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Iajki Estados Onidos / She Went to the U.S.: Nahua Identities in Migration within Contemporary Nahua Literature, 1985-2014

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***Iajki Estados Onidos / She Went to the U.S.: Nahua Identities in
Migration within Contemporary Nahua Literature, 1985-2014***

by

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Dedication

To my family in the U.S. and the Huasteca, for your love and strength, and for always believing in this project.

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***Iajki Estados Onidos / She Went to the U.S.: Nahua Identities in
Migration within Contemporary Nahua Literature, 1985-2014***

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

Supervisor: Arturo Arias

Abstract: In this dissertation, I analyze contemporary Nahua literature from 1985 to 2014. I explore how these texts disarticulate the Mexican national narrative frame of vanquished Indians and antiquated religiosity. In this sense, they question and critique post-revolutionary Mexican identity, which champions an Occidentalist modernity where the pre-Columbian legacy just played a symbolic identitarian role. Nahua authors of the last three decades, though differing significantly in their literary styles and political strategies, complement one another in attempting to uproot the national narrative that positions them as “not present in the present” and reduces their religious and ethical perspectives to exotic folklore. They employ metaphors closely tied to their language and ceremonies in order to rewrite the official history that has marginalized Nahua worldviews. By doing so, they seek to open a space for alternative knowledges. These relate principally to a deep connectedness with natural surroundings, remembrance of ancestors’ philosophies, and an affective intelligence in which emotions are conjugated with cognition. I argue that such worldviews play a key role in a dynamic politics of identities for the empowerment and self-representation of Nahua communities within the nation-state.

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Introduction. *Iajki Estados Onidos / She Went to the U.S.: Nahua Identities in Migration within Contemporary Nahua Literature, 1985-2014*

Tengo mi mamá...	I have my mom...
mi mamá no está conmigo	she is not with me
iajki Estados Onidos	she went to the U.S.
lava coches	and washes cars
(como mi abuelita nixtamal)	(like my grandma <i>nixtamal</i>)
	-Mardonio Carballo
	“Pola, o yo le lloro como papán”
	<i>Huehuexochitlajtoli</i> (2006)

Nahua artist Mardonio Carballo’s verse *iajki Estados Onidos* (“she went to the United States”) transits between languages—Spanish (*Estados Onidos* [sic]) and Nahuatl (*iajki*), a sort of *nahuañol* or Spanahuatl—similar to the migration it describes. This movement challenges common stereotypes of Indigenous peoples, such as notions of staticity and isolation erroneously suggested by the words *Indigenous* and *indígena*. Such dynamism is apparent in Carballo’s own life, as he relocated in his teens from the Huasteca Veracruzana¹ to Mexico City to complete his secondary education. Nearly all published Nahua artists have had similar experiences in migrating from smaller communities to urban settings. Their negotiation among these different places is central to present-day Nahua literature. *Nahuatl*, popularly known as the language of the Mexica or Aztecs, is often relegated to a distant past and many are unaware that today there are over three million Nahuas (a term generally used to refer to people who speak the Nahuatl language). Carballo’s innovative code-switching breaks with the depiction of the language itself as static and temporally frozen. While the present study is not an analysis of Mardonio Carballo’s work, the epigraph is a fitting introduction to one of the

main tropes within contemporary Nahua literary production—that of movement, transit, and migration. In shifting and sifting across and through regional, nation-state, linguistic, and epistemic borderlands, authors creatively engage these encounters and offer valuable perspectives toward crucial issues such as alternative pedagogies, linguistic diversity, modern colonialism, and gender constructions.

Within Carballo's poem, the mother's washing cars instead of *nixtamal* (maize soaked in limewater) suggests a displacement of Nahua practices. Nahua artists in general seek through their work to overturn such marginalization. The reference to *nixtamal* symbolizes the contributions that they have to offer, and also symbolizes a change in which Nahua knowledge production is recognized for its importance—not for manual labor such as cleaning cars. As shall be seen in this study, maize and its form as *nixtamal* constitute a metaphor for art and philosophy.

Of great significance, *iajki Estados Onidos* (“she went to the United States”) can also refer to leaving for Mexico City (where Carballo's sister, the mother described, actually lives now), as the official name for Mexico is the Estados Unidos Mexicanos. Such a move reveals the cracks within national discourse that attempts to paint a unified Mexican nation-state. The states are not united, which Carballo ironizes by changing the *u* of *unidos* to *onidos*. *U* and *o* are interchangeable in Nahuatl. This Nahuatlized version of the word underscores the divisions within Mexico, and the internal word *nido* (nest) also suggests the irony that the nation-state is not a welcoming space, a “nest,” for Indigenous peoples.

In the present study, I explore the implications of this new textual production that reframes the relationship of contemporary Nahua writers to the Mexican State. This study analyzes texts written from the 1980s to the present. I argue that Nahua artists disarticulate the narrative frame of vanquished “Indians” that is exemplified in Mexican national discourse and the championing of an exclusive “Modernity,” which considers only Mestizo subjects as citizens.² I highlight how these artists represent dynamic Nahua knowledge production against a backdrop of official history that depicts them as backward.

Cultural Criticism of the Context in which Contemporary Nahua Literature Has Emerged

When I first set out to research “contemporary Nahua literature” extensively, I soon came to the realization that doing so resembles attempting to write an unreasonably broad analysis on a topic like “contemporary English literature.” Contrary to what many might think, there is a plethora of texts and such diversity among this literary production that arguably to speak of “Nahua literature” misleadingly suggests homogeneity and at the same time conveys the idea that there must be very few writers and texts. A movement of present-day writers comes as a surprise to most, as popular narratives teach that their “pre-Modern” language has disappeared or else is on the verge of extinction—definitely not a thriving language with a wealth of modern knowledge production.

Rather than attempt to portray an illusory uniformity among Nahua literary production, this study underscores the rich diversity among these texts with selections principally from the genres of poetry and theater. At the same time, there are similarities

among this literary production that make researching “contemporary Nahua literature” a viable mode of analysis, such as the prevalent theme of migration mentioned previously. By *migration*, I refer not only to relocation to another country or internal migration within Mexico, but also movement among different worldviews, cultural practices, and languages. *Nemiliztli*, “philosophy” or literally “movement,” constitutes a Nahua theoretical perspective—addressed in detail within in chapter one—in which dynamic change is a given and close observation of past events is crucial in offering solutions within an unpredictable present.

Authors’ desire to revitalize the Nahuatl language constitutes another major point of convergence among them. Even authors who do not speak the language highlight the importance of it within their works and seek to recover their linguistic heritage. They attribute the loss of their language to linguistic discrimination, evident throughout all sectors of society, that inculcates that Nahuatl is a pre-Modern “dialect” fit for museums but not for modernity. Through their works, authors reject this discourse and show that the language is very much alive and a key player in contemporary literature.

These artists do not come from isolated communities nor do they argue for an idyllic return to a mythic past of Pre-Columbian glories. They take up for example the genres of lyric poetry and theater and, as Arturo Arias describes in relation to novels, “Nahuatlize” them (“Nahuahtlizando la novelística” 1–4). While the novel is unquestionably of Western origin in contrast with other genres such as poetry and theatre that share similarities with Pre-Columbian artistic creations,³ Nahua authors transform the Western versions of all genres in unexpected ways.⁴ According to these

artists, if there is a society that is static and stuck in atavistic practices, it is the colonial/“modern” society that persists in mistakenly depicting Indigenous peoples as inert.⁵ Nahua authors describe their present-day cultural production as a “new sun.”⁶ Albeit problematic in male writers’ disassociation of women from this surge in literary production, as shall be explored later on, this sun serves as a symbol for Nahua creation of a space for themselves and claim to the significance of diverse contributions within a context of migration, particularly in relocating to Mexico City and other urban centers within Mexico. These movements challenge the strict categories that national discourse attempts to impose, and in doing so uproots an exclusionary politics of who is capable of offering knowledge. Nahua cultural production offers distinct worldviews, such as a dynamic perception of time as we will see later in this same dissertation.

Nahuas represent an intellectual tradition that has largely been overlooked in the present. As we pay closer attention to their texts, we come to question not only stereotypes regarding Indigenous peoples, but also glean from them strategies for battling discrimination in numerous contexts. As mentioned earlier, this politics of Nahua identities is not only about resistance to colonial practices, but also about offering solutions to present-day societal problems. They seek to remedy what Mapuche literary critic Luis Cárcamo Huechante terms acoustic and visual colonialism in which only the voices of a dominant elite in the official national language sanctioned by that state are heard.⁷ It is important to see the theater and poetry analyzed in this study as a node in a larger network of Nahua cultural production in which artists seek to flood out the silencing of their voices through television, film, social media, and all other mediums.

A critical moment in the beginnings of this surge in Nahua and Indigenous cultural production throughout the Americas, the 1994 Zapatista uprising in Chiapas denounced the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) as aspirations of an elite few to form part of the global North to the detriment of the majority of Mexico's population.⁸ The phase of armed struggle in this movement lasted twelve days, from 1 to 12 January 1994. This conflict quickly transferred to political mediations due to national and international pressure for a ceasefire. Two commissions were formed to facilitate these discussions, and the armed rebellion gave way to a series of social and political initiatives in the approximately thirty-eight municipalities that had declared themselves Zapatista autonomies. They rejected local leadership of the official government and formed their own municipal councils to attend to issues such as education, health, agriculture, and judicial proceedings.⁹ These widely broadcasted happenings brought worldwide attention to Zapatista demands and Indigenous nations throughout Mexico, to whom Zapatistas would reach out to form alliances. The Mexican state subsequently attempted to combat the insurgency and critiques directed toward the national government with a wide array of developmentalist models and projects. One of these projects was increased funding for the publication of Indigenous literatures, which had already begun in part due to earlier demonstrations against the 1992 quinquennial celebrations of Christopher Columbus' arrival to the Americas.

While the Zapatista rebellion as well as protests against quinquennial festivities coincided with a surge in contemporary Indigenous literary production, Nahua literature by no means began with these events. A key moment is Nahua artist Luz Jiménez's

participations with anthropologists Robert Barlow and later with Fernando Horcasitas. Jiménez (1897-1965) was from the municipality of Milpa Alta, which today forms part of the Distrito Federal, as the greater metropolitan area of Mexico City is politically denominated. She worked as a model for Mexican muralist Diego Rivera and later shared narratives with Barlow and Horcasitas in the Nahuatl language about her personal life and hometown. The publications of these narratives helped to shift somewhat an academic focus of colonial Nahua documents to contemporary Nahua production—although not without its problems, as Jiménez was viewed more as a carrier of oral tradition and not recognized as the author of her narrations. *Estudios de Cultura Nahua*, a journal founded by renowned Nahuatl scholars Ángel María Garibay and Miguel León Portilla in 1959 with a principal focus on the study of Pre-Columbian and colonial Nahuatl documents, published excerpts from her narrations as well as the works of other Nahua authors, particularly in the late seventies.

There is a prevalent concept within Nahuatl expressed with the terms *ixtlamatiliztli* (“knowledge with the face”) and *ixtlamatini* (“one who knows things with the face”). Such a perspective highlights the importance of personal experience (“with the face”) in being able to develop effective solutions to societal challenges. This importance of lived experience appears in Luz Jiménez’s work.¹⁰ Such a view does not privilege individuals who have received formal education, but rather stressed the importance of close observance and local knowledges from community elders. Within the Huasteca, a region encompassing a large area across multiple states approximately 150 miles northeast of Mexico City, state-run educational programs through the 1940s to

the 1960s discredited Nahua local knowledges. They shifted *ixtlamatini*'s meaning from community knowledges to distant formal education with the arrival of teachers trained by the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) in the mid-twentieth century. Manuel Gamio, head of the Instituto Indigenista Interamericano (1942–1960), exercised significant influence in the formation of these teachers. In a work reflective of the educational mission of the Instituto Nacional Indigenista and subsequently the SEP, entitled *Consideraciones sobre el problema indígena* (1948),¹¹ Gamio criticizes Indigenous modes of knowledge production:

Desarrollo Biológico. El indígena generalmente interpreta los hechos y fenómenos que observa en sí mismo y en el mundo que lo rodea basándose en sus experiencias puramente personales y en las del mismo carácter que le han transmitido sus antecesores. Por ejemplo, en lo que se refiere al desarrollo biológico, el diagnóstico de un curandero que atiende a una persona enferma de neumonía no está inspirado en previas investigaciones metódicas, sino solamente en las observaciones personales que él ha hecho . . . Contrastando con esto, el criterio científico del médico se inspira no en exclusivas y aisladas experiencias personales, sino en una gran serie de observaciones y comprobaciones metódicamente efectuadas por muchas personas que han estudiado dicha enfermedad. (28)

Biological Development. The indigenous person generally interprets events and phenomena that he observes himself and in the world that surrounds him based on purely personal experience and similar ones transmitted to him by his

ancestors. For example, regarding biological development, the diagnosis of a shaman who attends a sick person with pneumonia is not influenced by previous methodical research, but rather personal observations . . . In contrast, the doctor's scientific criteria is not based on exclusive and isolated personal experiences, but rather on a long series of observations and methodic testing conducted by many people who have studied foresaid illness.¹²

Gamio espoused a pedagogical approach—a “criterio científico” (scientific criteria)—in which familiarity with Indigenous communities through academic studies would help alleviate plights within those areas, with the end goal of eventually assimilating them into mainstream mestizo-culture citizenship. Arguably, this attitude was healthier than that of other leaders at the time such as Mexican philosopher and first Secretary of Public Education José Vasconcelos, who opposed Gamio for even considering that present-day Indigenous practices were worthy of study. Nonetheless, as evidenced in the above citation, Gamio failed to view Native communities as sources of valid knowledge production. This approach—similar to colonial missionaries who learned their parishioners' traditions to eradicate them and exemplary of the *indigenista* movement Gamio is credited with initiating—was transmuted into educational programs in Indigenous rural areas and arguably still prevails to the present despite changes in official government rhetoric.

In 1968 the *Siete Magnificos* (called “The Magnificent Seven” due to the popularity of an American western film of the same name) received significant attention with their stark criticism of academic and government interventions within Indigenous

communities. The *Siete Magníficos* were seven anthropologists who questioned the State's assimilationist policies toward First Peoples and the field of anthropology's complicity in such projects. In 1970 they published their watershed book *De eso que llaman antropología mexicana* that voiced their critique. Anthropologist Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán—not a member of the *Siete Magníficos*—had played a significant role in the development of Indigenous education in the 1960s and openly pushed for assimilation of originary populations. In the 1970s, in light of the criticism aimed at such programs from the *Siete Magníficos* and others, he shifted his discourse “to allow” Indigenous communities to preserve their languages and cultural practices if they so chose.

Around this same time, a crucial movement was that of Nahua primary and secondary education teachers trained by the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP). The SEP was instructing these teachers to assimilate their pupils into the national culture and transition them from speaking Nahuatl to using solely Spanish. Far from passive receptacles of these policies, these teachers turned against the system and sought to reform it to respect Nahua cultural practices, knowledge production, and language. Nahua professors represent a school of thought that has not received due recognition for their role in proposing educational reforms that would respect Indigenous practices.¹³ They have obtained nowhere near the attention that teachers in Chiapas and Oaxaca have been given due to the latter's widely known role in the creation of the Coalition of Workers, Peasants, and Students of the Isthmus (COCEI) in Juchitán, Oaxaca in 1973 and the Zapatista movement in Chiapas. Nearly all writers of what can be deemed the

first generation of Nahua authors, generally born before 1967, served between the 1960s and 1980s as teachers for the Secretariat of Public Education.

In spite of protests and educational projects from the *Siete Magnificos* and Indigenous teachers, Gamio's view in which he questions Indigenous knowledges survives to the present. Literary critic Kelly S. McDonough notes that the state educational apparatus "imposes an approved 'Mexican' version of subjectivity" and "create[s] a formal opposition between what is framed as 'legitimate' Western knowledge and 'backward' indigenous knowledge" (167). The *macehualtlallamiquiliztli* (Nahua knowledges) that Nahuas refer to in their works are discounted and discarded as worthless. According to such an (il)logic, community elders represent the atavistic practices and superstitions that teachers were taught to celebrate as quaint at best and more often than not as vestiges of the past. Nahua authors and teachers continue to battle against this persistent repudiation of their knowledges.

Within this study, I refer to the Nahua teachers who were trained by the Secretariat of Public Education and then subsequently turned against it the "first generation of authors." This reflects how both they themselves and younger authors refer to them. It is with this generation of authors that talk of "contemporary Nahua literature" begins to emerge in the 1980s and 1990s. Critical attention to authors of the first generation encourages dialogue with a corpus of literature that has received little recognition. Increased focus on this movement could opaque the literary production of previous authors—especially in speaking of a *first* generation, as if there were no authors beforehand. Far from the case, these authors came into the literary production of

those before them, particularly that of Luz Jiménez as well as the millennial literary production within their communities.

Notwithstanding what I have stated, and given that research on the topic of “first authors” still demands further exploration, we may consider as the seminal author at this time Natalio Hernández, known by many Nahua authors as well as Native writers in general as a “father of contemporary Indigenous literature.” In 1985, Hernández published the first single author full-length book of poetry in the Nahuatl language, entitled *Xochikoskatl* (Flowered Necklace). This book helped set off a plethora of publications in Nahuatl and other Indigenous languages. I choose 1985 as a crucial moment within contemporary Nahua literary production because it coincides with the publication of *Xochikoskatl*, a work that helped spark talk of contemporary Nahua literature as such and a greater emphasis on Nahuas and Indigenous authors gaining control of publishing houses and their own literary production. Nonetheless, this is by no means to suggest that Nahua literature “begins” during this time and that either Hernández or this book filled in a void plagued by a lack of Nahua cultural production. Rather I seek to highlight the influence this book and Hernández had in helping launch a surge in contemporary Nahua literary production. Among them, this encouraged Ildefonso Maya, also trained within the national educational system as a teacher, to produce multiple plays in the Nahuatl language. The texts analyzed in this study attempt to deconstruct that supposed inferiority of Indigenous peoples and lack of capacity to contribute innovative ideas. Following Hernández and Maya arose numerous authors

and a great diversity of works that have been for the most part overlooked. The present study attempts to fill in this gap that glides over the importance of these authors.

Survey of Studies on Contemporary Nahua Literature and the Re-presentation of This Literature within Latin American Cultural Production

Few scholars have examined contemporary Nahua literature, and only four studies go into significant detail. In *Relatos de la diferencia y literatura indígena: Travesías por el sistema mundo*, literary critic Luz María Lepe Lira gives an extensive overview of the context in which Natalio Hernández writes and his strategies for displacing colonialism within government and academic institutions. She explores two principal aspects of Hernández's decolonial proposal: to decolonize the public education system and to use and disseminate Indigenous languages (118). In her dissertation, *Poesía indígena contemporánea de México y Chile* (2008), Sonia Montes Romanillos analyzes how different Indigenous authors from the last three decades challenge the idea of a homogenous and monolingual "Spanish American nationality" (1). This study is broad in scope, and, in addition to Hernández, she researches Zapotec author Víctor de la Cruz, Mazatec author Juan Gregorio Regino, and Mapuche poets Elicura Chihuailaf and Leonel Lienlaf. While valuable in their attention to Hernández and contemporary Nahua literature, Lepe Lira and Montes Romanillos do not offer close analyses of Hernández's texts in Nahuatl.

In the published conference proceedings of the Symposium *Fondo autóctono y aportes europeos en las literaturas amerindias* (2005), ethnomusicologist Marie Sautron compares the Nahuatl language in *Cantares mexicanos* (Nahuatl Songs) and *Romances de los señores de Nueva España* (Ballads of the Lords of New Spain) with the first part

of *Xochikoskatl* (Flowered Necklace), published by Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) under the title *Sempoalxochitl* (Twenty Flower). Although unique in its attention to Natalio Hernández and analysis of the language in *Xochikoskatl*, Sautron's study works counter to the book's principal message. Sautron privileges elements that seem to coincide with "Classical Nahuatl" and depicts those that do not, such as loan words, as evidence of degeneration from prestigious forms of the language. Within this study I seek to counter the reduction of contemporary Nahua texts to the "standard" of Classical Nahuatl and offer a close analysis of this literature.

In her book *The Learned Ones: Nahua Intellectuals in Postconquest Mexico* (2014), Kelly S. McDonough offers an excellent analysis of Nahua literary production from the colonial period to the present. She fills in a wide gap within Nahua Studies by highlighting a continuity of Nahua intellectual history to the present, contrary to the typical depiction of Nahua intellectual production as having fallen into disarray and disappeared with the arrival of the Spaniards. McDonough problematizes the thinking that Nahua intellectualism emerged from a slumber at the end of the twentieth century. She argues that Nahua intellectual tradition was suppressed and, even in spite of this marginalization, there are texts from the colonial era to the present that give evidence to a continuous tradition. Of particular interest for this study is her analysis of contemporary Nahua author Idefonso Maya and his play *Ixtlamatinij* (1987). McDonough uses this text as part of her main argument regarding an unbroken Nahua intellectual tradition. She also shows how Nahuas redefine what it means to be an intellectual. "Ixtlamatinij" or "wise ones," literally means "people who know things with

their faces.” Personal experiences are central to being an intellectual, which is why an elderly person, *huehuetlacatl*, also connotes an intellectual. In this work she uses *ixtlamatiliztli* (literally “knowledge with the face”) as a key approach in the analysis of Nahua literary production, principally in relation to Ildefonso Maya’s work. This is a concept that I use in my own work and one that appears throughout contemporary Nahua cultural production, as shall be seen, in the emphasis on the eyes and Nahuas’ ability to closely observe.

My study offers a unique approach in its focus on contemporary Nahua literary production and it is the first full-length study to do so. A significant advantage to this approach is the gesture to turn away from thinking of Nahuas always in relation to the Pre-Columbian period and shortly after the arrival of Spaniards to Mesoamerica. While such continuities with the past are of great interest, Nahuas have dealt with contemporary issues in dynamic ways and their ideas do not always need to be somehow rooted in the sixteenth century. This is a tendency with Indigenous and Native American writing that one does not see with literature considered more “mainstream.”

An abundance of hundreds of studies on Classical Nahuatl and Nahua colonial literature contrasts with the limited analyses of contemporary Nahuatl. The lack of attention to present-day Nahuas and the narrative framework that relegates Nahuatl to the past are not confined only to academia, but is apparent within Latin American literature itself and literary anthologies. Nahua authors write against literary traditions that romanticize and patronize Indigenous populations. In literature throughout the twentieth century, as in the move toward Nahua studies in the same century, one can

trace a genealogy of glorifying a Pre-Columbian past that denies Indigenous presence in the present, in spite of comprising more than ten percent of Mexico's population.¹⁴ For example, in *El Periquillo Sarniento* (1816; 1831), considered the first novel in Mexico, one of the figures expresses that in a far distant past there existed a great poet named Nezahualcoyotl, but today the "indios" no longer have such things.¹⁵

Although allusions and references to a Pre-Columbian past were not new to twentieth-century literature, one can trace the construction of this history within the Post-Revolutionary state to the works of Manuel Gamio, to whom I referred earlier in this introduction, and Mexican writer and diplomat Alfonso Reyes. In *Forjando Patria* [Forging a Nation] (1916), Gamio speaks of the mixing of bronze and steel races, a popular metaphor displayed in the works of muralists in the 1920s and 1930s (24). Within this visual paradigm, steel whiteness represents the "civilized" intelligence necessary to guide the country while bronze denotes Indigenous roots as a mysterious spiritual strength from the past. Both merge in the ideal *mestizo* citizen—an individual, following this metallurgical metaphor, with a steel head and bronze body (24). Alfonso Reyes propagated the invocation of Anahuac through his work *La visión de Anáhuac (1519)* (1915). He argues that the Mexica reached relatively great heights in development because of the aridness of the land. Present-day Mexicans have inherited the spiritual strength from this era, but again, as in Gamio, Indigenous peoples only play an ethereal role relegated to a remote past. Reyes praises the artistic sensibility of the Mexica, but concludes that, "Hay que lamentar como irremediable la pérdida de la poesía indígena mexicana" ("One must mourn the loss of Mexican Indigenous poetry as

irreparable”; 48). Both Gamio and Reyes consign Indigenous subjects to the past—a Bronze Age pre-historical step toward reaching a foreordained national unity of spirit and body.

Gamio and Reyes helped initiate a Post-Revolutionary genealogy of metaphors that depict Indigenous cultural practices as inherently ancient and thus in a dichotomous relationship (unless absorbed through *mestizaje*) with modern *mestizo* systems. Such a logic allows one to group Natalio Hernández and other authors with Pre-Columbian artistic production, whereas it would be ridiculous to categorize Carlos Fuentes with José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi—though there are less than two centuries of difference between Fuentes and Lizardi and more than half a millennium between Hernández and Pre-Columbian artists. One can trace the perpetuation of such temporal metaphors throughout Mexican poetry, in well-known poems such as “Discurso por las flores” by Carlos Pellicer (1946); “Silencio cerca de una piedra antigua” and “Oración del indio” (1952) by Rosario Castellanos; “Piedra de sol” and “Himno entre ruinas” (1958) by Octavio Paz; and in Pablo Neruda’s *Canto general* (first published in Mexico City in 1950). The propagation of references to Indigenous symbols and subsequent *indigenista* defense of originary populations led to a growing interest in Nahua studies, beginning chiefly in the 1950s.

The use of Indigenous symbols is evident in Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes’s work, but within the usual parameters of antiquating First Peoples. Beginning with one of his most well known short stories, “Chac Mool” from *Los días enmascarados* (1954), Fuentes uses allusions to an Indigenous past as a magical motif in the present. Such a

framework appears especially in his novel *La región más transparente* (1958), in which Mexico City is the main protagonist and Indigenous symbols constitute something of a mystical consciousness of the city. Fuentes would continue to employ such tropes in his works during the 1960s and 1970s, such as in *Terra nostra* (1975).

Through the late 1950s and 1960s, *indigenista* discourse remained strong. Rosario Castellanos is the most representative author of this period. While her depiction of First Peoples in *Balún Canán* (1957) and *Oficio de tinieblas* (1962) is more complex than previous *indigenista* works, with a greater emphasis on the agency of First Peoples, these works still focus on oppression and suggest that Indigenous communities are stuck in a remote past that is incompatible with Western modernity. The representation of First Peoples is also still filtered through writers and academics from dominant sectors of society.

A crucial publication in 1959 was Miguel León Portilla's *Visión de los vencidos* (Vision of the Conquered). The book became a bestseller both in Mexico and in the United States under the title *Broken Spears* (1962), particularly among the Chicano movement in California. Since then numerous editions in both Spanish and English have been produced. *Visión* brings together Nahuatl-authored texts from the colonial period to give the "Other's" view of the Conquest. While the text is laudable in attributing voice and agency to Pre-Columbian peoples, the title of the text—"vision of the defeated or conquered"—lends itself to the notion that Indigenous communities fell into disarray and virtually disappeared after the arrival of the Spaniards. They had voice and agency in a distant past, but not so in the present. Since the 1980s León Portilla has sought to

remedy this misconception through collaborations with contemporary Nahua authors, but nonetheless the idea pervades that First Peoples were defeated and vanished. *Visión* helped spark an interest in Nahuatl Studies in the United States and in Mexico. Both the title of León Portilla's *Visión de los vencidos* and Fuentes's *La región más transparente* allude to Alfonso Reyes's *Visión de Anáhuac* (Reyes cites in this text the phrase "la región más transparente" [the most transparent region] from Prussian geographer Alexander Von Humboldt's descriptions of the Central Mexican Valley), and place Indigenous subjects within a distant mythical space—transparent and conquered.

As previously indicated, with the movement of 1968 that anthropologists unleashed, there surfaced more open criticism of the framework in which First Peoples were incessantly configured as the Other of Western modernity. With these critiques emerged a growing interest in marginalized voices. This interest is especially evident in works from Mexican writers Elena Poniatowska and Carlos Monsiváis. In *Hasta no verte Jesús Mío* (1969), Poniatowska brings together parts of interviews with Jesusa Palancares, an Indigenous woman from Oaxaca who fought in the Mexican Revolution and then later worked as a domestic servant in Mexico City. In Carlos Monsiváis's only fictional work, *Nuevo catecismo para indios remisos* (1982), he satirizes the conversion of Indigenous peoples and highlights their picaresque resistance to it. While such literature from the late 1960s to the 1980s was commendable in its desire to defend the oppressed, the voices of those marginalized were constantly passed through someone else.

In spite of changes in discourse demanding respect for Indigenous populations, there still pervaded a discourse of discrimination, especially within mass media, that continues, albeit less so, to the present. Within mass media through the 1970s and 1980s, First Peoples were continually portrayed as violent mobs, excessively ignorant, or victims. Felipe Cazals's well-known film *Canoa* (1976) represents a Nahuatl community led astray by anti-communist discourse. The community confuses five university workers from the city of Puebla with Marxist guerrillas and in a ruthless rage kills three and severely maims two. In the 1970s, and even up to the present, the figure "La India María" gained great popularity. Films with this character mock First Peoples as ignorant and unintelligent. Within Mexican cartoonist Rius's work beginning in the 1960s and on, Indigenous peoples always embody the archetype of poverty and oppression in jokes, but not as agents in battling such persecution.

As Indigenous activists and artists indicate, discourse from dominant sectors changed in the late 1960s and 1970s within academia and politics, but the racism apparent within mass media I have mentioned nonetheless still continued within academia and politics. It is really with the active participation and self-representation of Nahuas and other First Nations that more enduring proposals that questioned the status quo emerged. Debates surrounding Indigenous representations led to a number of workshops in the 1970s led by Indigenous intellectuals. These workshops began with discussions regarding writing systems for original languages. Such was the case with Nahuatl in the *Nechikolistli tlen Nauatlajtouaj Maseualtlamachtianej* [Organization of Nahuatl Indigenous Professionals Civil Association] (OPINAC), founded in 1973 and led

by Nahuatl writer Natalio Hernández. In the late 1970s, Natalio Hernández championed the creation of the nation-wide organization of Indigenous teachers Alianza Nacional de Profesionales Indígenas Bilingües (ANPIBAC). These organizations sought for the self-representation of Nahuas within the educational system. Members of these organizations later began to publish in *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl*.

At this same time in the 1970s there surged numerous other Indigenous political movements with social and cultural demands. Radical responses in Guerrero, the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, and in Chiapas under the leadership of Catholic Bishop Samuel Ruiz began to command attention for contemporary Indigenous exigencies. Indeed, Binnizá poet Irma Pineda's father Víctor Pérez was a leader of the COCEI movement in Juchitán in the 1970s, and was disappeared when she was a girl. Movements such as these have influenced Indigenous literary production in many respects. In Guerrero, Lucio Cabañas Barrientos led the armed group Partido de los Pobres (Party of the Poor) in the 1970s. Many Nahuas took part in this movement, and it encouraged the formation of later organizations that will be analyzed more in chapter three. These different movements had a significant effect on Indigenous authors and attracted the attention of literary critic Carlos Montemayor. Montemayor later would write the novel *Guerra en el paraíso* (1997) based on the life of Cabañas and shortly after *Los informes secretos* (1999), a novel dealing with the offensive launched against the Zapatistas in 1995. He would become from the 1980s onward one of the most influential promoters of Indigenous literature, and also come to serve as a mediator between the government and

Indigenous-led armed movements in the 1990s such as the Ejército Popular Revolucionario (EPR).

It is principally in the 1980s that Indigenous literary workshops began to form. Maya author Miguel Ángel May May helped lead the creation of the Taller de Literatura Maya (Maya Literature Workshop) in 1982 in Yucatán. With support from Dirección General de Culturas Populares and Carlos Montemayor, Maya artists who took part in this workshop developed the writing system for their language and created the newspaper *U yajal maya wiiniko'ob* (The Maya Awakening) in 1987. During this same time, workshops developed in Chiapas for the promotion of Indigenous cultural production in other Maya languages as well as Zoque. The San Andrés Accords in 1996 between Zapatistas and the Mexican government called for the formal creation of cultural centers promoting these languages and cultural practices. This would materialize in the establishment of the Centro Estatal de Lenguas, Arte y Literatura (CELALI) in 1997, led by Tzotzil writer Enrique Pérez López. With support from Carlos Montemayor and funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, their efforts led to the publication of the two series *Colección Letras Mayas Contemporáneas* from 1994 to 1996. One series contains Maya texts from Yucatán and the other from Chiapas, with a total of forty titles published by the Instituto Nacional Indigenista.

In 1990 the Primer Encuentro de Escritores en Lenguas Indígenas (First National Meeting of Writers in Indigenous Languages) took place, coordinated by Natalio Hernández and Carlos Montemayor with funding from Consejo Nacional para la Cultural y las Artes (CONACULTA) and the Instituto Tamaulipeco de Cultura. Without

a doubt, Natalio Hernández and Carlos Montemayor became the two most crucial actors in coordinating meetings and publications of Indigenous authors from throughout Mexico. Key participants from this meeting participated in an anthology of essays in 1993, also coordinated by Carlos Montemayor, entitled *Situación actual y perspectivas de la literatura en lenguas indígenas* (1993). At this same time, Hernández and Montemayor promoted the creation of scholarships Fonda Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (FONCA) for Indigenous artists, a program that continues to the present. Hernández's collaboration with many authors facilitated the creation of the anthology entitled *Narrativa náhuatl contemporánea* (1992). Edited by Hernández, this text contains short stories of Nahua authors from multiple regions. This same year Carlos Montemayor helped coordinate the publication of a two-volume anthology of Indigenous writers, entitled *Los escritores indígenas actuales*. These different efforts helped lead to the creation of Association of Indigenous-Language Writers (ELIAC) in 1993, which has published individually authored works from many Indigenous authors up to the present.

In 2004 Carlos Montemayor directed the publication of another anthology that gained notoriety, *Las voz profunda: Antología de la literatura mexicana en lenguas indígenas*. That same year he led the creation of *Festival de Poesía Las Lenguas de América*, a biennial recital supported by the Programa Universitario México Nación Multicultural de la UNAM. This recital brings together many languages spoken throughout the Americas—without distinction of whether they are Romance or originary languages—to emphasize that Indigenous languages are as valuable as dominant

languages such as English or Spanish. This festival has brought much attention to Indigenous literatures and since 2010 has filled up one of the largest auditoriums on the campus of the National Autonomous University of Mexico. The readings from the first two recitals have been published in *Las lenguas de América: Recital de poesía I* (2005) and *Las lenguas de América: Recital de poesía II* (2010).

Along with literary critic Donald Frischmann, Carlos Montemayor directed a multilingual three-volume anthology entitled *Words of the True Peoples: Anthology of Contemporary Mexican Indigenous-Language Writers*, released between 2004 and 2007. These three volumes, spanning poetry, narrative, and theater, include authors from throughout Mexico. In 2008 ELIAC published its own two-volume anthology of contemporary Indigenous poetry and narrative, entitled *México: Diversas lenguas, una sola nación*. These are some of the most prominent publications that have helped bring attention to this literary production and have promoted the work of Indigenous authors, among them Nahuas.

While there have been numerous publications from Maya artists as well as numerous other Indigenous languages, a perception exists that Nahuatl receives special privilege because of its role in Mexican national symbols (such as the name of the country itself and the national flag). There persists a long-standing animosity of Zapotecs¹⁶ and other Indigenous nations toward Nahuas that extends back to Mexica expansion from the Central Valley of Mexico into the Oaxacan region all the way to the Northern Triangle of present-day Central America in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries when the Triple Alliance. The Alliance, or *Ēxcān Tlahtōlōyan* (“Three Places

Where You Dialogue”), more popularly known as the “Aztec Empire,” consisted of three Central Valley *altepetl* or “city-states” of Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, and Tlacopan. Members of the Alliance would not have recognized the term “Aztec Empire,” which emerged in the nineteenth century from the works of English anthropologists and archaeologists.¹⁷ Spanish colonialism took advantage and expanded on this system of domination, not only territorially but also linguistically. Nahuatl served as the *lingua franca* for Nahua and non-Nahua populations under Spanish rule throughout the sixteenth century and into the early seventeenth century all the way down to the northern triangle of Central America. Binnizá (Zapotec), Yokot’an (Chontal), and Hñähñu (Otomí) authors (Zapotec, Chontal, and Otomí are derogatory Mexica exonyms) perhaps would be willing to reconcile if this hegemony did not persist within cultural circles today. Nonetheless, the “privileged” position of Nahuatl in national discourse creates a double bind for Nahua authors: to appeal to national discourse and receive criticism as copouts or else not get published under the criticism of being unfamiliar with one’s supposed cultural heritage. The national celebration of *flor y canto* (flower and song), Nahua mythic figures, and the naming of the top prize for Indigenous literatures *Premio Nezahualcoyotl* (Nezahualcoyotl Prize)—the awarding of which takes place in a large auditorium of the same name—have helped to accentuate a perceived Nahua imperialism within Indigenous studies and to provoke comments such as “Nezahualcoyotl wanna-be” (“se cree Nezahualcoyotl”) mentioned at the beginning of chapter one.

Though this perceived linguistic hegemony (located within the “marginality of marginality”) seems to unduly benefit Nahuas, it often impedes the full recognition of authors’ literary innovations and, as seen particularly in chapter four, disregards authors who eschew appealing to the official Nahua history of national discourse. When authors write in *diidxaza* (one of the endonyms for the Zapotec language) or *rarámuri* (endonym for the Tarahumara language), for example, they are not constantly evaluated for how they “measure up” to colonial, “pristine” forms of the language. While many Nahua authors do integrate symbols and rhetorical devices of Classical Nahuatl into their poetry, at the same time they challenge the relegation of contemporary Nahuatl or any Indigenous language to the margins. As mentioned earlier, Nahua literary production has been central in opening a space for not only Nahua authors but Indigenous authors in general.

A close analysis of contemporary Nahua literary production and familiarity with the contexts in which they write helps shift discussions away from the customary “standard” to which present-day Nahua literary production is measured, as to how well it holds up to or deviates from “Classical Nahuatl.” One quickly begins to see that these works do not constitute nostalgic gazes toward a constructed classical past. The most intriguing parts of Nahua writing are not so much where older forms of Central Mexican Nahuatl coincide with present-day forms, but where they differ.¹⁸ One can trace certain resemblances to Pre-Columbian practices, but present-day Nahua intellectual production should not be expected to be homologous to merit close study. While authors like Natalio Hernández do trace similarities with older Nahuatl, they claim contemporary

knowledge production is of great value in and of itself. Nahua thought did not cease with the arrival of the Spaniards nor did Nahuas stop developing their philosophies and life strategies in multitudinous ways.

The antiquating subscription of Nahuas and Indigenous peoples in general appears in contemporary anthologies purporting to offer the Mexican literary “canon.” If these anthologies do make mention of contemporary Indigenous authors, they place them at the beginning of the collection—pre-dating Christopher Columbus and Bernal Díaz del Castillo—under captions such as “Amerindian Voices” or “Pre-Columbian literature” (See *Voces de hispanoamérica*, which I will address more in detail within this introduction, and *Antología general de la poesía mexicana*). The obfuscation of present-day First Peoples as always relegated to a distant past has influenced all literary genres in Mexico. As literary critic Estelle Tarica and Natalio Hernández have attested, the *indigenista* movement itself carried an underlying tenet that Indigenous masses were unable to offer intellectual leadership against colonial practices foreign to their ancient traditions, and thus needed liberators from gracious dominant sectors of society to reach down and protect them.¹⁹ Even in the name of “saving” Indigenous populations, the core assumption pervaded (and pervades) that First Peoples needed to submit to racial, linguistic, and cultural assimilation within a nationally unified *mestizo* population.

The discourse of the Indigenous as past or pre-national history is reflected in the structure of Latin American literary anthologies such as *Voces de Hispanoamérica* (first edition 1988 with four subsequent editions). This anthology constitutes the main text for upper-division introductory courses to Hispanic American literature in many U.S.

universities. I focus on this anthology because it shows the far-reaching influence of a structure that emerged in Mexican literary anthologies such as *Antología general de la poesía mexicana* in the 1960s and 1970s up to present—which differ greatly from the Indigenous literary anthologies mentioned earlier. *Voces* begins with the section “Voces amerindias: los mayas, los nahuas y los quechuas” (iii). It contains a part entitled “poesía náhuatl” with popular translations made by Miguel León Portilla and Ángel María Garibay of poetry attributed to Nezahualcoyotl. In addition to “poesía náhuatl,” it has a part of the *Popol wuj* and Quechua poetry.²⁰ Even though there is much contemporary literature in Indigenous languages throughout Latin America, the anthology does not include a single example. One could argue that they are not included because it is an anthology of *Hispanic* American literature, which could imply that includes only literature in Spanish. Nonetheless, if that is the case, then why include “náhuatl poetry” from antiquity in the collection? Moreover, there are excellent Indigenous authors who only write in Spanish.

Voces de Hispanoamérica does make mention of one contemporary Indigenous author, the Nahua writer Natalio Hernández—but it is within the same section at the beginning of “voces amerindias” (Amerindian Voices), as if First Peoples today only pertained to that past. The anthology states:

La expresión literaria en lenguas amerindias *era* muy viva y así lo testimonian antologías y recopilaciones, aunque lamentablemente de limitada circulación. . . . En nuestros días la literatura escrita en lenguas nativas reafirma la capacidad de *resistencia* de los pueblos indígenas, el orgullo en las tradiciones autóctonas y la

heterogeneidad cultural y lingüística de Hispanoamérica. Natalio Hernández Xocoyotzin, poeta bilingüe en nahuatl y español, ha expresado muy bien la actual dinámica entre los códigos nativos y el importado. Compara el español con el árbol del ahuehuate que nos cobija y da sombra. Este árbol, o sea el español, se nutre de las lenguas indígenas que le otorgan sus características al castellano de México . . . Esta literatura reafirma la capacidad de *resistencia* de los pueblos indígenas y la pluralidad cultural de Hispanoamérica (15, emphasis mine).

This introductory note states that literary expression in Amerindian languages *was* very alive, which implies that they are no longer so. Then the word “resistance” appears twice, which suggests that Nahuas and other First Peoples only resist and do not produce, that they do not create but rather fight constantly as victims against different abusers. Such a framework for anthologies is not new with *Voces de Hispanoamérica*, but can be traced back to the 1960s when Miguel León Portilla’s and Ángel María Garibay’s translations of colonial Nahua documents gained popularity. Nonetheless, contemporary Nahua and Indigenous authors in general have not received the same attention or acceptance into these anthologies.

Evidenced in a survey of academic and literary publications, there is a significant gap in the study of contemporary Nahua literature and an exclusion of this literature persists that marginalizes it from the “mainstream.” This study seeks to remedy that gap and explore how the authors themselves challenge such depictions. In doing so, these artists write against the exclusion from wider publication and distribution, as well as the

problematic depiction of them within/out “national” literature—within something of a Mexican pre-literature but outside “modern” cultural production. Nahua artists communicate loud and clear that they are present in the present with valuable ideas for contemporary society.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Nearly all Nahua literature is bilingual with the authors’ versions of works in both Nahuatl and Spanish (or in some cases, such as Mardonio Carballo, a fusion of both), and so these works are relevant to literary production in the Spanish language. Nahua author Natalio Hernández argues that not only is Mexican Spanish highly influenced by the Nahuatl language and other Indigenous languages, but also that First Peoples have appropriated the Spanish language and made it their own. This perspective emphasizes the agency of First Peoples, as they mold the language with their own creativity and knowledge production. This is an important perspective in approaching the main questions of this study that helps to avoid the common Othering and exoticization of Nahua literature as provincial, linguistically pristine, and disconnected from “outside” influences. Relevant to not only Hispanic Studies, particularly twentieth and twenty-first century Latin American literature, and Indigenous Studies, but rather a wide array of fields, some key questions that guide my analysis are:

- Does Nahua self-representation within the nation-state not legitimize the very entity that has marginalized them? How do these authors redefine sovereignty?
- Do these authors constitute an Indigenous elite, along the lines of Rama’s *ciudad letrada*, that becomes hegemonic within Nahua communities? Do they

manipulate the idealization of classical Nahuatl within the national discourse in a self-interested attempt to gain symbolic capital and scholarships from the government?

-What is the significance of the tensions prevalent between the older generation of Nahua writers and the younger ones?

-Why are there so few published Nahua women authors? How do these authors challenge typical representation of women within Nahua literature if they were published? How do representations of Nahua women shift when they represent themselves?

-What strategies can be gleaned from Nahua artists' experiences that would be of value to struggles for social and political rights across the globe? What do they teach us about gender discrimination as well as persecution of minority languages and cultural practices?

Above all, the most significant aim of this research is to collaborate with Nahuas as colleagues and full-fledged knowledge producers. As opposed to entering these Nahua communities with a foreign model, I sought in my fieldwork to promulgate and work closely with programs run by Nahuas themselves. In conducting this research, I was affiliated with the Macuilxochitl Cultural Foundation, directed by Natalio Hernández. The Macuilxochitl Foundation seeks to aid adolescent youth in the Huastecan community of Lomas del Dorado. The Nahuatl texts I study are intertwined with these goals to help Nahuatl-speaking youth and cannot be fully understood without

close participation in these and other programs conducted by Nahua authors and academics. These projects also correlate well with the theoretical basis of my research in which Indigenous knowledges should be understood on their own terms and in their own language, as much is lost in translation. In an effort to develop this greater understanding, I am collaborating with Nahuatl-speakers in these different regions instead of representing the atavistic treatment of indigenous peoples as objects of research.

In addition to this collaboration, I seek to encourage dialogue among Indigenous communities and academic institutions in Mexico and the United States. There has existed something of a divide between Native American Studies in the global North and Indigenous Studies south of the U.S.-Mexican border. The Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) has promoted initiatives such as Abya Yala (a concept encompassing Native territories across all of North and South America). The name of the Association itself, including Native American and Indigenous, is reflective of this effort. Nahua authors themselves have also sought to create dialogues and networks with Native Americans.²¹ To help continue in the spirit of this transborder dialogue, I highlight throughout the study similarities between both Nahua and Native American authors and theorists.

Nahua Theoretical Perspectives: Research Methods and Key Terms

When I first set out analyzing this literature, I focused on placing Nahua perspectives in dialogue with theoretical approaches proposed in postcolonial and decolonial studies, principally from Walter Mignolo, Javier Sanjinés, Aníbal Quijano,

and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui. While I still consider this important, as I progressed in my analysis of contemporary Nahua cultural production I found it increasingly important to place Nahua perspectives in dialogue with Indigenous theorists—among them Cusicanqui—throughout Abya Yala. These perspectives for the most part are more closely tied to Indigenous movements and decolonial strategies throughout the Americas. Above all, it increasingly became more evident of the need to use Nahua perspectives principally to analyze Nahua literary production and became increasingly possible for me to do so as my proficiency in the language improved during multiple visits to Mexico to collaborate in Nahua revitalization projects led by Nahuas and to conduct fieldwork.

This study uses a number of these perspectives as the theoretical footing for an analysis of contemporary Nahua cultural production, among them: *tlaixpan* (“that which is in front”), *ixtlamatiliztli* (“knowledge with the face”), *yoltlallamiquiliztli* (“knowledge with the heart”), and *tlachiyaliztli* (“close observance”). Using local Indigenous categories for textual analysis of their own literary production offers innovative theoretical and aesthetic approaches to challenges throughout the continent. *Tlaixpan* (“that which is front” or “altar”) is tied to a reconceptualization of space and time reflective in the texts of Nahua authors. The altar appears throughout this cultural production. Altars face toward the East to greet the morning sun. The ark over the altar represents solar passage across the sky.²² As the movement of the sun itself, the care for ancestor’s knowledges represented upon the altar is not at all static. In addition to their role in the articulation of Nahua identities, these concepts work within literary analysis

to better critique the complexity of the symbols, poetic and narrative structure, and imagery within contemporary Nahua literary production.

Artists' travel toward urban centers proposes a remapping in which, instead of receiving from the North, the movement is outward (like Carballo's *iajki Estados Unidos*, going to the United States) to offer important perspectives that have been taken lightly. The emphasis on eyes throughout Nahua literary production highlights this ability to observe among these movements, and underscore the perspective of *tlachiyaliztli* (close observance). This is a concept used as a theoretical approach throughout my study of contemporary literature. The emphasis on Nahuas' ability to closely observe, breaks with stereotypical representations of Indigenous peoples as made for manual labor and unable to analyze critically. For example, I apply this perspective to Ethel Xochitiotzin Pérez's poetry. Her emphasis on observation and the deeper connotations it has in Nahuatl underscores women's agency and their ability to closely analyze their surroundings. Numerous symbols and images within Xochitiotzin's poetry point to this observation. Her text *Tlaoxtika in tlajtol* (2012) is framed around the power of women's observation, moving from close observation of ancestors' knowledges, to the corn crop at the center of the book, to a more inward look in the final poems through a personal articulation of a Nahua identity.

In contemporary Nahuatl, the concepts *huehuehtlahtolli* (old/wise words) and *huehuehtlacameh* (literally "old people") are connected to a distinct view of who constitutes an intellectual. Contrary to the general Western concept of someone detached from her or his subject of study with privileged objectivity, in a Nahua worldview, the

intellectual is one who knows things from personal experience. Hence, elders with their wealth of lived knowledges are intellectuals. As Kelly McDonough identifies in *The Learned Ones*, the related term *ixtlamatiliztli*, which also appears throughout Nahua literature in varied forms, literally denotes “knowledge gained with the face or eyes.”²³ Nahuas do not devalue non-propositional knowledge like Western academic research, but rather view it as crucial in providing effective solutions to societal problems. *Ixtlamatiliztli* (“knowledge with the face”) constitutes the need to carefully observe one’s surroundings, of personal, lived knowledges (in other words, “with the face”). Opposed to a depiction of Nahuas as mere recipients of tradition, Nahua writers situate them as producers of knowledge. They possess the ability to carefully observe surroundings and propose solutions to societal challenges.

Perspectives tied to *tlaixpan* (“that which is in front”) are also crucial and relate to *ixtlamatiliztli*. *Tlaixpan* communicates that the past is not situated “behind” the subject. Rather, the past constitutes what is known and lies in front of the subject as a guide. Lessons from the past serve not as anchors to tradition, but play a role in a dynamic present and future. Nahua women artists observe and look to deceased female relatives for guidance (these relative’s pictures lie on the *tlaixpan*, the word used for “altar” in Nahuatl). They then use the strength from that past to project their own perspectives into the present and future. References to weaving and other forms of expression tap into a long tradition of creative production by ancestors. This concept is key in understanding Gustavo Zapoteco Sideño’s book of poetry *Cuicatli*, and the imagery of an Indigenous subject jumping into a raging sea to his death. With *tlaixpan*

and the regeneration that it entails, I am able to analyze how this death forms part of a regeneration of the crop (which is one of the key purposes of altars—which appear in Zapoteco’s text—is to petition a successful crop). The text ends with this sacrificial death, which could be read as a fatalistic, but instead *tlaixpan* helps to view the wider implications of this imagery.

Yoltlallamiquiliztli (literally “knowledge with the heart”) represents a fundamental metaphor linked to an affective space in which emotions are conjugated with rational thought. This is particularly important when addressing Nahua and Indigenous texts in general, as they are traditionally depicted as excessively “emotional” and “weak.” Nahua writers instead paint a space of strength in which Nahuas possess and shape the word through their texts. The heart is a locus of cognition and feelings, an affective intelligence. By emphasizing the heart, Nahuas are not reiterating the hackneyed depiction of Indigenous peoples as led by instincts, but rather the ability to exercise an affective intelligence that recognizes emotive and cognitive responses as intimately interwoven. Constant references to feeling, laughter, and dialogue with the heart challenges the prevalent stereotype that Indigenous peoples are stoic with no sense of humor. This feeling is highlighted in the kinship ties among Nahuas within networks that span the globe. A significant absence within Nahua literary production is a discourse of victimization. While Nahuas in many instances have been displaced due to economic pressures, artists assert the agency among a network of Nahuas in tackling these challenges.

Tied to Nahua knowledge production is an aesthetic in which corn operates as a central metaphor. It is important to note that to speak of *a* Nahua perspective has serious pitfalls, since there exist a multiplicity of viewpoints, as with any population, and many of their practices closely resemble those of other Indigenous groups in the hemisphere, though there exist noted differences as well. There are Nahuas who self-identify as Protestant, Catholic, Mormon, and atheist and who affiliate with political parties of the right, the alleged center, and the left;²⁴ Nahuas who don't speak Nahuatl, and Nahuas in urban areas, rural municipalities, and places in-between. Nevertheless, although not reflective of everyone, one sees within Nahua literature a general emphasis placed on maize and knowledges linked to corn ceremonies. The growth of an individual, key spiritual ceremonies, and writing itself are grounded in corn. Maize comes to the forefront in contemporary Nahua cultural production.

Corn aesthetic transmits concepts codified within the Nahuatl language, namely *nemiliztli* (walk of life), *tlachiyaliztli* (observance), and *yoltlallamiquiliztli* (philosophy from the heart), which are related to the importance of sacred landscapes, reciprocity, respect for ancestors, a dynamic cyclical perception of time, and affective intelligence. The term used in Nahuatl for "Indigenous," *macehualli* (roughly translatable as "peasant farmer"),²⁵ carries with it the connotation of *farmer*, and the tending of the crop ties back to an Indigenous view of who embodies an intellectual, because the planter must carefully observe and have personal experience with the terrain. This telluric intimacy crosses over into general Nahua knowledge production and the aforementioned perspectives of *nemiliztli* (walk of life), *tlachiyaliztli* (observance), and

yoltlallamiquiltli (philosophy from the heart). An alternative view of time stems from the cyclical and dynamic nature of the corn crop itself. Respect for the landscape does not spring from a New Age romanticized conception of the land, but instead is rooted in recognition of the earth as the living source of one's sustenance. Situated within a non-anthropocentric worldview in which the individual is not the main locus of enunciation, Nahuas venerate ancestors and community. Knowledges of elders and the past, not deemed temporally peripheral, are capable of renewing the present and future. Corn serves as the fundamental metaphor for all these perspectives—sacred landscapes, reciprocity, respect toward ancestor, cyclical temporality, and affective intelligence—as they play out in other contexts, such as Nahua intellectual production in academics, politics, and the arts.

In relation to this knowledge production, the Indigenous migrant is a central figure in the questioning of the way in which Western modernity disregards Indigenous intellectual tradition as non-existent or anti-progressive. This migrant, metaphorically referred to in Nahuatl as an “orphan,” can never fully assimilate into these new surroundings, even if she or he wanted to do so, as the deeply engrained imaginary instilled by her or his originary experience cannot be erased. She or he begins to consciously articulate elements from this alternative imaginary that conflict with Western modernity, elements that before were most likely taken for granted and not expressed explicitly. It is within this context of migration, principally to Mexico City, that these knowledges are openly articulated, and they serve as coping strategies in uncertain topographies and a theoretical lens through which to interpret the experience

of migration itself. In an article entitled “Todos somos migrantes” (We Are All Migrants), Natalio Hernández highlights the importance of this experience through internal migration within Mexico or else abroad, but also stresses that migration in the sense of movement is a part of any life.²⁶ Within chapter one, I connect this view with the concept of *nemiliztli* (“walk” or “philosophy”), which appears repeatedly in Hernández’s *Xochikoskatl* and in the works of later authors. Contemporary Nahua literature is groundbreaking in this representation of Indigenous migrant experiences. Migration shifts discussions away from authenticity and a fundamentalist rescue of a pre-Hispanic past, and toward a multivalent process in which Nahuas negotiate among epistemes from both their community and urban landscapes.

This study has its theoretical footing, above all, within the Nahuatl language itself. Although Nahua artists usually do not explicitly articulate concepts like *nemiliztli* (walk of life) as theory, they nonetheless, very much in line with the idea of an intellectual in Nahuatl, offer alternative perspectives that should be set in critical dialogue with theoretical perspectives that have a wider audience. In discussing coloniality, I dialogue with Aníbal Quijano’s analysis, published approximately a decade after *Xochikoskatl*, to explore in depth the implications of the *coyotl* (coyote) in the Huasteca. *Coyotl*, which will be analyzed in detail within chapter one, is the term generally used to refer to those who disrespect Nahua practices and attempt to displace Indigenous peoples from their lands. For a decolonial perspective, I employ theoretical concepts from literary critic Walter Mignolo (border thinking), literary critic Javier Sanjinés (viscerality and embers of the past), and Aymara theorist Silvia Rivera

Cusicanqui (*nayrapacha* and *ch'ixi*). These concepts relate to the alternative knowledges in the works of Nahua authors and help to place them in discussion with current theoretical debates regarding Indigenous literatures. Albeit showing parallels with the theories of Quijano, Mignolo, Sanjinés, and Rivera Cusicanqui, crucial specificities come to the forefront when the analysis is set within the terms and language of the text itself. For example, although *coloniality* relates to *coyotl* (coyote) in Nahuatl, these terms are not interchangeable. As Rivera Cusicanqui argues (in criticism of the other three theoreticians cited), outside theories should not overlay Indigenous writings with preconceived notions and models (*Ch'ixinakax utxiwa* 68–69). Such superimposed frameworks tend to result in the divorcement of Nahua knowledge production from its specificities and political movements.

“Decoloniality”—or “descoloniality” as Cusicanqui prefers to call it to distance the term away from English-based theorizations in the global North—in turn constitutes a search for a new language that transcends coloniality and describes the complexities of gender, race, class, sexuality, knowledge, and spirituality. It dialogues with non-Western forms of knowledge as equal players on a heterarchical field of knowledge production, in which “the West” no longer constitutes the ground zero from which to measure the value of other knowledges.

Cusicanqui offers a much needed response to Mignolo and Sanjinés. Though she has been outspoken in her criticism of these theoreticians, her work is fundamentally analogous with them, albeit articulated from a different loci with terminology arguably less tied up in theoretical debates in the United States. She problematizes Mignolo’s talk

of “traditional” and “modern” and Sanjinés’s references to the *contemporaneity* of Indigenous *non-contemporaneity* as terminology that carries with it undercurrents of the stereotypical positioning of Indigenous subjects as somehow always stuck in the past. In this sense, Cusicanqui calls for a decolonization of the theoretical debate over decoloniality.

Two terms from Aymara particularly effective in this regard are *nayrapacha* (past-as-future) and *ch’ixi* (overturning of time). Even though Cusicanqui uses these terms specifically in relation to Bolivia, they are concepts evidenced in numerous other Indigenous languages, including Nahuatl. *Nayrapacha* is a view in which the past is seen as in front of the subject, and it transcends speaking of Indigenous peoples as “non-contemporary” or “traditional.” It is a cyclical or spiral perspective toward time that forms part of a dynamic process in which the past is capable of renewing the future. *Ch’ixi* is a color in Aymara that constitutes the combination of two colors that are together while simultaneously separate. Similar to Mignolo’s *border thinking* and Sanjinés’s analysis of migrant experiences, Cusicanqui uses *ch’ixi* as an alternative metaphor to the problematic terms such as *hybridity* for the encounters of Indigenous and Western worldviews. These theoretical concepts relate closely to the alternative knowledges in the texts of Nahua authors, who vie for a deep respect for ancestors, a close relationship with nature, and an affective intelligence that deconstructs and shifts the discourse of Western rationality.

Concepts from Cusicanqui and other de(s)colonialists help place the texts in question in dialogue with current debates in Latin American Studies and Indigenous

Studies. I emphasize specificities based on Nahua theoretical approaches because they help to tease out meanings in the texts otherwise unnoticed. Much of the analysis in this study would be deficient without these theoretical concepts. A heart would just be a pleasant metaphor representing feeling and the face would not go beyond similarities with facial tropes in Pre-Columbian literary production. Nahua concepts clearly place the texts of this study within a contemporary context and highlight their contributions within that present.

Beyond Representation: The Politics and Poetics of Contemporary Nahua Literature

The results of this work, first and foremost, contribute to ongoing academic discussions surrounding Indigenous literary production and language revitalization. This project makes a significant contribution by attracting overdue recognition to the aesthetics and philosophies represented within Nahua literature. Ultimately, of course, this divergent line illustrates the broad, heterogeneous space covered by contemporary Latin American cultural studies, and points in the direction of decolonial thinking.

The topics in this study dialogue with wider discussions in Mexican and Latin American Studies, such as debates over the construction of “modernity” and the nation-state, decolonial strategies, and the active role of Indigenous intellectuals in Mexico and elsewhere in the continent. With the materials and experience gained from this research, I have sought to make an influential contribution to Latin American Studies, Indigenous Studies, and especially Nahua communities by analyzing their literary production and media on their own terms in the original language.

As I explored this literature, I found that previous studies offer only brief overviews of the works and read them in translation. The present study is the first to address primarily contemporary Nahua literature and media and to closely analyze this artistic production in the contemporary Nahuatl language. This study hopefully can help serve as a precedent that will prove useful in studying literature in numerous Indigenous languages on their own terms. My analysis highlights the importance of the Nahuatl language, both in methodology and within the texts themselves. While most of the literature is bilingual in Spanish and Nahuatl, and in some cases trilingual with English also, the Spanish versions of the texts are not replicates of the Nahuatl versions. Certain meanings of these works, often with subversive implications, are lost or else hidden in translation. In turn, there are also meanings in the Spanish added that do not appear in the Nahuatl. For example, Ildefonso Maya's theatrical performance *Ixtlamatinij* contains abundant code-switching plays between Spanish and Nahuatl that go unnoticed without a command of both languages. My extended research and collaboration with authors in their communities has been crucial to allow me to complete this analysis working with both Nahuatl and Spanish.

In spite of a small readership (and even fewer able to read Nahuatl), literature is still one of the preferred methods used by Nahua artists for self-expression and negotiating a politics of Nahua identities. Literature offers a powerful means of representation through which Nahua subjects revalue their culture and practices, and use it as an instrument to uproot colonial practices such as economic marginalization, epistemicide, and linguistic discrimination. This dissertation is only a beginning in the

analysis of Nahua artistic expression. Younger Nahua artists in particular are gaining new spaces of expression through digital media and particularly the works from this newer generation are tied to projects in film, music, painting, and blogs. Across this diverse media and their literature, they express a negotiation between their Nahua communities and urban spaces. Not wanting to be tied down by preconceptions of Nahua authenticity nor by the supposed superiority of the city, they enter into a fluid politics of identity in which they question even Nahua cultural practices without ceasing to proudly self-identify as Nahuas.

With the emerging corpus of Nahuatl literature, authors seek to create a different genealogy that does not erase Indigenous literary production as always behind the great literature of the West. While official discourse proclaims the importance of Indigenous languages, the notion still pervades deep even among many of those who champion these projects that Indigenous peoples are somehow stuck in the past and any departure from a stereotyped pristineness constitutes an exit from indigeneity itself. All Nahua authors with whom I have had the opportunity to speak have underscored that the Mexican nation-state and general populace still fails to dialogue seriously with Indigenous peoples. While there is a wealth of literary production since the 1980s, this literary production has received limited critical attention beyond an acknowledgment of its existence.

I conclude in this project that a serious exploration of contemporary Nahua literature raises numerous questions: Who is capable of offering ideas in the construction of the nation-state? Who wields the power of inclusion? Who defines “progress”? The

texts addressed in this project serve as forerunners in both posing and answering these questions, displacing discriminatory practices as products of a colonial era and proposing alternative knowledges in the construction of the nation-state.

Structure of This Study and Works Analyzed

In this project, I focus on three main areas: 1) how Nahua artists Natalio Hernández, Ildefonso Maya, Gustavo Zapoteco Sideño, and Ethel Xochitiotzin Pérez foreground an alternative aesthetic with its underlying epistemologies to assert the exigency of Nahua knowledges in the present; 2) the use of Nahua pedagogy and language to critique a failed government-run Indigenous educational system; and 3) artists' perspectives toward migration and how they depict dynamic Nahua knowledge production against a backdrop of official discourse that depicts them as static.

To address these issues, in the first chapter I explore Natalio Hernández's *Xochikoskatl* and how Natalio Hernández challenges a national discourse that depicts Nahuas as not present in the present. Migration is a key trope throughout his book, as he speaks of dealing with life in Mexico City. *Xochikoskatl* is revolutionary in its use of Nahuatl in unexpected ways within a contemporary urban setting, its stark critique of continued discrimination within a system that was purportedly denouncing discrimination, and above all its demand that Indigenous subjects be treated as people with valid ideas for the present. The migrant, as Hernández himself was when he wrote *Xochikoskatl*, is a key figure in the questioning of a Mexican post-revolutionary ruling party's version of "modernity." This migrant, metaphorically referred to in Nahuatl as an "orphan," can never fully assimilate to these new surroundings, even if he wanted to do

so, as there is a deeply engrained imaginary instilled by his originary experience that cannot be erased.

He begins to consciously articulate tropes from this alternative imaginary that collide with modernity and before were most likely taken for granted. The evidence of such tropes becomes even more compelling when observing the translation of “word of the orphan/migrant” in the text as “feeling” also. This feeling represents an affective intelligence. The eyes and face are bodily metaphors of *nonemiliz* (“life/philosophy/path/emotional health”) and emphasize a feeling/thinking body. Here the gaze of the colonizer is turned in on itself as the Indigenous subject has a face and eyes, shifting the meaning of *indio* from the nameless mass that coloniality constructed and giving him the ability to gaze back on the colonizer. In relation to the main argument of my dissertation, I argue that Hernández consistently frames contemporary discriminatory practices within a colonial space and time in order to displace coloniality and imagine an alternative space in which Indigenous subjects actively participate in the construction of the nation-state.

The first generation of Nahua authors repudiates the folkloric and exotic displays of their cultural practices within national discourse. Their texts focus on Nahua cultural practices as sources of valid alternative epistememes and complex worldviews, contrasted with *mestizos* who represent themselves as the inevitable norm to which all must aspire. Language, dress, and education come to the forefront in denouncing the everyday racism targeted against Nahuas.

This last observation would also hold true for the author I analyze in the second chapter, playwright Idefonso Maya. His theatrical work *Ixtlamatinij* deconstructs and shifts the supposed superiority of metropolitan clothing and language. This work relates to the principal goals of this first generation of writers and the overall argument of my dissertation in locating performance of Nahua rituals and worldviews as deeply psychological experiences that deconstruct and shift the dominant discourses of *mestizaje* (i.e. assimilation) and the racial and ethnic discrimination that these discourses indoctrinate.

The third chapter explores the apparent generational differences between Natalio Hernández's *Semanca Huitzilin / Colibrí de la armonía / Hummingbird of Harmony* (2005) and Gustavo Zapoteco Sideño's *Cantos en el cañaveral / Cuicatl pan tlalliouatlmej* (2004). The tensions between these two authors are telling of disagreements of older authors with a younger generation of artists such as Mardonio Carballo and Gustavo Zapoteco Sideño. Hernández emphasizes in his poetry, though by no means categorically, the value of Nahua cultural identity and history, whereas in Zapoteco's text Nahua identity is secondary, though still vitally important, to denouncing social and economic inequality in the sugarcane fields of Morelos. *Cantos en el cañaveral* represents a scathing critique of a paternalistic Mexican State that patronizes Indigenous subjects with vague promises of "progress" and inclusion. Nonetheless, this message lies hidden under hyperbolic praises of the surrounding landscape and altruism of Morelos, and Zapoteco himself explains that he wrote in an affected style to obtain funding from government institutions for publication. He mixes

poems that on the surface are nationalistic lauds and focus on “mere” cultural practices with others that explicitly condemn social injustices. In doing so he is able to be published and at the same time avoid, according to his self-described positioning, being coopted by the state like Natalio Hernández and other first generation of Nahua authors. This is a common accusation made by the newer generation of Nahua writers, who criticize the older generation of being excessively centered on cultural practices while positioning themselves as social activists. For this younger generation, the markers of Nahua identity must be coupled with protests against injustices. In contrast, Hernández argues that he has been so put off by this continual victimization of Indigenous peoples as the sufferers of colonialism, social inequality, and globalization, that for the most part he has ceased to write explicitly of these ills in his poetry and is reluctant to give readings of previous poems that do so. The poems he wrote in the eighties openly denouncing discrimination were interpreted more within the usual framework of victimization than in the intended new framework of empowerment. This chapter focuses on how both Zapoteco and Hernández, though differing in their strategies, argue for the need to listen, understand, and treat as equally valid marginalized intellectual traditions such as those of Nahuas.

The fourth chapter explores the representations and self-representations of Nahua women. I explore these representations and how Nahua women authors move away from the typical patriarchal and patronizing perspectives toward women that consistently appear in other Nahua texts. Even Zapoteco’s writings fall into this, as he speaks in the poem “Ayúdame” (2006) of the need to hit docile Nahua women over the head so that

they wake up from their dreaming and fight against discrimination. My field research allowed me to obtain texts from Nahua women writers and expand on the counter-perspectives to such a view. I was able to obtain unpublished manuscripts of Nahua women authors. I closely analyze an unpublished book of poetry, *Tlaoxtika in tlajtol* (Grinding Words) (2012) from Tlaxcaltecan Nahua poet Ethel Xochitiotzin Pérez. I argue that she transforms common metaphors within Nahua poetry to position women as decision makers and thinkers within and outside their communities. In doing so, she subverts Nahua male authors' traditional objectification of them and reiteration of male dominance. This is a significant contribution to Nahua studies and a fitting way to end this dissertation, as it points to the even more innovative and revolutionary paths toward which Nahua literature is headed in the coming years.

From Southern California to the Huasteca Veracruzana: The Pathways and Networks of This Study

The roots of my research began nearly fifteen years ago in Southern California. There Nahua colleagues of mine would speak Nahuatl at home, and they told stories of their family members as important actors in society, far from the all-to-common “on the way out the door” or passive depictions of Indigenous peoples. Their grandparents had fought actively in the Mexican Revolution. The subsequent move to Southern California was a deliberate decision in which they actively developed a transnational network of kinship. A main objective in my research since that time has been to highlight Nahua agency and their critical contributions, against a backdrop in which they are portrayed as void of ideas and causalities of “modernization.”

Although they would speak Spanish in the community, my Nahua colleagues communicated in Nahuatl among themselves. They related to me how they avoided doing so publicly out of fear of oppression for speaking what others disparagingly called a “dialect.” My experiences with this family instilled in me a determination to understand Indigenous communities’ diverse self-representations.

Nahuas constitute a large population that has been obscured within both Mexico and the United States. “Axnicnequi ninahuatiz pampa zan nizaniloa nahuatl *cuatrapeado*” (I don’t want to speak Nahuatl because the Nahuatl I use is broken), the father of a teenage student explained to me in the Huasteca Veracruzana of Mexico. I had heard this complaint many times, always with the Spanish loan word *cuatrapeado*—a word that carries connotations of speaking senselessly like an animal. Such is the product of systemic discrimination over centuries against Indigenous languages and cultural practices. Parents who have suffered such marginalization in many cases avoid teaching their children the Nahuatl language in the hope that they will not suffer a similar fate.

Natalio Hernández is from this region and—in an attempt to uproot discriminatory practices and revitalize the Nahuatl language—developed the innovative idea of a bilingual Nahuatl-English course for high school students. In 2010 he led the formation of curriculum for this course based on a mix of methodologies from student-centered, communicative techniques and approaches gleaned from a key text in the formation of Nahua pedagogical perspectives, Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968).

“Naman niquitta quena ipatiuh nahuatlahtolli ihuan axmelahuac tlen techilhuiah coyomeh” (Now I see that Nahuatl is valuable and what the “coyotes” tell us is not true), Norberto said in one of the class sessions. As mentioned briefly in this introduction, “coyotes” refers to people who persecute Indigenous communities, and who promote the idea that Nahuatl is synonymous with being backward and unintelligent. Normally reticent to speak Nahuatl, Norberto changed his perspective after studying contemporary Nahua cultural production and attending a special presentation from a Nahua medical doctor named Enrique Ramírez. Becoming acquainted with an accomplished doctor who values his Nahua upbringing was a life-changing experience for students. They began to openly question stereotypes regarding Indigenous peoples and to criticize the bullying targeted against classmates who admit they are Nahua. Another student, Heydi, participated in the course for four years and now attends an intercultural university where she uses both Nahuatl and English in her studies. Pride in the language and cultural practices of her community are now a key factor in her education. Successes of the course confirm the powerful effects (and affect) that ethically-minded teaching and cultural production led by Nahuas can have.

My hope is that this collaboration with Nahuas and my analysis of their literature will help deconstruct the various racial and social stereotypes regarding their communities and Indigenous communities in general. These stereotypes are often evidenced in public discourse in Mexico and the United States, and underlie the epistemic and physical violence exercised against Nahua populations. In contrast, the present study highlights the great diversity in aesthetics and philosophy that exists

among their communities. This heterogeneity has largely been overlooked or ignored in projects that have tended to over-generalize and pigeonhole speakers of Nahuatl and their cultural production. In turn, a displacement of such discrimination will help open pathways for youth within Nahua communities to feel empowered by their language and cultural practices.

¹ The Huasteca encompasses principally rural areas of Northern Veracruz, Hidalgo, Querétaro, and San Luis Potosí. It is the region with the largest population of Nahuas and many Nahua artists are from there.

² The term *mestizo* has a long and problematic history that will be explored more within the chapters of this study. To give a brief preliminary definition, the discourse of *mestizaje* implies the assimilation of Afrodescendants and Indigenous peoples into a homogenous notion of the ideal Mexican citizen, and the portrayal of increasing distance from markers of Indigenous identity as “progress” toward becoming a “modern” subject.

³ Arturo Arias explains that “A diferencia de la poesía, el cuento o incluso el teatro, nadie puede argumentar que el género novelesco tuviera alguna presencia o raigambre en el mundo prehispánico. Es un producto eminentemente occidental, pese a sus manifestaciones anteriores en la China” (4).

⁴ Nahuas writing contemporary literature in itself is unexpected. Dakota historian Philip J. Deloria speaks of the power of “Indians in unexpected places” to challenge stereotypes of Indigenous peoples. See Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*.

⁵ In a similar vein, Chickasaw theorist Jodi A. Byrd comments on the irony of the term *transit authority*, whose job it is to halt and control movement rather than facilitate that transit. They represent the nation-state’s attempt to enforce strictly delineated borders. See Byrd, xv.

⁶ In his book of essays entitled *In tlahtoli, in ohtli / La palabra, el camino*, Natalio Hernández states that in the 1990s “se inauguró así una nueva etapa del movimiento indígena que, dicho poéticamente, hizo nacer un nuevo sol, un nuevo amanecer” (137). Many Nahua writers as well as Indigenous writers in general employ this metaphor of a “new sun” to describe the surge in Indigenous cultural production and publications.

⁷ For an analysis of “acoustic colonialism,” see Luis Cárcamo Huechante, “Indigenous Interference: Mapuche Use of Radio in Times of Acoustic Colonialism.”

⁸ Indigenous farmers have been some of the hardest hit by NAFTA, as they are unable to compete with the price of subsidized surplus corn that pours into Mexico from the United States.

⁹ For an excellent analysis of the Zapatista movement, see Bruno Baronnet, et.al., *Luchas “muy otras”*: *Zapatismo y autonomía en las comunidades indígenas de Chiapas* (2011).

¹⁰ See Kelly McDonough, *The Learned Ones*, 134.

¹¹ This work was first published by the Instituto Indigenista Interamericano in 1948, and then republished in 1966. Miguel León-Portilla and Lázaro Cárdenas underscore Gamio’s influence on rural education programs within Indigenous communities in the commentary for the second edition *Consideraciones sobre el problema indio*. Natalio Hernández also cites this influence in *De la exclusión al diálogo intercultural con los pueblos indígenas* (2009). Historian Claudio Lomintz-Adler also attests to the importance of Gamio in *Exits from the Labyrinth* (2).

¹² Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are the author’s.

¹³ Nahua artist Natalio Hernández has a forthcoming book, entitled *Forjando un nuevo rostro / Yancuic ixtlachihualistli: Orígenes y desarrollo de la educación indígena en México* (Forging a New Face: Origins and Development of Indigenous Education in Mexico), which is scheduled to be published in 2015. This text seeks to correct the lack of recognition for particularly Nahua professors’ role in the formation of Indigenous education.

¹⁴ For discussions of this glorification of a Pre-Columbian past within national discourse, see Jongsoo Lee, *The Allure of Nezahualcoyotl: Pre-Hispanic History, Religion, and Nahuatl Poetics*.

¹⁵ See José Joaquín Fernández Lizardi, *El Periquillo Sarniento*, 550-552. Nahuatl women present what is satirized as a “suñeto” (making jest at the o and u being interchangeable in Nahuatl), which sparks a debate regarding the origins of poetry and the possibility of quality Pre-Columbian literature.

¹⁶ *Zapoteco*, “people among the sapodilla trees,” itself is an exonym imposed by the Mexica.

¹⁷ For further discussion of this expansion, see Justyna Olko, “Aztec Universalism: Ideology and Status Symbols in the Service of Empire-Building.”

¹⁸ I thank Sergio Romero for an insightful discussion regarding this Classical Nahuatl standard to which researchers tend to position contemporary Nahuatl.

¹⁹ For critical perspectives on *indigenismo*, see Natalio Hernández, *De la exclusión al diálogo intercultural con los pueblos indígenas*; Estelle Tarica, *The Inner Life of Mestizo Nationalism*.

²⁰ K’iche’ scholars write the title as *Popol wuj*, but there are equivocal Western mis-representations of the name, such as *Popol vuh*.

²¹ Among these collaborations, Inés Hernández Ávila has interviewed Natalio Hernández; Gustavo Zapoteco Sideño has participated in NAISA; Nahuatl artist Judith Santopietro is completing a Ph.D. at the University of Texas at Austin and participating in the Native American and Indigenous Studies Program. These efforts and numerous others seek to bridge the imaginary divide between North and South.

²² In Nahuatl, each day is in fact measured by *tonatiuh* (suns).

²³ For an excellent analysis of this term and Nahuatl intellectualism, see McDonough, *The Learned Ones*, 3-9.

²⁴ *Priistas* (members of *Partido revolucionario institucional* [PRI]), *panistas* (members of *Partido de Acción Nacional* [PAN]), and *perredistas* (members of *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* [PRD]) represent the three largest political parties in Mexico.

²⁵ The term *macehualli* has an interesting and varied history from the colonial era. *Macehualli* (“commoner”) had been used pre-contact in contrast with *pilli* (“noble”). It signified “vassal” or a position of subservience to an individual with greater authority. Through the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the term gradually became synonymous with *indio* (Indian) in general, regardless of one’s social position among Indigenous populations. With the achievement of nominal independence in the early nineteenth century, *indio* lost its legal status to refer to a population with certain special rights and came to be solely a derogatory term for Indigenous peoples. *Macehualli* in turn came to signify less “indio” and referred instead to Nahuas who speak Nahuatl, know how to personally work the land, and carry on cultural practices that help secure a successful crop. Rather than self-identify as *indio* (Indian), *indígena* (Indigenous), or even *nahua*, *macehualmeh* would self-identify according to their specific communities and their location in that area (e.g. by the river, near the hill etc.). With the emergence of both national and international Indigenous movements in the 1970s, *Indigenous* or *indígena* became the widely accepted term in legal proceedings in international courts and organizations such as the United Nations. Within Nahuatl translations of such proceedings, *macehualli* has been used and has continued to be adopted as the equivalent to *indígena*. This general association of *macehualli* with *indígena* or *nahua* has become increasingly common within Indigenous communities. Nonetheless, the term tends only to be employed with this meaning when used in state, national, or international politics to demand certain rights or concessions. Within quotidian contexts, *macehualli* signifies more *campesino* (peasant farmer) than anything else. The use of the term *macehualli* becomes even more complex, as there are Nahuatl authors who avoid the term (and even have adopted the term *pilli*) because they are familiar with its history in which it denoted subservience. Natalio Hernández in fact now avoids using the term and states that Nahuas are really *pilli* and not *macehualli*. For an extensive discussion of these terms, see Mercedes Olivera, *Pillis y macehuales*.

²⁶ See Natalio Hernández, “Todos somos migrantes,” *De la exclusión al diálogo intercultural con los pueblos indígenas* (2009).

CHAPTER 1. *Ixtlamatiliztli* / Knowledge with the Face: Intellectual Migrations and Colonial Dis-placements in Natalio Hernández’s *Xochikoskatl*

Ma sampa moechkauikaj ueuetlakamej
ma sampa tijkakikaj ueuetlajtoli
ma sampa tijyolitikaj
xochikali uan kuikakali.

May the wise elders draw near again
may we again listen to words of wisdom
may we again revive
the house of flowers and house of song.

-Natalio Hernández, *Xochikoskatl* (1985)¹

These lines from the sixth stanza of the poem “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words) and similar ones throughout *Xochikoskatl* (Flowered Necklace) by Nahua author Natalio Hernández have smacked, for some readers, of Pre-Columbian utopianism and an appeal to a Mexican state-sponsored national narrative. Because of Hernández’s numerous references to Nezahualcoyotl, Tenochtitlan, and “flower and song” and a poetic style resembling Ángel María Garibay’s translations of the sixteenth-century manuscript *Cantares mexicanos* (Nahuatl Songs), several critics have gone so far as to dismiss him as a mediocre artist on the government payroll and “Nezahualcoyotl wanna-be.” Younger Nahua authors in particular accuse him of being out of touch with the reality of Indigenous communities and lost in dreams of a return to Aztec imperial glories. Nonetheless, at a closer reading of the text, especially in Nahuatl, one finds quite the opposite to be the case. Hernández skillfully displaces the national narrative of the vanquished or vanishing Indian.

Xochikoskatl, Natalio Hernández’s first book, is more complex than its critics would have us think, and I seek to show through a close analysis that this text, particularly the Nahuatl versions of the poems with their numerous maize-centered tropes, offers insights into Nahua perspectives and strategies for confronting

discriminatory practices. I argue that Hernández foregrounds corn aesthetic and its underlying epistemologies to assert that Nahua knowledges produce solutions for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples living within cities. He frames contemporary discriminatory practices within a colonial space and time in order to displace colonial practices or “coloniality”² (*coyoyotl* or “essence of the coyote” in Nahuatl, a concept resembling coloniality that I address in detail within this chapter) and imagine an alternative space in which Indigenous subjects actively participate in the construction of the nation-state using epistemologies woven with the landscape, respect for elders, an alternative view of time, and affective intelligence.

This chapter begins with the section “Literature Review,” which explores the few works that have analyzed *Xochikoskatl*. The second section, “Intuitive Theory and Revolution: A Brief Biography of Natalio Hernández,” details Hernández’s trajectory leading up to the publication of this book. In the third section, “Topographies of Readings,” I offer an overview of the structure of *Xochikoskatl* and frame the structure of readings within the chapter—topographies in both the sense of the physical landscape and Nahua literary topos from which Hernández writes. The fourth section, “Nahua Theory with Face: The Methodological Framework of this Analysis,” outlines the Nahua theoretical framework—above all Nahua perspectives articulated within *Xochikoskatl*. In the middle portion of this chapter, I conduct readings of poems from this text in relation to five main themes: corn aesthetic, landscape, the *coyomeh* (coyotes), respect for ancestors, and affective intelligence. I conclude the chapter commenting on the

implications of *Xochikoskatl* and point toward promising avenues of research regarding Hernández's work and contemporary Nahua literature.

1. Literature Review

Few scholars have analyzed Hernández's poetry, and only three studies go into significant detail. In *Relatos de la diferencia y literatura indígena: Travesías por el sistema mundo* (2013), Luz María Lepe Lira explores an array of Hernández's poems and essays from the 1990s to the present. She begins by extensively outlining numerous theoretical approaches tied to the terms coloniality, decoloniality, and world-systems. Lepe Lira argues that Hernández's use of Nahua wisdom and language breaks with colonial "narratives of difference" (103). In regards to the two principal aspects of Hernández's work—the transformation of the public education system and the dissemination of Indigenous languages—she identifies how Hernández writes against the exoticization of Nahua knowledges and their relegation to manual labor. Of particular interest is her analysis of how Hernández positions Indigenous peoples as producers of knowledge. In her dissertation, *Poesía indígena contemporánea de México y Chile* (2008), Sonia Montes Romanillos addresses the context in which Hernández writes along with other Indigenous authors of the Americas, and she analyzes how he challenges the depiction of Nahuas as illiterate and unintelligent in her readings of the poems "Tlamatini" and "Yo soy indio" (75; 143). As stated in the introduction, while these studies pay much overdue attention to Hernández and contemporary Indigenous

literature, Lepe Lira and Montes Romanillos do not offer close analyses of Hernández's texts in Nahuatl.

In her study entitled “El discurso poético náhuatl de ayer y de hoy: Trayectoria continua y discontinua” (2000; published 2005), Marie Sautron compares the Nahuatl language in *Cantares mexicanos* (Nahuatl Songs) and *Romances de los señores de Nueva España* (Ballads of the Lords of New Spain) with the first part of *Xochikoskatl* (Flowered Necklace), published by Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) with the title *Sempoalxochitl* (Twenty Flower). As stated in the introduction, this gesture works counter one of the main objectives of *Xochikoskatl*—to highlight contemporary Nahua knowledge production. Sautron privileges elements that seem to coincide with “Classical Nahuatl” and describes those that do not as “linguistic deformations” and “intrusion of Spanish terms” (296-97). She concludes that Hernández's poetic discourse “clearly comes from the florid language of the pre-Hispanic era, and that is the case no matter how much it has evolved and may seem modern” (“procede verosímilmente del lenguaje florido de la época prehispánica, y eso por más que haya evolucionado y parezca moderno”; 300). Within this chapter I seek to counter the reduction of contemporary Nahua texts to the “standard” of Classical Nahuatl and offer a close analysis of *Xochikoskatl*'s seemingly straightforward poems.

The Kalpulli printing house published only 3,000 copies of *Xochikoskatl*, and the full text has never been reprinted. As Hernández recalls, this was a personal publishing house self-funded by “Don Benito.” He does not remember the main editor's full name. Don Benito offered to publish the entire work after Hernández expressed his displeasure

at the UNAM Nahuatl Studies cohort's lack of interest in distributing the text in its entirety. UNAM's editorial board communicated they were willing to print only the first section, "Sempoalxochitl," but even then, as Hernández recounts, they moved too slowly—and evidently continued to advance slowly as this section was not published by UNAM until two years later.³ The inadequate attention given to this book is endemic to the problem that Hernández himself combats within it. As explored in the introduction, Indigenous writing remains within what Arturo Arias calls the "marginality of marginality," as these texts are skimmed for superficial content (*Taking Their Word* 53). Nonetheless, they contain creative ways of approaching controversial social issues with innovative literary styles.

Xochikoskatl is historically significant in helping launch Hernández's career and opening a space for future Indigenous writers and the later creation of the organization Escritores en Lenguas Indígenas Asociación Civil [Association of Indigenous-Language Writers] (ELIAC) in 1993. While few have seen *Xochikoskatl* (1985) in its entirety, a wider public has read selections in anthologies and partial republications such as its first part, "Sempoalxochitl" (Twenty Flower), printed as a separate work in 1987 by UNAM.⁴ Interest in Hernández's work soared after these publications, and he used this influence to advocate for the creation of ELIAC. In 1994 Hernández released through Editorial Diana an anthology of his poetry, *Yancuic Anahuac cuicatl* (New Song of Anahuac), with poems from *Xochikoskatl* and two subsequent texts. After less than a decade, Hernández went from little-known Nahua teacher working as Deputy Director in Indigenous education to well-respected literary and political figure. Within national and international

publications and programs on Indigenous political rights and literary production, Hernández is a leading figure in interviews and nationally broadcasted debates.⁵ He attributes the origins of this success to the Editor of Editorial Kalpulli and his willingness to publish *Xochikoskatl*.⁶

Due to Hernández's profound influence, many Indigenous authors refer to him as the "father of contemporary Indigenous literature." His first published book of poetry is an ideal point of departure for a consideration of Nahuatl literature as a whole and especially literature from the Huasteca, spanning portions of Veracruz, Hidalgo, San Luis Potosí, and Puebla. "Huasteca" (*Huasteca* in Nahuatl) denotes a region in which the Huastecans, a Maya population, settled in the seventh century. It is a highly diverse region in which Totonacos, Ñähñus, and Tepehuas coexist and share numerous cultural practices.⁷ Until recently, access to the Huasteca was difficult and, at the time Hernández wrote *Xochikoskatl*, government pamphlets described the area as a remote wilderness frontier ready for the taking by capitalists (See Lomintz-Adler 321). The region also lies on the periphery of Nahuatl studies centered in Milpa Alta near Mexico City—in this sense Huastecan authors write within a marginality of the marginality of the marginality. In personal interviews with Nahuatl authors from Central Mexico, I have heard them refer to Huastecan Nahuatl as "popular Nahuatl" (with negative connotations), "baby Nahuatl," and "vulgar Nahuatl" (*vulgar* with the dual meaning of both *common* and *full of vulgarities*). Other Huastecan Nahuatl authors, among them Juan Hernández Ramírez, Idefonso Maya, Alberto Becerril Cipriano, Crispín Amador Ramírez, and Mardonio Carballo, use similar images and symbols in their works and also argue that

contemporary Nahua literary production deserves the same acclaim as other Mexican literatures.

2. Intuitive Theory and Revolution: A Brief Biography of Natalio Hernández

Natalio Hernández is a Nahua poet, novelist, essayist, and activist who published his first work during the 1980s in Mexico City, at a time when there was a significant disparity between the progressive rhetoric of interculturality and bilingualism from the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP)⁸ and actual practices that posited Indigenous cultures as obstacles to national unity and industrialization.⁹ Publishing houses that support modern Indigenous literatures would not emerge until the 1990s, and Hernández published *Xochikoskatl* amid a milieu that still pitted Nahuatl and other originary languages as antithetic to contemporaneity and even proper language as such.¹⁰

Hernández was born in the Nahua community of Naranjo Dulce in the municipality of Ixhuatlán de Madero, but his family moved to nearby Lomas del Dorado, which he considers his true hometown, when he was about five years old. The majority of Nahuas in the Huastecan region have as last names Hernández or De La Cruz (both Natalio Hernández's maternal and paternal last names are Hernández), due to the colonial evangelization in which priests imposed Christian surnames.¹¹ Natalio Hernández published *Xochikoskatl* under the pseudonym José Antonio Xokoyotzin, "José Antonio Jr.," to combat this patronymic encroachment and honor his grandfather José Antonio.¹²

In interviews Hernández calls *Xochikoskatl* a product of "pure intuition," *completamente intuitivo*.¹³ He wrote this book while serving as Deputy Director of Indigenous Education for SEP. By *intuitivo* he means that this book was birthed,

exploded, from feelings of outrage and frustration within a context that, as he describes, restricted his movement:

“[Yo] venía de un movimiento indígena, en el que había tenido plena libertad para moverme y expresarme. Pero como funcionario debí ajustarme a ciertas formas de conducción personal que restringían mi conducta habitual. Además, el cambio del medio rural al urbano me hacía sentir que estaba muy lejos de mi tierra natal, Lomas del Dorado o Naranjo Dulce, en Ixhuatlán de Madero, en la Huasteca. Todo esto me provocó un conflicto emocional muy fuerte y la poesía se me ofreció como el espacio idóneo para expresarme libremente . . . [*Xochikoskatl*] es un libro fundacional para mí y para el movimiento de reivindicación de la lenguas indígenas de México.” (“Afirma poeta que la literatura indígena está en pleno renacimiento” [“Poet Claims that Indigenous Literature Is in Full Resurgence”], *El Porvenir*, 22 August 2008)

“I came from an Indigenous movement in which I had full freedom of movement and expression. But as a government official I had to adjust to certain ways of personal conduct that restricted my everyday behavior. Also, the shift from a rural environment to the city made me feel far away from my home community, Lomas del Dorado or Naranjo Dulce, in Ixhuatlán de Madero, in the Huasteca. All of this provoked deep emotional conflict, and poetry appeared as the ideal space to freely express myself . . . *Xochikoskatl* is a foundational book for me and for the movement to recognize Indigenous languages in Mexico.”

Hernández also denotes with *intuitive* that he was not readily aware of literary movements or styles at the time, aside from Ángel María Garibay's translations of *In xochitl in cuicatl* (Flower and Song); rather, *Xochikoskatl* was based on his foundational experiences in the Huasteca and subsequent service for twenty years as a bilingual teacher and Deputy Director, referred to explicitly in the book (31). Significant in its correlation with the number twenty, Hernández's two decades of service allowed him to observe a vicious cycle of discrimination that he seeks to end through his work.

An understanding of these events that marked Hernández's life aids in exploring the spaces depicted within *Xochikoskatl*. Perhaps one of the principal reasons why close analyses of contemporary Nahuatl literature are so scant is due to general lack of familiarity with present-day Nahuatl language and the contexts in which authors create their literature. As seen in greater detail further on in this chapter, this unfamiliarity has led some critics to consider *Xochikoskatl* and Indigenous literatures in general as overly insular and provincial. Nonetheless, much the same could be said of well-known literary traditions if they too were relegated to a periphery where they were not even known to exist. I detail Hernández's biography here to help set the context for *Xochikoskatl* and challenge accusations of insularity and provincialism.

When Hernández was an adolescent, he resided in Colatlán, then half a day's journey away from Lomas, to complete part of his secondary education there. Upon graduation, he returned to live in Lomas del Dorado for about one year. Hernández describes this return to Lomas as a solidifying experience in which he was initiated into the community as an adult and gained a deep respect for the knowledges there. He

labored daily in the fields, came to know the community elders, and participated in ceremonies throughout the year.¹⁴

After this year in Lomas, Hernández's father told him that he was not meant for work in the fields and should leave to complete his studies at a *preparatoria* (three-year pre-university school similar to high school). Hernández moved to Hidalgo and worked for a time as a domestic servant to help pay for his studies. He recalls his chagrin at having to go fetch water (a target of jest from others, as it was viewed as “woman's work”) for an elderly *mestiza* who treated him with disdain as an *indito* (“little Indian”). Frustrated with this situation, he left the house and worked as an ice cream street vendor. The financial difficulties and discrimination faced during this time left an indelible impression on Hernández that has motivated him to fight against the marginalization of First Peoples.

In the mid-1960s, after completing his secondary school education, Hernández worked as a bilingual teacher in Puebla. In the early 1970s, he began his undergraduate studies at the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH). While at INAH, Hernández led the creation of a pan-Nahua urban and rural association with the *Nechikolistli tlen Nauatlajtouaj Maseualtlamachtianej* [Organization of Nahua Indigenous Professionals Civil Association] (OPINAC) and served as its first President in 1973. OPINAC had three main goals: 1. Collaborate with Indigenous movements on a national and international level; 2. Foment political ideology for First Peoples and by First Peoples; 3. Create a functional standardized grammar of contemporary Nahuatl that would stimulate its use and strengthen a Nahua consciousness (*Nechikolistli, Neluyotl*

tekiyotl, 3). As Hernández notes, this political opening worried government officials—particularly the Director of INAH, who thought that Nahuas were attempting to supplant him.¹⁵ This apprehension led to Hernández’s transfer to Puebla to oversee bilingual education without having completed his studies at INAH. Anthropologist Claudio Lomnitz argues that by the late 1960s the complicity between “Mexican anthropology and official nationalism” had reached its apex (“Bordering on Anthropology the Dialectics of a National Tradition in Mexico” 349). Mexican anthropology offered the tools to forge an imaginary that shaped “a modernist aesthetics” of Mexican citizenship by “‘indigenizing’ modernity and by modernizing the Indians” (349). This complicity incited virulent denunciations of Mexican *indigenismo* and nation-state policies toward Native communities. Never having completed his *licenciatura* (undergraduate education), Hernández has had to deal with the pressure of teaching at the university level while not holding a Bachelor’s degree. Nonetheless, Hernández affirms that the knowledges he has obtained from personal experience outweigh anything he could have learned within a classroom.¹⁶

As President of OPINAC and bilingual educator in various Nahua regions, Hernández became familiar with numerous variants of Nahuatl, which evidences itself in his poetry. The Secretary of Public Education (SEP) transferred him from Puebla to Hidalgo in the mid-1970s to direct Indigenous Education for the entire state. Hernández recounts that he again came under suspicion from government officials for his support of *campesino* (peasant farmer) uprisings in the Huasteca during this period.¹⁷ This support led to his transfer to Mexico City as Deputy Director of Indigenous Education in 1978.

In interviews Hernández tells of walking around Mexico City in the early eighties and feeling alienated.¹⁸ He recounted his crisis in 1980 to anthropologist Arlene Patricia Scanlon, who responded that he was not the only one who felt this way and recommended the novel *Brave New World* (1932).¹⁹ Within Aldous Huxley's futurist novel, the fictional character John, labeled "the Savage," is removed from one of the few remaining Native American reservations, preserved as voyeuristic honeymoon destinations, and transported to a so-called "civilized" society of upper class Alphas. This society, under the rule of a mysterious Controller, classifies and quantifies people like merchandise and machines. Resembling a colonial system, each social class is strictly associated with certain jobs and conditioned for them by a series of slogans directed by the Controller. John, reduced to spectacle in a reality television-like entertainment for the society, feels alienated and, at the novel's end, commits suicide upon finding himself unable to escape this gaze.

Hernández identified strongly with this novel, and, though a different genre, one finds significant influence from it in *Xochikoskatl*. Acknowledgement of this influence also counteracts any essentialist decolonial positioning that attempts to depict any European work as incommensurable and anathema to "pure" Indigenous practices.²⁰ More closely analyzed later in this chapter, numerous lines resemble statements in *Brave New World*.²¹ The character John defines the supposed superiority of "science" within his world as "something that caused you to laugh at Corn Dances, something that prevented you from being wrinkled and losing your teeth" (171). Hernández likewise criticizes those who try to make him feel ashamed of corn ceremonies and leadership of elders in

his community. Like the character John, referred to as the Savage, Hernández voices his deep frustration toward this “brave new society” in an Indigenous language. In the poem “Na nojkia ni tlakatl” (I Am Also a Man), from the first sub-division of *Xochikoskatl*, Hernández stands up to those who “dicen que soy un salvaje” (“say I am a savage”; 52). Tempted to commit cultural suicide by disguising himself in Mexico City as a *mestizo* with his excellent Spanish, he chooses instead to affirm and nurture the cultural and intellectual practices from his hometown.

When Hernández returned to Mexico City in 1978 to reside as Deputy Director of Indigenous Education, there was a surge in Nahuatl studies.²² These studies still centered, for the most part, on the prestigious *in xochitl in cuicatl* (flower and song) of the past, and non-Nahuatl researchers subscribed present-day Nahuas within this paradigm as relic-like informants who could offer linguistic snippets that might help in reading colonial-era documents.²³ The history of Nahuatl studies and the emergence of contemporary Nahuatl literature is often framed as *mestizo* researchers having opened a space and “accepted” present-day Nahuas within their circle.²⁴ Arguably, this history should instead be articulated as Nahuas creating a space for themselves and convincing these researchers of their potent existence and importance. Although more well-recognized movements, among them the group I mentioned in the introduction of anthropologists deemed the *Siete Magníficos*, played an important role in the 1970s, Nahuas, among them Natalio Hernández, were especially vital in shifting dialogues from that of researcher-informant to one with ethical implications in its recognition of present-day Nahuatl knowledge production.

Ángel María Garibay's translations of works such as *Cantares mexicanos* (Nahuatl Songs) and Miguel León Portilla's later translations had a significant influence on the literary scene in which Natalio Hernández first published in 1985.²⁵ By the 1970s it was standard to quote Garibay's and León Portilla's translations in anthologies of Mexican literature.²⁶ When Hernández wrote *Xochikoskatl*, he was reading a great deal of Ángel María Garibay's and Miguel León Portilla's renditions of "flower and song" in Spanish. In Hernández's personal copies of Garibay's *Poesía náhuatl*, one finds handwritten notes and even the beginnings of some poems found in *Xochikoskatl*.²⁷ Though the influence in particular of this text is evident, Hernández does not simply imitate its style by any means. To the contrary, Hernández points to how this rich expression is alive and well in contemporary Nahuatl and particularly present-day ceremonies. The title *Xochikoskatl* (Flowered Necklace) itself is a skillful allusion to "flower and song" and also to modern-day ceremonies.

While writing *Xochikoskatl* in the early eighties, Hernández was troubled as he worked for SEP and often heard officials speak with authority about Indigenous education based not on experience within Native communities but rather a rehash of theory and praxis developed in distant state institutions such as the Secretariat of Public Education itself. He entitles one of the poems written during this time, in the first part of "Sempoalxochitl" (Twenty Flower), "Kemantika nijmachilia nimiktojka uan nojua niyoltok" ("I Feel Dead Though I Am Alive"; 37-38). I cite the title here to underscore the vexation Hernández felt at this moment in his career. He alludes with the poem's title

to how his very being was strained through a sieve of national discourse that attempted to obscure him as a folkloric museum display.

In writing *Xochikoskatl* Hernández underscored that Nahuas are of great importance to the present. As already mentioned, with its limited prints, few have read *Xochikoskatl* in its entirety and more are familiar with the first part of the text in UNAM's publication of *Sempoalxochitl* (Twenty Flower) in 1987, later anthologies, and citations within numerous publications. Even for those who have not read his work, Hernández wrote himself into what Ángel Rama calls the *ciudad letrada* (lettered city). He came to represent a compelling voice that deepened dialogues over Indigenous agency and questioned the supposed Western monopoly over knowledge production. He is now perhaps the most well known Nahua of both the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and the path to this notoriety began with *Xochikoskatl*. Taking into account this influence, it is puzzling that so few have examined the text. A return to *Xochikoskatl* offers crucial insights into Nahua perspectives and shifts discussions from Indigenous victimization to dynamic agency.

A question that arises in relation to this entrance into the “lettered city” is of whether it constitutes a privileging of Western genres over Indigenous forms of expression. In his article “Kotz’ib: The Emergence of a New Maya Literature,” Arturo Arias poses the question of whether “these scriptural processes could be read also as a belated embrace of *The Lettered City*” (23). What are the implications of still being marginalized by the hegemonic other outside of mainstream publications, and the same time apart from the narrative practices within their Indigenous communities? Instead of

attempting to take sides in this dichotomy, I explore how Natalio Hernández negotiates between Western literary forms and the aesthetics from his Huastecan community. Similar to the Maya authors analyzed in Arias's study, Hernández also shows immense creativity and astuteness in engaging colonialism and Western essentialisms with innovative rhetorical devices.

Natalio Hernández has gone on to become the point of reference for Indigenous letters in Mexico, a founder of ELIAC, and winner of the Premio Nezahualcoyotl in its first convocation in 1997. He has an extensive body of publications, among them the books of poetry *Así habló el ahuehuete* (1989), *Canto nuevo de Anáhuac* (1994), *Papalocuicatl* (1996), *Semanca huitzilin* (2005), and *Flores de primavera* (2012). Hernández has also gained international recognition as an expert in intercultural education, and he has published widely on the subject, such as the single-author essay collections *La palabra, el camino: Memoria y destino de los pueblos indígenas* (1998), *El despertar de nuestras lenguas* (2002), and *De la exclusión al diálogo intercultural con los pueblos indígenas* (2009). He was recently elected in 2013 as a member of the Academia Mexicana de la Lengua. While Hernández has gained notoriety, he has also become a polemical figure for younger writers, which will be analyzed in greater detail within chapter three. His book of poetry *Xochikoskatl* is a watershed moment that helps in following the trajectory of one of the most renowned Indigenous artists.

3. Topographies of Readings

In this section, I will elaborate a close analysis of *Xochikoskatl* to signal the well-charted structure of this book of poetry. The book consists of four sub-divisions or

“necklaces”: “Sempoalxochitl” (Twenty Flower), “Yankuik kuikatl” (New Song), “Yoloxochitl” (Heart Flower/Magnolia), and “Yankuik tonatij, yankuik tlanextli” (New Sun, New Sunrise). Each necklace contains twenty “poems,” also referred to as “flower and song,” for a total of eighty poems in the book’s entirety. These sub-divisions together figuratively shape four flowered necklaces. In Veracruz such ceremonial necklaces serve as a symbol of dignity and authority for the wearer. Written with rhythm and meter inspired in Nahuatl ritual language, the poems vary in length anywhere from a brief quatrain to three pages with multiple stanzas ranging between two and eleven lines. Each poem is, as Hernández describes, a *cuenta* (bead/count) on each sub-division’s strand of twenty that progress from a cathartic expression of grief and protest to an assertion of power and knowledge.

The four parts coincide with cardinal points, beginning with the North (the place of wind and death). As *Xochikoskatl* develops, these four sub-divisions circle the compass and culminate in the fundamental direction East. The book advances like a Huastecan Nahuatl community guided by a *tlatimini* (literally “knower” or shaman) through a *xochicalli* (flowered house) ceremonial space.²⁸ Readers unfamiliar with such rituals would not recognize this significance because Hernández does not explicitly identify them. In these *xochicalli* ceremonies, the community adorns distinguished members and visitors with flowered necklaces (alluded to in the book’s title, *Xochikoskatl*). A *tlatimini* first petitions harmful north winds not to afflict the corn crop or community members; within *Xochikoskatl* Hernández makes pleas like the invocations of the *tlatimini* for dominant sectors of society to stop afflicting the landscape and

Indigenous peoples. As a ritual develops, the community moves from the north into the *xochicalli* (flowered/ceremonial house), where members dance at the east-facing altar throughout the evening. At daybreak they then climb a mountain to greet the sun and a successful crop. In *Xochikoskatl* Hernández metaphorically traces these steps from colonial north winds to the welcoming of a “new sun” of Indigenous empowerment that culminates in the final part, “Yankuik tonatij, yankuik tlanextli” (New Sun, New Sunrise).

While it would not be possible to analyze all eighty poems within this study, the table of contents from *Xochikoskatl* can help give an idea of its overall structure. The first part “Sempoalxochitl” (Twenty Flower) offers the following poems, each poem numbered with Mesoamerican bar-and-dot notation: 1. “Xochikoskatl (tlen ipeuayaj) / Collar de flores (inicial)” (Flowered Necklace [the beginning]); 2. “Xokoyotsin moyolnojotsa / Xokoyotsin dialoga con su corazón” (Xokoyotsin Dialogues with His Heart); 3. “Iknotlajtoli / Sentimiento” (Orphan Words); 4. “Na ni indio / Yo soy indio” (I am Indian); 5. “Maseualtlajtoli ipan koyomej inintlali / Palabras indias en tierra de blancos” (Indigenous Words in the Land of the Coyotes); 6. “Nimitsuikatis maseualichpokatl / Te cantaré mujer india” (I Will Sing You Indigenous Woman); 7. “Kemantika nijmachilia nimiktoja uan nojua niyoltok / Algunas veces me siento muerto en vida” (Sometimes I Feel I Am Dead and I Am Still Alive); 8. “Tatamej: nimechonkamaus / Abuelos: permítanme hablarles” (Elders: May I Speak to You); 9. “Amatlajuiloli para notata / Carta para mi padre” (Writing on Paper for My Father); 10. “Toseltika matinejnemikajya / Necesitamos volver a caminar solos” (Let Us Walk Alone

Now); 11. “Nititlachixtokej yejyektsij uan tekuesoj / Es alegre y es triste nuestra existencia” (Our Existence Is Happy and Sad); 12. “Tlauel nimitsiknelia nonantsij / Te quiero mucho madrecita” (I Love You Dearly Mother); 13. “Na nojkia nitlakatl / Yo también soy hombre” (I Am Also Human); 14. “Kemaj nanimikis / Cuando yo muera” (When I Die); 15. “Nopiluj: xikonkakikaj ueuetlajtoli / Hijitos: escuchen la palabra de los ancianos” (Children: hear wise words); 16. “Xijkakikaj koyomej / Escuchen hombres blancos y mestizos” (Listen Coyotes); 17. “Nomaseualchinanko / Mi pueblo indio” (My Indigenous Community); 18. “Nomaseualikniuaj tlen monelkoyochijkej / Mis hermanos que se ladinizaron” (My Indigenous Brothers Who Made Themselves into Coyotes); 19. “Maseualsemanauak / América, tierra india” (Indigenous Continent); 20. “Xochikoskatl (tlen itlamiyaj) / Collar de flores (final)” (Flowered Necklace [Ending]).

The second part “Yankuik Kuikatl / Canto nuevo” (New Song) contains the following poems: 1. “Xochikoskatl (tlen ipeuayaj) / Collar de flores (inicial)” (Flowered Necklace [the beginning]); 2. “Yankuik kuikatl / Canto nuevo” (New Song); 3. “Uikak yaotekatl / El guerrero cantó” (The Warrior Sang); 4. “Yolki se yejyektlatsotsontli / Nació una música bella” (Beautiful Music Came to Life); 5. “Yankuik anauaktlakatl / El hombre nuevo del Anauak” (The New Man of Anahuac); 6. “Nesahualcoyotl yoltok / Nesaualkoyotl vive” (Nezahualcoyotl Is Alive); 7. “Sampa mochalchiuitlakentij tonana tlaltipaktli / Y nuestra madre tierra volvió a vestir su falda de jade” (Again Our Mother Earth Dressed in Jade); 8. “Kuatitlanxochitl / Flor de campo” (Forest Flower); 9. “Yankuik kauitl / Tiempo nuevo” (New Time); 10. “Kuatitlantlakamej / Los hombres de la montaña” (Men from the Forest); 11. “Mexikayotl axpolijtok / La mexicanidad no ha

muerto” (Mexicanness Has Not Died); 12. “Sampa tlachixki tonana istaksiuatl / Nuestra madre Istaksiuatl volvió a despertar” (Our Mother Istaksiuatl Has Reawoken); 13. “Nopilyaojtekatsitsij / Mis pequeños guerreros” (My Little Warriors); 14. “Axkanaj toselti tinemij / No estamos solos” (We Are Not Alone); 15. “Tonatijxochitl / Flor del sol” (Sunflower); 16. “Axnijneki nimikis / No quiero morir” (I Do Not Want to Die); 17. “Maluilikuikatl / Canto sagrado” (Sacred Song); 18. “Anauakuikatl / Canto al Anauak” (Anahuac Song); 19. “Na nikuaujtemoktsij / Yo soy Kuaujtemoktsij” (I Am Kuaujtemoktsij); 20. “Xochikoskatl (tlen itlamiyaj) / Collar de flores (final)” (Flowered Necklace [Ending]).

The third part “Yoloxochitl / Flor del corazón” (Heart Flower) consists of the following twenty poems: 1. “Xochikoskatl (tlen ipeuayaj) / Collar de flores (inicial)” (Flowered Necklace [the beginning]); 2. “Xiualaj louej / Cariño ven” (Come Dear Child); 3. “Nixochitoktiaj / Voy sembrando flores” (I Go on Planting Flowers); 4. “Istaxochitl / Flor blanca” (White Flower); 5. “Noyolo, nimitsonmaktilis se ome xochitl / Cariño, te entregaré unas cuantas flores” (My Dear Heart, I Will Give You Some Flowers); 6. “Tlapalxochitl / Tlapalxochitl” (Tlapalxochitl Flower); 7. “Yoloxochitl / Yoloxochitl” (Yoloxochitl Flower); 8. “Nitlaneltoka / ¡Creo!” (I Believe); 9. “Chimalxochitl / Chimalxochitl” (Chimalxochitl Flower); 10. “Yolpakilistli / Alegría” (Happiness with the Heart); 11. “Siuapiltsij tlen xochipejpena / La niña que recoge flores” (The Little Girl Who Gathers Flowers); 12. “Chokak noyolo / Lloró mi corazón” (My Heart Cried); 13. “Tonana tlen texochimaka / Nuestra madre que regala flores” (Our Mother Who Gives Flowers); 14. “Teokuitlaxochitl / Teokuitlaxochitl” (Teokuitlaxochitl Flower); 15.

“Xochipili / Xochipili” (Flowered Noble); 16. “Semanauakuikatl / Canto al universo” (Song of the Universe); 17. “Kemaj kueponki xochitl / El día que brotaron las flores” (When the Flowers Blossomed); 18. “Xochiketsali / Xochiketsali” (Flowered Preciousness); 19. “Texochimajmakani / El dador de flores” (The Giver of Flowers); 20. “Xochikoskatl (tlen itlamiyaj) / Collar de flores (final)” (Flowered Necklace [Ending]).

The fourth part “Yankuik tonatij, yankuik tlanextli / Nuevo sol, nuevo amanecer” (New Sun, New Sunrise) contains the following poems: 1. “Xochikoskatl (tlen ipeuayaj) / Collar de flores (inicial)” (Flowered Necklace [the beginning]); 2. “Mijkia koyotonatij / El sol de occidente ha muerto” (The Day of the Coyote Has Already Died); 3. “Tepetlajtoani / El *tlajtoani* de la montaña” (The Ruler of the Mountain); 4. “Amatlajkuiloli tlen nijmaktilia ueyitlanauatiani / Carta al emperador” (Letter I Give the Emperor); 5. “Ayok uajkauas tech kajteusej tokoluaj / Pronto nos abandonarán nuestros abuelos” (No Longer Will Our Grandparents Take Long to Leave Us); 6. “Na nisemanauaktlakatl / Soy hombre universal” (I Am a Universal Man); 7. “Xijkaki Kuaujtemoktsij / Escucha *Cuauhtemoctzin*” (Listen Cuauhtemoctzin); 8. “Nikixkopinas se tonatij / Pintaré un sol” (I Will Paint a Sun); 9. “Tokilistli / La siembra” (Sowing Season); 10. “Tokani / El sembrador” (Sower); 11. “Tlakapiltsin / Tlakapiltsin” (Noble Person); 12. “Tepeiluitl / Fiesta en la montaña” (Festival in the Mountain); 13. “Yaotekatl itlatennojnotsalis / La oración del guerrero” (The Warrior’s Call); 14. “Uuetlajkuiloj / El viejo tlajkuiloj” (The Old Writer/Painter); 15. “Yankuik tlajkuiloj / El nuevo *tlajkuiloj*” (The New Writer/Painter); 16. “Kemaj tlakatki yankuik tonatij / El día que nació el nuevo sol” (The Day a New Sun Was Born); 17. “Sitlalmina / *Sitlalmina*” (Archer of Stars); 18.

“Ueuetlajtoli tlen kimaktiliaj se telpochtlajtoj / Consejo de un anciano al Director del *Telpochkali*” (Wise Words Given to a School Principal); 19. “Sampa moyolkuikej kuajmej / El resurgimiento de las águilas” (The Resucitation of Eagles); 20.

“Xochikoskatl (tlen itlamiyaj) / Collar de flores (final)” (Flowered Necklace [Ending]).

Throughout the different themes of this chapter—corn aesthetic, landscape, the *coyomeh* (coyotes), respect for ancestors, and affective intelligence—my analysis concentrates on poems from the first part, “Sempoalxochitl” (Twenty Flower), because of the impracticality of attempting to address eighty total poems. Moreover, it is principally within this section that Hernández confronts colonial perspectives and explores the culture shock he experienced in Mexico City. Hernández’s poetic persona articulates Indigenous empowerment in this context. I also analyze portions of the final part of the *Xochikoskatl* (Flowered Necklace) to give a holistic approach to the book and a glimpse at the overall progression toward optimism at the book’s conclusion.

I begin by analyzing corn (*cintli*) aesthetic in the first part of *Xochikoskatl* (Flowered Necklace), entitled “Sempoalxochitl” (Twenty Flower), and explore the importance of place in Nahuatl articulations of the subject in the poem “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words), from this first sub-division. “Sempoalxochitl” (Twenty Flower) depicts a dismal context in which *coyomeh* (“coyotes,” signifying *mestizos/ladinos* / “whites”²⁹) attempt to bury Nahuas under an oppressive discourse that obscures their very existence. *Cempohualxochitl*³⁰ (Twenty Flower) is the only flower used in both ceremonies for the dead and the living. As seen in “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words), Hernández not only addresses an asphyxiating context in which many of his Indigenous brothers are dying

both in spirit and in body, but also points to the present legacy of ancestors' wisdom and modern Nahua intellectuals.³¹ After analyzing "Iknotlajtoli" (Orphan Words), I look at the fictional letter "Amatlajkuiloli tlen nijmaktilia ueyitlanauatiani" (Letter I Give the Emperor), from the fourth and final part of *Xochikoskatl* (Flowered Necklace), "Yankuik tonatij, yankuik tlanextli" (New Sun, New Sunrise). "Letter I Give the Emperor" builds upon "Orphan Words" in underscoring peripatetic observance in relation to maize. This chapter section concludes with a comparison between the importance of walking/place in "Letter I Give the Emperor" and the poem "Orphan Words" from the beginning of the section.

The sixth section, "Beyond the Furrows on the Page: Nahua Migrants and Border Thinking within Textual Landscapes," expounds upon the importance of place in *Xochikoskatl* and how Nahua migrants appropriate city spaces and offer valuable knowledges for those spaces. This section briefly revisits the poem "Orphan Words" in relation to the importance of place in *Xochikoskatl*. The section then analyzes *Xochikoskatl* as a whole in relation to the importance of place and how Nahua migrants appropriate city spaces. I offer a close analysis of "Nomaseualchinanko" (My Indigenous Community) and "Xijkakikaj koyomej" (Listen Coyotes), both poems from the first part of *Xochikoskatl*, "Sempoalxochitl" (Twenty Flower). "My Indigenous Community" depicts the tension between Nahua migrants' experiences and urban lifestyles—a tension reflected in "Listen Coyotes" when Hernández addresses the dual destruction of both people and land.

The seventh section, “Coyotialism / Colonialism: Shifting Landscapes of Inequality and Colonial Continuities,” explores how Hernández’s displaces monological *coyotl* (literally “coyote,” which serves as a metaphor to represent *mestizo/ladino/white*) perspectives that perpetuate themselves with colonial practices. Such practices attempt to impose a single language, privileged form of dress, and singular perspective of what constitutes valid knowledge. The section begins by briefly referring back to the poems “Orphan Words” and “Letter I Give the Emperor” and explores the symbolism of the number four in them. I then analyze three poems from the first part “Sempoalxochitl” (Twenty Flower): “Na ni indio” (I Am Indian), “Nomaseualikniuj tlen monelkoyochijkej” (My Indigenous Brothers Who Truly Made Themselves into Coyotes), and “Maseualsemanauak” (Indigenous Universe).

The eighth section, “*Huehuehtlahtolli*: Different Temporality Where the Past Renews the Future,” addresses how Nahuas view the past and ancestors not behind the subject but rather in front, offering knowledges to help guide dynamically through the present and future. This section returns to “I Am Indian” to look at its relevance to the importance of the past and ancestors in offering dynamic solutions to the present. I briefly mention *Brave New World* and explore (in relation to the poems “Indigenous Universe,” “I Am Also a Man,” and “Listen Coyotes”) how Hernández’s response to the novel elucidates Hernández’s invective against a discourse of coloniality that does not respect elders’ wisdom and presumes to strip Indigenous populations of agency. I conclude this section with a reading of “Nopiluj: Xikonkakikaj ueuetlajtoli” (My Children: Listen to Wise Words) and the respect for elders in it.

In the ninth and final section, “*Yollotl* and Affective Intelligence: Thinking with the Heart,” I look at how Hernández proposes an affective intelligence in *Xochikoskatl* that does not separate emotions from rationality. Such a perspective has significant implications for knowledge production and the validation of Nahua intellectual perspectives. This section revisits “Listen Coyotes” and “Orphan Words” to read these poems through the primacy of affective intelligence. I also analyze the poem “Xokoyotsin moyolnojnotsa” (Xokoyotsin Has an Inner Dialogue with His Heart) and its emphasis on a feeling body with agency.

Sempoalxochitl (Twenty Flower), the title of *Xochikoskatl*'s first sub-division, is rooted in the vigesimal base number in Nahuatl and represents a completeness or wholeness (indicative in its literal meaning of *ce pohualli* [one count of twenty]). With the repetition of this number in the word *cemphualxochitl* (twenty flower) in naming the initial part of the book and in the entire structure of *Xochikoskatl* with twenty poems in each of the four sub-divisions, Hernández alludes to the Mexica *xiuhpohualli* (“year count”/calendar) with its twenty day signs, the twentieth being *xochitl* (flower). In *Xochikoskatl* the number twenty symbolizes the break with a period of discrimination and beginning of a new time cycle, evident in the progress of the book as a whole. In the third and fourth parts of *Xochikoskatl*, Hernández begins to dedicate the poems to internationally recognized individuals who are recently deceased, such as Indira Gandhi (155, 157, 199, 213). Such references mark a change in tone from the first poems’ militant attitude to a perspective dedicated to offering knowledges not only for the capital or the entire country of Mexico, but on a global scale. In doing so, Hernández breaks with

stereotypical depictions of Indigenous communities as insular and unaware of international events. As the book advances, he resolves his own internal conflict and begins to speak of the imminent arrival of a new sun of Indigenous leadership.³²

4. Nahua Theory with Face: The Methodological Framework of this Analysis

The Nahua view of an intellectual is fundamental to understanding one of the main arguments of *Xochikoskatl*; namely, that Nahuas and Indigenous peoples in general are modern knowledge producers with effective ideas for solving present-day challenges. *Xochikoskatl* shifts fluidly between Pre-Columbian references and contemporary Nahua cultural production, as evinced by this chapter's epigraph. *Huehuehtlahtolli*, literally "old words," connotes words of wisdom.³³ Although popularized on a national scale by Miguel León Portilla in relation to Pre-Columbian knowledge production, *huehuehtlahtolli* in the Huasteca is still acutely contemporary. Hernández highlights continuities between present-day practices and philosophies and those found in Nahuatl texts from the colonial period.³⁴ In doing so, he positions Nahua thought within an unbroken millennia-old tradition that dislocates the pervasive notion that Indigenous subjects do not have intellectual traditions on which they can draw for the present. That tradition is not a limit on contemporary knowledge production; rather, it has accompanied this intellectual production through dynamic innovations.

As stated in the introduction, within contemporary Nahuatl, *huehuehtlahtolli* (old/wise words) and *huehuehtlacameh* (elders) denote a distinct view of what makes an intellectual. From a Nahua perspective, personal experiences are central in one's development and ability to observe surroundings closely and offer solutions. The related

term *ixtlamatiliztli* (“knowledge gained with the face or eyes”) appears throughout *Xochikoskatl* in varied forms. Unlike Western academic research which tends to minimize non-propositional knowledge, Nahuas consider it fundamental in gaining understanding and developing strategies toward societal challenges.

Tied to Nahua knowledge production is an aesthetic in which maize operates as a central metaphor. The different stages in a person’s life, communal philosophies, and literature are grounded in corn. Maize comes to the forefront in *Xochikoskatl*, with the understanding that Huastecan Nahuas deem it a flower. In the last lines of the epigraph to this chapter, Hernández calls for a revival of the *xochicalli* (flowered house) and *cuicacalli* (house of song). *Cuicacalli* alludes to Pre-Columbian schools, but *xochicalli* refers to contemporary sanctuaries in which communities perform corn ceremonies. When Hernández speaks of “flower and song,” it carries deeper meanings associated with contemporary Nahua practices and is not strictly a reference to the nationally celebrated *flor y canto* (flower and song) of Pre-Columbian origin. Indeed, the word often used for “flower and song,” *xochicuicatl*, literally means “flowered song” or “corn song” and alludes to *xochitlatzotzontli* (flowered music) played at modern ceremonies. Corn aesthetic transmits concepts codified within the Nahuatl language, namely the approaches analyzed in the introduction to this dissertation of *nemiliztli* (walk of life), *tlachiyaliztli* (observance), and *yoltlallamiquiliztli* (philosophy from the heart).

In relation to these perspectives, the Indigenous migrant, as Hernández himself was when he wrote *Xochikoskatl*, questions Western modernity’s disregard for Indigenous intellectual traditions. This migrant, metaphorically referred to in Nahuatl as

an “orphan” in “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words), one of the poems I analyze from the first part entitled “Sempoalxochitl” (Twenty Flower), negotiates between the worldviews of their communities and urban settings. Within this context of migration, Hernández openly articulates these views, and they serve as a lens through which to interpret the experience of migration itself and position Nahuas as knowledge producers. *Xochikoskatl* constitutes a precursor to later representations of Indigenous migrant experiences. These movements shift discussions away from a fundamentalist rescue of a pre-Hispanic past, and toward a dynamism in which Hernández negotiates among knowledges from both his Huastecan community and urban landscapes.

To delve deeper into these alternative perspectives, I use the studies of Nahua researchers in anthropology and linguistics from the early eighties: Rosa Reyes Martínez, Joaquín Romualdo Hernández, Joel Martínez Hernández, and Agustín Reyes Antonio. These works, along with *Xochikoskatl*, offer analyses that reaffirm Nahua perspectives gleaned from Hernández’s text. Such texts underscore the importance of Indigenous knowledge production, as in many respects they excel coeval studies conducted by non-Indigenous scholars.

In this same vein, *Xochikoskatl* and Indigenous literary production in general highlight how literature often anticipates future theoretical debates and performatively gives life to these perspectives. Storytelling and poetry are crucial in communicating Indigenous theories.³⁵ *Xochikoskatl* blurs the lines between different genres by mixing lyric poetry, narrative, epistolary, and ceremonial chant. Through the contact zones among these different forms of expression, Hernández’s poetic persona articulates a story

of Nahua agency and the views that give Nahua subjects great force to observe, create, and transform their surroundings. This literature bridges abstract concepts with everyday personal experience—in keeping with the Nahua definition of intellectualism.

5. “*Cintli* within the First Part ‘Sempoalxochitl’ and Fourth Part ‘Yankuik tonatij, yankuik tlanextli’: Knowledge Production and Corn Aesthetic within Sacred Landscapes”

The first of *Xochikoskatl*’s four parts, “Sempoalxochitl” (Twenty Flower), alludes with its title to the preparations for ceremonies within the *xochicalli* (flowered/ceremonial house) and for the Day of the Dead (*ilhuitl*) in which a path of petals from this flower leads ancestors to their homes. My analysis first focuses on “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words), the third poem in the first part entitled “Sempoalxochitl,” and its exploration of sacred landscapes. I conclude this section analyzing “Amatlajkuiloli tlen nijmaktilia ueyitlanauatiani” (Letter I Give the Emperor) from the final part of *Xochikoskatl* and how it deepens an understanding of the importance of walking through ancestral topography.

“Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words) serves as an ideal introduction to the vitality of corn and natural surroundings throughout the book. This third poem consists of eight quatrains, and each verse consists of seven to sixteen syllables. *Iknotlahtolli*, the title of the poem I am analyzing, literally means “orphan words,” but also connotes words of feeling and suffering. As a migrant in Mexico City, Natalio Hernández is not only orphaned from the members of his community but also from closeness to natural surroundings, as seen in the first stanza. He writes:

Niiknochoka kemantika
niteikneltij ninentinemi
tekuesoj ken nipanotinemi
koyopaj nitekipanoua. (25)

I sometimes cry like an orphan
abandoned, walking around
it's sad how I go traversing
working at the behest of coyotes.

Rather than situate and articulate his being in dialogue with the landscape, Hernández's work within Mexico City severs this connection and leaves him under the gaze of *coyomeh* ("coyotes," within the postpositional *koyopaj*) who consider themselves superior. He walks and traverses but such a path seems to go nowhere. Bereaved from the corn ceremonies that helped reinforce this connection with the landscape, in the second stanza Hernández writes that with all his heart he wants to hear maize ceremonial music:

Ika noyolo nijnekiskia
xochitlatsotsontli nijkakiskia
ayakachtli nimijtotiskia
iniuaya nomaseualikniuaj nipakiskia. (25)

With my heart I would desire
to listen to the flowered music
to dance with the rattle
to laugh with my Indigenous brothers.

*Xochitlatzotzontli*³⁶ (flowered music), in the second verse, comprises an extensive repertoire of sacred music played solely at corn ceremonies (as already indicated, "flowered music" also denotes "corn music"). These religious practices are central in the articulation of this respect for place as well as a dynamic process of becoming within these settings. Distinct *xochitlatzotzontli* compositions carry titles such as "Atl" (water), "Tlazcamatilli" (gratitude), "Tlitl" (fire), "Tlaixpan" (altar), "Tepetl" (hill), "Ohtli" (path), "Tlaneztihuala" (sunrise), and "Ehecatl" (wind), and all this music is centered on maize. Significantly, the poem "Iknotlajtoli" (Orphan Words) itself does not make explicit mention of these elements, as here the poetic voice describes how he is separated from them in Mexico City. Only to highlight the reference to *xochitlatzotzontli* (flowered

music) in “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words) and within the book’s entirety, rather than analyze here the numerous other poems that allude to this, it is important to note that the same natural elements of *xochitlatzotzontli* appear symbolically throughout *Xochikoskatl* (53, 61, 99, 183).

The style of the poem “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words), reflective of *Xochikoskatl* as a whole, resembles the diction and overall structure of Nahuatl ceremonial language. Conditional tense is common in ritual phraseology (as in the second stanza of “Orphan Words”: *nijnekiskia* / I would desire; *nijkakiskia* / I would listen; *nimijtotiskia* / I would dance; *nipakiskia* / I would be happy), as the *tlamatini* communicates to divine powers that the community would desire good rainfall and a successful crop. Unlike in Spanish or English, the conditional tense in Nahuatl implies that what one petitions should exist and that some aberrant state impedes its realization.³⁷ Initial repetitions of words and syntactical structures serve as a cross-stitch in sewing memories together (both figuratively and literally as a mnemonic device) and maintaining an intimate connection with the land. Hernández evidences this correlation between textiles and knowledge production in fifth stanza of the poem “Nimitshuikatis maseualichpokatl” (I Will Sing to You Indigenous Woman”), also from the first part “Sempoalxochitl,” which I cite briefly to underscore its significance in relation to the poem “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words), when the poetic voice claims:

Tlauei nikamati mokechtlajtsoj
 miak tlamantli nopayoj ixnesi
 tlajlamikilistli tlen tokoluaj
 tlajlamikilistli tlen moneki tictlepanitas
 uan tikajokuis. (35)

I very much like your precious embroidered blouse
 many things appear there
 the wisdom of our grandparents
 wisdom that you need to respect
 and protect.

As a thread that returns to the fabric to form a row and the similar planting of seeds across a furrow, words within the lines of the song and on the page reiterate similar diction and syntax. This ceremonial language resembles the Nahuatl aesthetic in *Cantares mexicanos* (Nahuatl Songs).³⁸ The poetic voice marks continuity between classical language and present-day practices in the use of parallel structures and repetitions. As already stated, this link with Pre-Columbian literary production highlights a millennia-old Nahua intellectual tradition to the present while simultaneously demonstrating that Hernández does not attempt to hark back anachronously to a Pre-Columbian utopia glorified by the Mexican national narrative.

One can hear similar parallel structures from “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words) in most Nahua ceremonies, such as that of the New Year (*Yancuic Xihuitl*) in which a wise elder pleads for an abundant crop. To evidence the proximity between the language in “Iknotlajtoli” and Huastecan ceremonial language, I cite a contemporary petition transcribed by Nahua researcher Manuel de la Cruz in “El discurso petitorio y el proceso escalonado de la ceremonia” (“El paralelismo semántico-gramatical”):

Kampa walah se kilitl,
kampa walah se xonakatsin,
kampa walah se yawitsin,
kampa walah se costsin,
walah se pilchiltsin, **walah** se torohtsin,
walah se kwali caballo,
walas se aguacero, **walas** se ayowitl,
walas se mixtli,
pan ni tiempo, **pan** ni horah,
pan ni tlanextli,
pan ni tepetl, **pan** ni cuatitlamitl,
pan ni ohmaxalli, **pan** ni tepetzacualli.

From where herbs **come**,
from where onions **come**,
from where black corn **comes**,
from where yellow corn **comes**,
come chilis, **comes** cattle,
come good horses,
will come a downpour, **will come** mist,
will come clouds,
at this time, **at** this hour,
at this sunrise,
on this hill, **on** this mount,
at this bifurcation, **at** this hill of rocks.

This language resembles the repetition in the fifth stanza of “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words), representative of similar structures throughout *Xochikoskatl*.³⁹

Asijka tonatij ma timoyolchikauakaj
Asijka tonatij ma tiyolpakikaj,
ma sampa tijkakikaj ueuetl uan teponastli
ma sampa tijkakikaj akatlapitstli. (25, emphasis mine)

The sun/day **has already arrived** for us to be strong of heart
The sun/day **has already arrived** for us to be happy of heart,
Again may we listen to the drum and rattle
Again may we listen to the flute.

These lines exemplify a Nahuatl aesthetic. For example, rhyming is not aesthetically appealing in Nahuatl. Rather, both sacred language and poems reiterate syntax, incorporated structures, and plays on these linguistic constructions. Repetitions increase the intensity of the enunciation with each passing verse.⁴⁰ It is evident in the poem “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words) that the rhythm and revisiting of syntactical forms are fundamental to the literary aesthetic of Mesoamerican languages.

Within this context, *cuicacalli* (house of song), referred to in the sixth stanza of “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words) and quoted in this chapter’s epigraph, no longer constitutes solely a reference to Pre-Columbian schools of music:

Ma sampa moechkauikaj ueuetlakamej	May the wise draw near again
ma sampa tijkakikaj ueuetlajtoli	may we again listen to words of wisdom
ma sampa tijyolitikaj	may we revive
xochikali uan kuikakali.	the flowered house and house of song.

Cuicacalli (house of song) correlates with the array of compositions taught in current ceremonies. The title of the poem, *icnotlahtolli* (orphan words), and the first line, *icnochoca* (cry like an orphan), contrast with the sonorities of the sixth stanza’s *xochicalli* (flowered/corn/ceremonial house) and *cuicacalli* (house of song). *Iconotl* (orphan)

juxtaposes with *xochitl* (flower/corn). Natural elements alluded to in the “flowered song” titles accompany rituals within the *xochicalli* (flowered/corn/ceremonial house), and they all contain life (*voltoc*) since without them Indigenous communities would not be able to cultivate corn nor cook it on the *comalli* (metal hotplate for cooking tortillas). Nahuas themselves have life within their hearts and minds because of the vital power contained within maize and everything that goes into its production. Nonetheless, “Iknotlajtoli” describes a space that orphans and alienates Nahuas from the landscape and reduces everyone and everything to a cog in an assemblage of commercialism.

Hernández articulates, within “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words), two different spaces: Mexico City and his home community for which he yearns. The use of the conditional tense *izquia* in the second stanza marks this longing, as he would listen to the *xochitlatzotzontli* (flowered music) and *ayacachtli* (rattle) if not confined within the city. While in the first four stanzas the poetic voice describes how his surroundings lead him to wander around unable to situate himself, removed from the space created by his *macehualicnihuan* (Indigenous brothers), these lost steps then turn toward the landscape in the final stanzas. Like the petitions expressed at ceremonies in which Nahuas ascend sacred hills/mountains,⁴¹ Hernández’s poetic persona calls for a return to respect for the earth and *xochicalli* (flowered/corn/ceremonial house). Revival of the *xochicalli* and *cuicacalli* (house of song) corresponds with the raising up of books and the *amoxcalli* (“library” or literally “house of books”) in the seventh stanza:

Ma sampa nesikaj toltekamej
ma sampa moechkauikaj tlajkuiloanej
ma tikintlalanakaj toamoxuaj
ma sampa tijketsakaj amoxcali. (25)

May the artists appear again
may the writers draw close
let us raise our books
let us again erect the house of books.

These verses link knowledge production with the cultivation of corn, paralleling the raising of texts with the growth of the crop. In this turn, the act of raising books relates to the importance of corn in helping elevate the spirit in ceremonial ascensions of sacred peaks. There are Huastecan healing rituals performed with corn and in some areas an ear of corn is tied under the arm of a sick individual to help *quitlalana itonal* (elevate his soul).⁴²

This context described in “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words) highlights the significance of the poetic voice’s statement in the poem “Kemaj na nimikis” (When I Die), which I briefly mention here to explore “Iknotlajtoli” in greater detail. He expresses that when he dies he wishes to be buried in his Indigenous clothing, with an Indigenous book, and the tools necessary to tend the fields (53). “Kemaj na nimikis” illuminates the raising of books and house of books in the seventh stanza of “Iknotlajtoli.” Burial is itself symbolic of planting the maize crop, which later returns with vigor. Similarly, Hernández’s writings, from an emotional state in which he feels dead, also will return with vigor in his book.

“Sempoalxochitl” (Twenty Flower), the title of the first part of *Xochikoskatl* (Flowered Necklace) that contains “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words), represents this link between life and death. As stated previously, it is the only flower used in ceremonies for both the deceased and living. Like flower necklaces made of *cempohualxochitl*, these flowers link the present with the past. Ancestors or their wisdom never permanently leave

the community. Hernández's words, in the book to which he refers in the seventh stanza, will return to raise the spirits of his Indigenous brothers like the corn crop and ancestors.

Evident in the seventh stanza of "Iknotlajtoli," as well as in other parts of *Xochikoskatl, amoxtli* (book) also implies an alternative calendar, as day observance was one of the principal responsibilities of Pre-Columbian scribes. Hernández writes *amoxtli* with an *x* as in older documents, such as those describing the calendar, rather than *amochtli* with *ch* as pronounced within his own community.

This keeping of days relates to the contemporary "readings" of corn to tell of ailments or future occurrences. Corn itself in these readings is also a text like the book raised in the seventh stanza of "Iknotlajtoli" (Orphan Words). As Hernández has explained in personal interviews, corn readings were very much on his mind when he wrote *Xochikoskatl*.⁴³ Presently, in some regions of the Huasteca, *tlamatinih* continue to analyze corn kernels and are able to predict future events and tell where a person needs healing (See Sandstrom 235-237). Alluded to in the sixth and seventh stanzas of "Iknotlajtoli," maize functions literally/literarily as a text and foretells resurgence of Indigenous knowledges and aesthetic. Corn receives its vitality from the sun and then passes on that stored energy when people consume it. The eighth and final stanza refers to this strength with "yolchikaualistli" (strength of heart), which serves as a metaphor "to be hard as a corn kernel":

Ma tlami ni majmajtli
ma tlami ni temiktli
ma ktoni ni kuesiuistli
ma sampa asi pakilistli uan yolchikaualistli. (25)

May this fear end
may this nightmare end
may this suffering burst
may happiness and strength of heart arrive.

The incorporated noun *yol(lotl)* (heart) also signifies *choice corn seed* and *chicahua* means *to harden*. While in Romance languages “to be hard of heart” is a character flaw, in Nahuatl, due to the associations of *yollotl* (heart) with maize, it represents having strength of character like the durable strength of a dried, hardened seed of corn.

“Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words) is performative as a petition, meant to tap into communal sonorities and feelings that such ceremonial enunciations elicit. The poem builds up in intensity with ritualistic diction to the final stanza in which Hernández’s poetic persona pleads for suffering to end and for a new era of Indigenous leadership to arrive. Similar to religious supplications for the clouds to burst forth with rain and for the crop to grow, he seeks that this nightmare (*temiktli*) and suffering (*kuesiuistli*) cease, literally burst (*kotoni*), and that happiness and strength of heart return. The health of community and individual parallels with the well-being of the harvest in this link between Hernández’s spiritual condition within Mexico City and the rainfall essential to plants—the *xochitlatzotzontli* (flowered song), mentioned in the second stanza, petitioning a successful crop is intimately connected with his psychological health in an urban context of fear and oppression.

Such a connection with nature communicates a view in which one forms part of a wide field of sonorities. Within this non-anthropocentric perspective, not only are humans animate and speak, but also animals and elements of the landscape such as hills. One seeks to dialogue with these surroundings, as seen in “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words) with its continual emphasis on listening: to the *xochitlatzotzontli* and his Indigenous brothers in the second stanza; musical instruments such as the *huehuetl* and *ayacachtli* in

the fifth stanza; words of the elders in the sixth stanza; the bursting of suffering itself in the final stanza (25). The reference to *huehuetl* in the fifth stanza cited earlier plays on three meanings of the word, as it signifies a Pre-Hispanic drum used in ceremonies (and made from a hollowed out tree trunk), the wise elders (*huehuehtlacatl*), and also a tree (known as *ahuehuetl* or *sabino*) that lives for centuries and symbolizes Nahua intellectual tradition. This word melds the individual with numerous sonorities: the wisdom of elders (*huehuehtlahtolli* / “wise words”), one’s relationship with natural surroundings (*xochicalli* / the “flowered house”), and the music and ceremonies (*xochitlatzotzontli* / “flowered music”) that help maintain this bond.

Western perceptions, in contrast, reduce intimate attachment to one’s natural surroundings to folklore. In fact, the poetic voice alludes to this marginalization in the third line from the first stanza of “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words) when he states “koyopaj nitekipanoua” (“I work before the coyote”; 25). *Tequipanoa* signifies labor as a peon and also work in the preparations for someone’s festivity. *Coyomej* (coyotes) attempt to reduce Nahuas to performing under a monological gaze and relegate them to manual labor—not adequate for intellectual production. Analyzed in greater detail in this chapter’s seventh section on colonialism, the “civilized” and “rational” coyote associates emplacement with being static, trapped in the past, and backwards. *Coyotl*, referred to as *blancos* (whites) and *mestizos* in Hernández’s version of “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words) in Spanish, connotes someone who imposes upon Indigenous populations a singularity in which urban scientific and technological advances downgrade Indigenous practices, language, and philosophy to exoticism for novels, tourism, and archaeology. The term

coyotl is not reserved exclusively for outsiders from cities; it also applies to Nahuas who begin to look condescendingly on their communities. *Coyopaj* (before the coyotes), from the third verse in the first stanza of “Iknotlajtoli,” also spacializes a relation of inequality in which Nahuas work for *coyomej* like servants before a king’s throne.

Hernández turns the gaze back on this colonizer in the poem “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words) and directs what can be described as an atypical inverse study toward the cities of conventional ethnographers and anthropologists. Traversing the city, he researches and reports on social penuries and customs within urban settings. Hernández, in the role of a critical observer, reverses the traditional paradigm in which only non-Indigenous urbanites conduct such studies. Urban residents suffer in crisis because of their estrangement from the landscape.

Hernández’s poetic persona ambles around lost in the first stanza of “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words) as he is unable to situate himself in a landscape of concrete and pollution. Within this representation urban inhabitants are the ones with regressive and unhealthy practices that instill both psychological and physiological crises, seen in the first stanza cited previously:

Niiknochoka kemantika
niteikneltij ninentinemi
tekuesoj ken nipanotinemi
koyopaj nitekipanoua. (25)

I sometimes cry like an orphan
abandoned, walking around
it’s sad how I go traversing
working at the behest of coyotes.

In this turn, the poetic voice displaces the supposed superiority of the coyote’s city and also exposes it as inherently dis-placed due to its detachment from a rural landscape. He recognizes the sacred landscapes of Mexico City and, as *Xochikoskatl* progresses from

“Iknotlajtoli,” the text describes his presence there more as a pilgrimage to *Mexco Tenochtitlan* than a migration (40, 189, 207). In the first four stanzas of “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words), Hernández’s poetic persona describes a socially stratified geography dominated by *coyomeh* (coyotes), and in the final four stanzas claims within Mexico City a space of Nahua empowerment and knowledge production rooted in sacred lands. He begins to place himself in Mexico City by inviting the sonorities of *xochitlatzotzontli* (flowered/maize music) and *xochicalli* (flowered/maize house) within the sixth stanza to transform the restrictive city space. He both rearticulates and reappropriates this space that attempts to marginalize him (*ma cotoni ni cuecihuiztli* / may this suffering end [25]). Not only more Mexican because he speaks Mexican (*mehicanoh* is another term for Nahuatl) but also because of this familiarity with the landscape, he evidences this right to the land in his usage of Nahuatl place names that always identify sacred features of the land.

At the beginning of “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words), the poetic voice relates in the first stanza, as already cited, “niteikneltij ninentinemi / tekuesoj ken nipanotinemi” (“I walk around vulnerable / it’s sad how I go about”; 25). *Ninentinemi* literally means “I walk around walking” and *nipanotinemi* “I go around going around.” Coupled with a Nahua view of an *altepetl*’s natural surroundings is the importance of walking, which in turn correlates with the perception of an intellectual as one with personal experience. One must have that personal contact with the landscape and know it face-to-face to properly comprehend it. The significance of this walking also emerges in the use of *nemi*, to live/walk, as the root word for *nemiliztli*, which can be translated as *philosophy, feeling*,

thought, and *way of life*. Nonetheless, as seen in “Iknotlajtoli,” the poetic voice ambles around lost in the synthetic landscapes of Mexico City. The coyotes do not respect his views and instead the landscape remains forgotten under pavement and buildings.

Walking is essential to the corn ceremonies centered on *chicomexochitl* (seven flower), to which the poem “Iknotlajtoli” alludes with the reference to *xochitlatsotsontli* (flowered/maize music) and the instruments that accompany this ritual, such as the *ayakachtli* (rattle). For religious acts centered on corn, a Nahuatl community climbs one of the numerous sacred mounts in Northern Veracruz to give offerings for a good crop. *Chicomexochitl* (seven flower) is a pair of sacred figures made from cornhusks, who, when bound together and dressed in miniature traditional *manta* (men’s white clothing) and *quechtlamitl* (embroidered blouse), become living entities.⁴⁴ Dressing the landscape in greenery and jade in “Letter I Give the Emperor” contrasts with attempts to *timokoyotlakentiaj* / dress like coyotes in the fourth stanza of “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words). The coyotes impose a singular system upon Nahuas and do not respect a field of diverse aesthetics or sonorities.

Instead of becoming animate through the binding of *Chicomexochitl*’s apparel, Nahuas *quimachiliah mictoquehya huan nocca yoltoqueh* (feel dead though still alive) when bound in the coyotes’ clothing, as described in the poem, from the first part entitled “Sempoalxochitl” (Twenty Flower), entitled “Kemantika nijmachilia nimiktojka uan nojua niyoltok” (“Sometimes I feel dead and I am still alive”; 37). I briefly cite this poem in relation to the analysis of “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words). The beginning of this poem resembles “Orphan Words,” as Hernández poetic persona attempts to situate himself

while searching for his clothing. He wanders lost among the streets: “pampa ayojkana na: / nijtemoa notlakej uan ayok nikasi” (“because I am no longer I: / I search for my clothes and no longer find them”; 37). This clothing, used for work in the cornfields, is intimately associated with the landscape. It is not tightfitting like blue jeans and boots of Western attire.⁴⁵ Furthermore, *coyotl* (coyote) clothes, in particular boots, separate one from the earth. Walking barefoot or with sandals permits one continually to touch the earth, whereas boots preclude such contact. Constricted clothes themselves are symbolic of the restrictive discourse and imposition of a *coyotl* worldview seen in “Orphan Words” and “Letter I Give the Emperor,” the latter analyzed further on in this section.

“Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words) forms a chiasmus in which the poem’s center between the fourth and fifth stanzas contrasts *timokoyotlakentiaj* (we dress like coyotes) and *inintlajtol tijtekiuiah* (we use their language) with *ma timoyolchikauakaj* (we gain strength of heart) and *ma tiyolpakikaj* (let us be happy of heart). The prefix *koyo-* (coyote) in “*timokoyotlakentiaj*” meets head-on with *yol-* (heart) in the parallel grammatical structure of “*timoyolchikauakaj*.” The heart is closely linked with ceremonies of corn, as seen later in “Letter I Give the Emperor,” with maize as the medium through which to observe and feel one’s surroundings. The phrase quoted earlier from this letter, *ma yolcui*, “gain strength,” denotes “grab heart.” This heart and the music and language housed within it promote respect for Mother Earth. Coyotes base their superiority on the supposed inadequacy of others (one can see coyotes’ “making fun of” contrasted with Nahua “laughing with the heart” at the center of the chiasmus in

“Orphan Words”); in contrast, the Nahuatl language expresses a wide field of sonorities that do not choke an array of voices like restrictive coyote apparel.

A two-page fictitious letter directed presumably to the President of Mexico in the final section *Xochikoskatl*, “Amatlajkuiloli tlen nijmaktilia ueyitlanauatiani” (Letter I Give the Emperor), emphasizes the necessity to walk. Building upon my reading of “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words), I now turn to an analysis of this letter to elucidate these pedestrian transformations. Hernández’s poetic persona affirms, “Miak tlakamej ayok kiijlamikij kenijki se nejnemi. Moneki sampa tinejnemisej ipan tlaltipaktli tlen techkauijtejkej tokoluaj. Inijuantij uajka asitoj san nejnientiajkej” (“Many people no longer remember how one walks. We must walk on the earth that our elders left us. They came from afar and only walked”; 187). Traversing on foot is referred to repeatedly and implies not only literal walking, but also careful observance of one’s surroundings. As seen in the word *nemiliztli* and related words such as *nicnehnemilia* (I think/seek solutions), it becomes evident that movement on foot correlates with thought processes. From a Nahua perspective, Descartes’s axiom “Je pense donc je suis” is a psychologically unhealthy viewpoint and perhaps even untranslatable into Nahuatl with its demarcation between cognition and affect.

When asked how they would translate this sentence into Nahuatl or in Spanish, “Pienso luego soy” (I think therefore I am), Nahuas generally explain that they know they exist because they *feel* that they exist and especially because they sense a connection with the landscape and fellow community members.⁴⁶ An Indigenous view of emotions as conjugated with rationality displaces Western modernity’s prioritization of rationality.

Although Psychology and other disciplines have made a gradual shift toward recognition of the intelligence of emotions,⁴⁷ the notion persists that emotions are in strict contrast with “rationality.” From Nahua and Indigenous perspectives, generally speaking, one exists symbiotically with natural surroundings and both thought and emotional processes cannot be attributed solely to one individual. As “Letter I Give the Emperor” as well as “Orphan Words” reveal, in the Nahua concept of the intellectual, cognitive processes and theorizations cannot be separated from one’s personal experiences walking through the landscape. Maize gives the individual vigor in his heart and in his mind for this journey, and through corn one gains the dynamic existence that both *nemi* (the root for to walk/to think) and *yoltoc* (to be alive, its root *yol* associated with the heart) convey.

The significance of this observance surfaces in “Amatlajkuiloli tlen nijmaktilia ueyitlanauatiani” (Letter I Give the Emperor) with the verb *titlachixtoqueh* (we observe) in the final lines: “Ma sampa moyolkui ipan Anauaktlaltipaktli sintsj tlen ika *titlachixtokej* uan timoesotijtokej” (“May the corn with which we observe and have blood once more obtain strength in the land of Anahuac”; 189, emphasis mine). This verb is used for newborns when they first open their eyes, and with it Hernández’s poetic persona asserts that he is a subject with agency, with the eyes and face to effectively analyze his surroundings. In the preface to *Xochikoskatl*, which I cite here to aid in analyzing “Letter I Give the Emperor,” he recounts, “Ijkinoj yolki ‘Xochikoskatl.’ Xochitl tlen ika *titlachixtoqueh*. Xochitl tlen ika timoyolkuitokej” (“That is how *Xochikoskatl* was born. Flower with which *we observe*. Flower with which we gain strength of heart”; 13, emphasis mine). Again, flower also signifies corn, and aesthetic

and practices tied to maize serve as a tool through which to view one's surroundings. *Tlachixquetl* (literally "one who observes") is the term used for a shaman who functions as a diviner, and, as mentioned earlier, reads corn to predict future events. This relation between corn and observation evidences itself in the previously cited lines of "Letter I Give the Emperor," where Hernández seeks with similar language that the corn, with which Nahuas observe and have blood flowing through their bodies, may recuperate its strength. *Timoesotijtokej* from these lines literally means "we are filled with blood," and Nahuas affirm that they are made of the corn that has existed with their ancestors for millennia. This knowledge, passed down through the crop, represents a bond with ancestors. Rather than producing a gaze fixed on the past, this observance passed down from ancestors leads one to vigorous action, to obtain strength of heart under ever changing circumstances.

Although it has become cliché to speak of a bond between Indigenous peoples with their ancestors, this intimate relationship should not be reduced to a romanticized view of First Peoples. Rather, this is better understood when framed within an ontological sense of what constitutes an individual. The profound implications of this viewpoint materialize in the Nahuatl word *tlaixpan*, the name for altars decorated with pictures of deceased relatives. *Tlaixpan* literally translates as "that which is in front" and denotes a view of the past and ancestors as in front of the subject rather than behind. Explored in greater detail in the seventh section of this chapter on respect for ancestors, this cogent past constitutes what is known and helps guide through the dynamism of the present. From this perspective, elders and their knowledge production are vital to decision

making. It resembles what Abenaki historian Lisa Brooks states regarding common Indigenous perspectives toward the landscape, partially citing Vine Deloria: “. . . creation stories are actually much more concerned with geography, ‘what happened here,’ than with chronological origins and temporality, ‘what happened then’” (xxiii). The landscape serves as a mnemonic device in recalling and rereading knowledges communicated by ancestors.

While in “Letter I Give the Emperor” the use of the word *Anahuac* in the lines previously cited (*Anauaktlaltipaktli* / Land of Anahuac), a classical endonym for the Valley of Mexico, seems to appeal to a utopic Pre-Columbian past, its etymology, “between/among waters,” relates to the word *altepetl* (“city” or literally “water-hill”) and the need to have water and hills in the construction of a city. Hernández’s poetic persona speaks in the letter of the need for “ma sampa mochalchiuitlakenti tonana tlaltipaktli” (“our mother earth to again dress herself in jade/green”; 189). The earth needs to recover its greenness and foliage, and humans must recognize the necessity to protect natural resources. Again, reductive connotations of *community* disappear in *altepetl* and *anahuac*. Before “Letter I Give the Emperor,” the poetic voice draws attention to his home region through a subtle allusion to this area in the poem “Xijkakikaj koyomej” (Listen Coyotes), from the first part “Sempoalxochitl” (Twenty Flower). Rather than give a full analysis of his poem here, I mention it to highlight the reference to mother earth dressing herself with *chalchihuitl* (jade/green) in “Letter I Give the Great Ruler.” In “Listen Coyotes” Hernández uses *Chalchicueya* (skirt of jade) to signify Veracruz, the Mexican state in which his Huastecan community is located (61). Jade itself symbolizes

rain and the fertility produced by abundant rainfall. Hernández articulates a space in which Indigenous peoples are key in both the past and present nation-state formation, especially capable of offering valid solutions for the present due to their familiarity with the landscape, reflected in Nahuatl toponyms that always recognize sacred geography.

6. Beyond the Furrows on the Page: Migrants' Border Thinking within Textual Landscapes

This section expounds upon the importance of place in *Xochikoskatl* and how Nahuatl migrants appropriate city spaces and offer valuable knowledges for those spaces, as indicated in the third section of this same chapter. I briefly revisit the poem “Orphan Words” in relation to the importance of place in *Xochikoskatl*. I then offer a close analysis of “Nomaseualchinanko” (My Indigenous Community) and “Xijkakikaj koyomej” (Listen Coyotes), both poems from the first part of *Xochikoskatl*, “Sempoalxochitl” (Twenty Flower).

Hernández’s poetic persona, in “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words), refers to coyotes making fun of “kenijki inintlajtoli tijtekiuiaj” (“the way we [Indigenous peoples] use their language”; 25). *Tequihua* implies using the language as a tool. This word also suggests an unwillingness to assimilate into castellanization,⁴⁸ and moreover an active use of the Nahuatl language to defend Nahuatl cultural practices. In contrast, Spanish is not felt affectively by the poetic voice, but rather, similar to commutes to work across cityscapes, is detached from the land. The center of “Iknotlajtoli” displays the tensions between Spanish and Nahuatl throughout the text, representing Spanish as an imposition.

Hernández creates versions of each poem in Spanish, thus resulting in three different versions of the book: one in Spanish, one in Nahuatl, and another reading for those who

understand both. In placing the two versions side-by-side in facing translations, he emphasizes that Nahuatl is a language as valuable as Spanish. Utilizing Spanish to do so reflects Kelly McDonough's analysis of the play *Ixtlamatinij* (The Wise Ones) (1987) by Nahua playwright Ildefonso Maya, in which the author uses "uses the tools of the dominant culture to critique and contest" (172). As Mary Louise Pratt indicates, subjugated people, not the passive recipients that colonialism attempts to construct, "cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, [but] they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for" (6, insert mine). The Spanish versions serve as means to mark difference, in a sense to signal the untranslatable, resembling what Rivera Cusicanqui describes as the radical and violent reaction to an intolerable coexistence of differing epistemologies (*Violencias*, 50-52), in this case incited by the dismissive attitude of *coyomeh* (coyotes).

In *Xochikoskatl*, amidst a setting that disparages contemporary Nahuas, the impossibility of coexistence surfaces in the tension between the two languages. Hernández confronts words in Spanish: *dialecto* (dialect), *indio* (Indian), *blancos* (whites), *mestizos*, and *bilingüe* (bilingual). In many instances it is to shift their meaning or else strip them of their supposed superiority or inferiority. In the poem "Nomaseualchinanko" (My Indigenous Community), from the first part of *Xochikoskatl*, instead of using the name Lomas del Dorado to refer to his community, the poetic voice calls it *Tlaltolontipan* in the first stanza:

Axkemaj nimitsilkauas nomaseualchinanko
 nochipa nimitsijlamikis ika noyolo
 nimits tokajtis ika nomaseualtlajtol
 "Tlaltolontipaj" ijkinok momaseualtokaj. (64)

I will never forget you, my Indigenous community
I will always remember you with my heart
I will name you with my Indigenous language
“Tlaltolontipaj,” that is your Indigenous name.

Nunca te olvidaré mi pueblo indio
siempre te recordaré con el corazón
te nombraré en mi lengua india
“*Tlaltolontipan*” te llamaré. (64)

Tlaltolontipan means “among the foothills” and again alludes to a sacred feature of the landscape—the many hills scattered throughout the Huasteca that originated from the main sacred mountain, *Postectitlan*. This is also significant because the Spanish exonym for the community, *Lomas del Dorado* (Hills of the Golden Ranch), comes from, according to oral tradition, the name of a previous wealthy *coyotl* (coyote) landowner’s ranch near the region. Presently, still referring to the sacred landscape as in the poem “Nomaseualchinanko” (My Indigenous Community) with the Nahuatl name *tlaltolontipan*, Natalio Hernández calls his community *Tepeco* or “place of the hill.”⁴⁹ These toponymic changes figuratively displace the landowner and also unite with the history of agrarian struggles against owners of large estates in the Huasteca throughout the twentieth century.⁵⁰

“Nomaseualchinanko” (My Indigenous Community) demonstrates further linguistic dissonance between Spanish and Nahuatl with numerous Nahuatl words presumably untranslatable in the Spanish version and written in italics, emblematic of Spanish being stretched for meaning. *Tianguis* (traditional flea market), though a common Nahuatlism in Spanish, comes up in italics in the third stanza of “Nomaseualchinanko”:

Nunca olvidaré cuando descalzo caminaba
veredas para ir a traer leña
caminos para ir a la milpa,
caminos reales para ir al *tianguis* (64).

I will never forget when I walked barefoot
the paths to bring firewood
roads to go to the field,
large roads to go to the market place (*tianguis*).

The placement of *tianguis* in italics suggests a different kind market that the connotation of the Nahuatlism in Spanish does not carry. *Tianguis* does not separate the worker from means of production and, conducted outside on streets, also operates closely with the landscape. “Nomaseualchinanko” mentions walking barefoot through the *tianguis*, setting aside the pejorative invective against Indigenous peoples as “indios patarrajados” (literally “paw-worn Indians”) (64). One can see Spanish stretched semantically in references to different birds in the fourth stanza, whose names often imitate their calls, notably *papanes* and *chichalacas* in the fifth stanza:

En verdad fue bello como fui creciendo:
los *papanes* temprano me despertaron,
las *chichalacas* por las tardes me cantaron . . . (64)

Truly it was beautiful how I went growing up:
the *papanes* woke me early,
the *chichalacas* sang to me in the afternoons . . .

In the sixth stanza, the poetic voice refers to flowers in Nahuatl, such as the *teokuitlaxochitl* (“golden flower”):

Con mucha alegría contemplaba
las flores que día a día brotaban
el girasol que junto con el sol giraba;
tlatokxochitl, *kuetlaxochitl*, *xiloxochitl*,
teokuitlaxochitl, *oloxochitl*, *sempoalxochitl*
y mucha otras flores recuerdo ahora,

de las que hasta la fecha adornan a mi pueblo indio. (64)

Happily I would contemplate upon
the flowers that sprouted each day
the sunflower that turned with the sun;
tlatokxochitl [sown flower], *kuetlaxxochitl* [skin flower], *xiloxochitl* [tender maize flower],
teokuitlaxochitl [golden flower], *oloxochitl* [corn cob flower], *sempoalxochitl* [twenty flower]
and many other flowers I remember now,
those that still decorate my Indian community.

These Nahuatl names for birds and flowers elicit a unique sensorium of sonorities, colors, and smells that nomenclature would not connote. After the sixth stanza, the poem speaks of the *sempoalxochitl* (twenty flower) and this flower's nexus with both deceased and living (66). Hernández's poetic persona uses the Nahuatl word *sempoalxochitl* in italics rather than the loanword *sempasúchil* in Spanish, distorted to where its original meaning, twenty-flower, is lost. In this poem he delineates the uniqueness of his Indigenous community, *nomaseualchinanko*, and features this uniqueness by not translating numerous words. Hernández expresses his unwillingness to conform to the coyote's language and marks limitations of the Spanish language itself.

The most striking example of these tensions between the two languages emerges with the word *indio* (Indian) in both the Spanish and Nahuatl versions of the poem "Na ni indio" (I Am Indian), from the first part entitled "Sempoalxochitl" (Twenty Flower) and analyzed in detail in the seventh section of this chapter on colonialism. I briefly mention the poem here to highlight its importance in relation to untranslated words, as seen in "Nomaseualchinanko" (My Indigenous Community). In the case of "Na ni indio," Hernández does not translate the derogatory Spanish word *indio* in the Nahuatl version and leaves it unitalicized. Hernández explains that he unremittingly repeated the word

indio not to make a case for the continued usage of it, but rather to draw a strict line of differentiation from *coyomeh* (coyotes).⁵¹ He describes that his attitude when he wrote *Xochikoskatl* was one of “arco y flechas” (bow and arrows) and that he sought to denounce Spanish as an imposed language and implement the teaching of Nahuatl in the schools.⁵² Hernández rarely utilizes *indio* in any of his other texts, and he clarifies that he used it within *Xochikoskatl* in order to “luchar, demandar, exigir” (“fight, denounce, demand”) and “desgastarlo y desecharlo” (“wear it out and toss it out”).⁵³ *Indio* was the surest way to be confrontational and draw a line of demarcation from the *coyomeh* (coyotes).

Within these contentious veins of *Xochikoskatl* emerges the violent encounter of different epistemologies that Rivera Cusicanqui analyzes in the Bolivian context (*Violencias*, 50-51). Mignolo labels this epistemological encounter *border thinking* and Sanjinés speaks of the resurgence of *embers of the past* in the face of Western Eurocentric pretensions to be “universal.” It is important to note that the Nahuatl word Hernández began to use in the nineties for interculturality is *ome pamitl*, literally “two furrows” or “two themes.” This metaphor relates to the furrows in which the corn crop grows and imagines a space in which different knowledges come together, though not necessarily in a romantic, harmonic synthesis. It is within the tensions on the page between Nahuatl and Spanish that Hernández articulates knowledges absent in the city. This tension evidences itself in the previously analyzed “Nomaseualchinanko” (My Indigenous Community) and “Na ni indio” (I Am Indian). The former represents an attempt to communicate elements and concepts from his Nahua community with

untranslated Nahuatl words in italics, while the later reveals the incommensurabilities that surface in this intercultural contact. In his versions of the poems in Spanish, one can see the difficulties in communicating the worldviews contained within the Nahuatl. The aforementioned perspectives related to walking, cognition, and ceremonial language are in many instances untranslatable without extensive footnotes describing their complexity and contextual landscapes.

Highlighting the importance of written script in Nahuatl, Hernández's poetic persona speaks of the need to bring back the *tlajkuiloanej* or "writers" in the previously cited seventh stanza of "Iknotlajtoli" (25). Nonetheless, this is not a logocentric perspective in which inscription with Latin graphemes overshadows other forms of carrying memory. In "Amatlajkuiloli tlen nijmaktilia ueyitlanauatiani" (Letter I Give the Emperor), Hernández underscores the wide array of texts one needs to read through the genre of the written petition.

I now turn from "Nomaseualchinanko" (My Indigenous Community) to "Letter I Give the Emperor" to look at questions of literacy and orality. *Amatlajkuiloli* literally means "writing on paper," suggesting that there are many other mediums for writing. In Spanish, Hernández translates the title of the poem as "Carta al emperador" (Letter I Give the Emperor). Through this fictitious letter to the President of Mexico, he harks back to an extensive body of Nahua petitions in Nahuatl to the Spanish crown (even more evidenced in referring to the President as an emperor).

Letrado (literally "lettered" or "one who can read letters"), in the colonial era, referred to lawyers familiar with laws, and they were a means to violate the rights of First

Peoples excluded from this legal training or representation.⁵⁴ The emphasis on written documentation, as especially evidenced in *conquistadores* coercing Indigenous leaders to sign documents they could not read, had the express intent to silence their defenses.⁵⁵ Far from passive recipients, Native populations learned the rules of legal discourse and contested abuse by priests and colonizers.⁵⁶ As shall be seen in detail in the next section of this chapter, Hernández also intimates with *emperador* that colonial systems of discrimination still pervade—in spite of anti-imperialist rhetoric within Mexican national discourse—and Indigenous subjects must fight internal colonialism within Mexico. During the period when the PRI ruled as virtually a one-party state (1929-2000), presidents were said to be “emperors for six years.” The large corpus of Nahuatl legal documents throughout the colonial era represents active Nahuatl efforts to challenge the usurpation of their land and violation of their legal rights.

Hernández, through “Letter (Writing on Paper) I Give the Emperor (Great Ruler),” also protests these abuses that have decimated Indigenous populations and proposes that Indigenous knowledges be accepted within Mexico City. As already mentioned, Hernández points to a wider conception of what constitutes a text with “Ma sampa moyolkui ipan Anauaktlaltipaktli sintsiy tlen ika titlachixtokej uan timoesotijtokej” (“May the corn with which we observe and have blood once more obtain strength in the land of Anahuac”; 189). Corn is central to knowledge production and gives one the vital energy to observe surroundings. Many elements associated with maize cultivation, such as *pamitl* (furrow), serve as metaphors for the act of writing on the page or elsewhere.

Hernández brings attention to the materiality of writing itself, as *pamitl* (furrow) also denotes lines on a page. In this sense the entire book is a shape poem with cornrows running across its leaves. Interestingly, the word *nepāntlah*⁵⁷ in contemporary Nahuatl refers to the border dividing two different fields. The correlation between writing and knowledge production with the landscape and corn crop come to the forefront when situated within these terms. In this sense, while similar to Mignolo's concept of border thinking⁵⁸ in which Indigenous peoples produce alternative perspectives inside the interstitial spaces between their originary experiences and urban settings, tangible geographical borders are a key element in this articulation among different spaces that Mignolo does not fully address. As mentioned in the introduction, Rivera Cusicanqui herself makes this point in her criticism of Mignolo's and Sanjinés's theories as overly abstract and devoid of materiality. She emphasizes not disassociating her theories from the Bolivian context and political movements demanding land rights and autonomy.

The image of *pamitl* (furrow) is similar to Cusicanqui's concept of *ch'ixi*, in which two different colors in their proximity form a third color, without fusing together, like the different rows in the fields connected by furrows (*Ch'ixinakax*, 69). Though Mignolo's border thinking resembles Cusicanqui's theoretical perspectives, her descriptions and employment of these perspectives are rooted more in the lived experiences of First Peoples and close observation of one's surroundings. Textile metaphors connected with *ch'ixi* are very much in line with the arranging of different furrows across the landscape. Within "Letter I Give the Emperor," Hernández's poetic

persona firmly delineates Nahua practices and those of the city as disparate, though something new is created in the conflictive encounter between the two.

This combative encounter reflects Mignolo's concept of *border thinking*, which is a process that moves away from *translation* to an affirmation of colonial difference and representation of Indigenous alternative epistemologies as different but nonetheless no less valid than Western paradigms. Colonial difference is placed at the center of knowledge production. Rather than being concerned with cultural authenticity, this perspective emphasizes the intersection of the "traditional" and "modern." Similar to Sanjinés's descriptions of the migrant, the subaltern subject is able to articulate unique knowledges from this interstitial space. Hernández explains that it was not until he moved to the city that he realized many of his own epistemological groundings.⁵⁹ These knowledges are metaphorically (and also in part literally) located in the furrows of fields and of the page, as seen in the poem "Tlakapiltzin" (Noble Person), from the final part of *Xochikoskatl* and which I briefly mention in relation to "Letter I Give the Emperor":

ipan nochi ni tonatij
[tlakapiltzin] kiajokki maluiltlajtoli tlen ikoluaj
ipan simpamitl uan epamitl (203, insert mine)

and every day
he [the noble person] protected the sacred words of his ancestors
among the corn furrows and bean furrows

The reference to "every day" or literally "every sun" highlights an unbroken tradition and the value of the wisdom kept in the furrows of the community.

In this sense *Xochikoskatl* is performative in bringing attention to the landscape through the furrows on each page. Writing is one of many ways to safeguard

remembrance, which the use of the classical form of the word *tlajkuiloanej* (writer) itself denotes in its additional meaning of “one who paints.” The title of the text itself, *Xochikoskatl* (Flowered Necklace), becomes a metaphor for the linking of words and lines on the page together, each line a furrow with its flowers or corn stalks. Hernández calls for a space in which Nahuatl knowledge production and language figure as equal to (if not greater than) coyote’s knowledge production and Spanish. As stated earlier, he does so in facing the poems alongside versions of the same poems in Spanish, placing the Nahuatl versions before the Spanish ones. Such an action not only projects the importance of the language but also of learning Nahuatl in order to understand the full breadth of the poems.

Under this alternative epistemological perspective with a more profound conception than Western views of what constitutes text, the landscape itself is a text that needs to be read carefully and that serves to tell stories and provide a reference for one’s actions. The flames under the *comalli* (metal hotplate for cooking tortillas) tell of an imminent visit from someone and the placement of corn kernels can indicate how to heal an ailment. *Ixtlamatiliztli*, “knowledge gained with the face or eyes,” does not solely underscore personal experience. As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, with the arrival of SEP professors this term shifted away from local community knowledges toward urban formal education. The term denotes comprehension gained from books (a meaning related to the word *tlaixpohua*, literally to “read with the face or surface”). *Ixtlamatiquetl* can refer to someone who has studied intensely and obtained a degree in higher education (with connotations like *letrado* in Spanish). Nonetheless, as

stated in relation to “Letter I Give the Emperor,” in *Xochikoskatl* Hernández emphasizes a much wider range of texts that one must study to truly possess the face or wisdom of an *ixtlamatiquetl*. He underscores this wisdom in the poem “Xijkaki kuaujtemoktsin” (Listen Dear Cuauhtemoc), from the final part of *Xochikoskatl*, shortly after “Letter I Give the Emperor”:

Nochipa xikijlamiki
tokoluaj intlajtoltlajlamikilis;
inijuantij kiijtojtejkej:
se tlakatl moneki kiasis “tlakauapaualistli”
kiijtosneki, *ixtlamatilistli* uan yolchikaualiztli” (195, emphasis mine)

Always remember
the wisdom of our ancestors;
they said upon parting:
a person must find *tlakauapaualistli* [classical term for “instruction” or “upbringing”⁶⁰]
knowledge gained with the face and strength of heart.

Kelly McDonough observes this prominence of lived knowledge among Nahuas in defining *intellectual*: “each response included the fact that to know something is to have lived something” and “the incorporation of *ixtli* to create the word ‘intellectual’ insists upon personal experience” (15).

In conflict with this primacy of personal experiences, the ethic of “modernity” and its perspective of mind over matter and marginalized peoples has had disastrous consequences for Indigenous subjects and the environment, which are two destructions that, in the first section “Sempoalxochitl,” the poem “Xijkakikaj koyomej” (Listen Coyotes) parallels.

I now turn from “Letter I Give the Emperor” to this poem to analyze its importance in relation to Hernández’s representation of place. The poem also serves as a

transition into the next section of this chapter with its focus on colonialism. Irrespective of Indigenous knowledges, the *coyomeh* (coyotes) inflict violence on Indigenous peoples and cause them to lose much blood. Mother Earth also bleeds as the coyotes rip out her “bones” and “hair” (61). They have taken the Native land as their own and polluted it, just as they have misread and misappropriated Indigenous wisdom.

Intriguingly when Hernández’s poetic persona speaks of environmental disasters and contamination, he refers to places with their original names in Nahuatl in “Xijkakikaj koyomej” (Listen Coyotes): *Uexotla* (Huejutla), *Akapolko* (Acapulco), *Chalchikueya* (Veracruz) (61). All these endonyms identify sacred aspects of the landscape, but *coyomeh* (coyotes) altered the names to where people no longer understand them. Unlike *coyotl* (coyote) toponyms, Nahua place names represent the imagining of a different space that respects the environment. He demands with “Listen Coyotes!” that coyotes hear the various sonorities of music, elderly words, and natural surroundings invoked in “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words).

The poetic voice in the second stanza of “Xijkakikaj koyomej” (Listen Coyotes) criticizes the *coyomeh* (coyotes) because “. . . namaj nochi inkitamachiuaj / namaj nochi inkikouaj / se tlehueli axkanaj imoyolnejnemiliaj” (“you now measure everything, / you now purchase everything, / and anything, you do not seek for solutions with your hearts”; 59). Coyotes reduce everything to capital under the banner of “rationality.” This same criticism then emerges again in the fourth stanza in a slightly different manner, referring to how the *coyomeh* want to impose this system on Indigenous populations—obligating them to exchange everything with money and measure everything with *tepoztlī* (metal).

Tepoztli can signify silverware as well as computers and other electronic devices. *Metal* serves as a trope juxtaposed with a respect for nature and practices perceived as closer to nature.

Such a connection with the land is not a stereotypical avataresque romanticization. Rather, Hernández offers effective solutions to societal dilemmas. An intimate relationship with the land, this emplacement, does not connote staticity, as traditional anthropological studies have positioned Indigenous populations. This becomes wholly evident in the dynamic etymology of *nemi* that connotes walking, living, feeling, and thinking. Like the unforeseen droughts and hurricanes that affect the corn crop, life itself is in constant flux, and a personal observation of physical and human landscapes is essential to understanding how to offer viable solutions.⁶¹

As seen previously, place is key to this dynamic existence. It cannot be changed at will and shapes human interactions and development. This in many ways marks one of the fundamental problems in studies of internal migration from rural areas to the city as well as globalization theories. The majority of these studies articulate a model in which one exits the periphery and locality by moving from rural areas to the city, and then from the cities becomes a cosmopolitan on an international scale. Such a model articulates an exodus as if the migrant were moving toward the magnet of a superior ecumenical universality. Hernández's text instead breaks with this model and provincializes the supposed superiority of urban areas and their privileged access to the "universal" or global arena.⁶² He highlights the need of residents in large cities to visit rural communities and become familiar with their knowledges. "Xijkakikaj koyomej" (Listen

Coyotes) problematizes the false dichotomy urban/local and condemns the coyotes' discriminatory practices.⁶³

As depicted in *Xochikoskatl*, a migrant in Mexico City feels alienated not only by direct discrimination, but also by being suffocated within an environment where humans divorce themselves from food sources and natural surroundings. The association of "local" or "rural" with peripheral is problematic. What occurs on the small scale of the community is pertinent to societies throughout the world as a whole, and in this sense is universal. In "Xijkakikaj koyomej" (Listen Coyotes) and the previous poems analyzed, Hernández offers solutions from his home community for the world as a whole.

This problematization of the dichotomy of city/local appears in the poem "Nanismanahuaktlakatl" (I Am a Person of the Universe), translated into Spanish as "Soy hombre universal" (I Am a Universal Man), from the final part of *Xochikoskatl*, and which I mention in relation to "Xijkakikaj koyomej" (Listen Coyotes). Hernández's poetic persona begins "I Am a Person of the Universe" by stressing that his knowledges are ancient but nonetheless completely relevant for the present and future. The poetic voice states:

xijkakikaj tlen nochi Semanahuac
xijkakikaj ni kuikatl
yaya Semanauak kuikatl (193, emphasis mine)

Listen those in all the universe
listen to this song
this is a universal song

He is not left in awe of the city, but instead directs a critical eye toward these surroundings and articulates his own philosophies. As in "Xijkakikaj koyomej," the

poetic voice demands that *coyomeh* (coyotes) listen to his discourse. Indigenous peoples are not without voice as commonly depicted with the perception that they need to be spoken for.

In the previously analyzed poem, “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words), the poetic voice refers to how sad things are that happen to *timaseualtekitinij* (us Indigenous workers). *Icnotlahtolli* itself can mean both “words of orphans” and “orphaned words,” with the possible meaning that the discourse itself is orphaned because others do not listen to it. “Xijkakikaj koyomej” (Listen Coyotes) and “Amatlajkuiloli tlen nijmaktilia ueyitlanauatiani” (Letter I Give the Great Ruler) insist that coyotes listen to Hernández’s Indigenous brothers and him. As mentioned previously, *macehualli*, though used on an international scale to signify Indigenous, in fact carries more the connotation of *campesino* (peasant farmer) in Spanish. This farmer has closely learned and observed things from personal experience with the landscape. Migrants do not leave behind their community, but rather these past experiences renew the present and future.⁶⁴ *Xochikoskatl* posits Indigenous migrants as individuals valued for intellectual contributions and not limited to manual labor. This confuses the idea of “local,” as a new place is made, transforming the spaces where they reside. As seen in this section, Hernández’s poetic persona repeats throughout the book that Nahuas “have their own face,” which represents that they are subjects with valid ideas and possess the ability to observe and analyze their surroundings.

7. Coyotialism / Colonialism: Shifting Landscapes of Inequality and Colonial Continuities

As stated in section four, in this section I will explore how Hernández displaces monological *coyotl* perspectives that perpetuate themselves with colonial practices. Colonialism and *coyoyotl* (“the essence of the coyote” or “coyotialism”) are both founded on the displacement and invalidity of Indigenous people’s spiritual and physical territories. The agents of these discourses debase such territorial claims as superstitions or tourist attractions at best that transform the sacred into commodity. *Coyomeh* (coyotes) invade Native territories in the name of progress and development, but, in *Xochikoskatl*, Hernández instead depicts the coyote as one who in tragic irony attempts to take land from Indigenous peoples without ever truly inhabiting that land himself. The *coyotl* does not bring advancement but rather destruction in a system that seeks to exploit natural resources to the fullest and dehumanizes First Peoples as if they constituted a commodity of strictly manual labor.

In “Na ni indio” (I Am Indian), from the first part of *Xochikoskatl*, Hernández firmly frames contemporary discrimination toward Indigenous subjects described in poems such as “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words) within colonialism. The poetic voice begins by stating in the first stanza:

Na ni indio:
pampa ijkinoy nechtokajtijkej koyomej
kemaj asikoj ipan ni yankuik tlaltipaktli. (27)

I am Indian:
because that is how the *coyomeh* named me
when they arrived here to this new land.

Hernández translates *coyomeh* here as *blancos* (whites), but from the context of the preceding poem “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words) with the translation “blancos y mestizos” (whites and *mestizos*) it is evident that, as seen previously, he establishes a continuity between the colonial system created by the Spaniards and twentieth-century discourses of *mestizaje*. The exonym *indio* is imposed on Nahuas as the dominant colonial power claims the power to name. As such it is purely a construct, which the poem highlights to a greater extent by not translating it into Nahuatl: *Na ni indio*. This word is even more awkward as an imposed construction because the sound *d* does not exist in Nahuatl. In juxtaposition with a millennia-old Nahua intellectual tradition, Hernández shows a colonial continuity through over four centuries of discriminatory practices.

To position discussions of coloniality within Nahuatl, it would be more appropriate to use *coyotl* (coyote). This word is deep-rooted in specific Huastecan contexts of abuses toward Indigenous subjects and their lands. In fact, in contemporary Huastecan Nahuatl, *coyotlacua* (he eats like a coyote) describes people who eat only the best cuts of the meat and wastefully leave the rest. Opposite a community ethic, the *coyotl* only cares about his self-interests and will cheat Indigenous peoples to obtain his aims.⁶⁵ In these migrations Nahuas are particularly vulnerable entering into spaces that disrespect their cultural practices, and many feel the need to disguise themselves to look and speak like everyone else and thus pass unperceived.

As with the landscape, the *coyotl* (coyote) sees Indigenous subjects as merely another element of nature to exploit. In line with Quijano’s analysis of coloniality, those who embody *coyotl* associate Indigenous subjects with manual labor and an undeveloped

magical landscape. Mentioned in the introduction, *coyotl* is a term with which all Nahuas easily relate, whereas *coloniality* in many respects lacks specificity and the emotional response that *coyotl* elicits. *Coloniality* is also a term that on a certain level divorces discourse from the agent imposing the discourse and depersonalizes actions, as if it were an abstract concept that forebodingly exists separately from actual people practicing it. As seen in Hernández's poetry and generally within the Huasteca, *coyotl* on the other hand is tied to specific agents of colonial discourse who attempt to distinguish themselves from Nahuas as "gente de razón" (people of reason). Rather than representing reverse racism in condemning "blancos y mestizos" (whites and *mestizos*), Hernández instead attacks this discourse and those who embody it.

Observed in "Na ni indio" (I Am Indian) and previously in "Iknotlajtoli" (Orphan Words), the *coyotl* attempts to impose a monological perspective with a singular vision of modernity. Quijano refers to this stratification as a new "cognitive model" in which different peoples with their own histories, languages, discoveries, cultural products, memories, and identities were all "merged into a single identity: Indians" (15). He describes this "new identity" as "racial, colonial, and negative" (15). The power structure associated with this cognitive model held a "new perspective of knowledge within which non-Europe was the past, and because of that inferior, if not always primitive" (15). This cognitive paradigm not only persisted into "modernity," but also was constitutive of modernity itself. "Modernity" creates a unique space and time. Its space arises from the dichotomies of civilized/barbarian, cosmopolitan/provincial, and developed/underdeveloped.

Nonetheless, in “Na ni indio” (I Am Indian) Hernández makes this system of discrimination wholly unnatural. In the second stanza Hernández’s poetic persona traces back the genealogy of the word *indio* (Indian) to the self-deception of the Spaniards when they first arrived to the Americas (*pampa mokajkayajkej koyomej* / because the coyotes deceived themselves). The poetic voice claims:

Na ni indio:
pampa mokajkayajkej koyomej
kemaj asikoj kampa tlanauatiayaj nokoluaj. (27)

I am Indian:
because the coyotes deceived themselves
when they arrived here where my grandparents/ancestors ruled.

The lines “pampa mokajkayajkej koyomej / kemaj asikoj kampa tlanauatiayaj nokoluaj” exhibit a cacophony with the *k* sound (27, emphasis mine). This is reflective of the *coyomeh* (coyotes) imposing sounds, language, and names such as *indio* with a foreign phonetic system. This cacophony is again repeated in the sixth stanza, “nijmati mokuapolojkej koyomej” (“I know that the coyotes erred with their minds; 27). The coyotes are the ones who represent ignorance and lack observation, similar to Hernán Cortés who disfigures Nahuatl words and toponyms in his *Carta tercera de relación*, such as *Temixtitán* instead of *Tenochtitlan* (92). Unlike the wise elders who know things with their face, the coyotes lack a face that observes and instead jump to erroneous conclusions.

The second stanza of “Na ni indio” underscores even more the importance of language and speaking: *kampa tlanauatiayaj nokoluaj* / where my grandparents ruled. Again, this does not hark back necessarily to the Pre-Columbian era, but to his own

grandparents (indicative also in the pseudonym that he gives himself). On a linguistic level this continuity with Pre-Columbian practices appears in the mixing of words from different variants of Modern Nahuatl and Classical Nahuatl, gained from his experience as a bilingual teacher and promoter of Nahuatl throughout Mexico. For example, while *cuicatl* for “song” is not used in the Huasteca (rather the very similar *huicatl*), it is used in other present-day variants and in Classical Nahuatl. Hernández highlights that no abysmal gap exists between classical and contemporary Nahuatl that the majority of coeval studies suggest. The verb *nahuatia* (to command) from the last line of the second stanza highlights the great force behind this language, as it is associated with both to govern and to speak Nahuatl with its similarity in script to *nāhuati* (to speak Nahuatl).⁶⁶

Modernity’s time is linear and a championed by the Enlightenment in which historical time was seen as moving toward a bastion of ultimate progress, of which Westerners would naturally be the harbingers. Tightly associated with this time is that of the supremacy of “rationality.”⁶⁷ Natalio Hernández writes in the third stanza of “Na ni indio” (I Am Indian) that coyotes named him *indio* to “nopan nejnemisej” (walk on him) and “nechpinajtisej” (make him feel ashamed), which he translates into Spanish as *aplastar* (to crush) and *discriminar* (to discriminate):

Na ni indio:
pampa ijkinoy nechmanextijkej koyomej
para uelis nopan nejnemisej uan nechpinajtisej (27-28).

I am Indian:
because that is how the coyotes point their hands at me
to be able to walk on me and make me feel ashamed.

The translations into Spanish are quite significant. *Nopan nejnemisej* (“they walk on me”) has a deeper meaning than physical violence. It implies an epistemological violence since, as previously mentioned, the root of the word *nemi* connotes thought, a way of life, or philosophy.

Walking on them connotes the *coyomeh* (coyotes) imposing their way of life, their way of seeing the world, and this is emphasized to a greater extent with *nechpinajtisej* (they make me ashamed). Nahuas commonly use this phrase when they feel ashamed to speak the language, and this mortification is often not openly coerced but rather internalized and made to seem natural.⁶⁸ Abashment toward the language transmutes into a rejection of Nahua philosophy, dress, and other cultural practices. As “natural” it becomes unquestioned and eventually obscured as the way things are simply supposed to be. Such a naturalized stratification of society develops, as Michel Foucault theorizes, into a system of discrimination that begins to govern itself without the use necessarily of coercion (45-47).

The repetition of *na* (I) throughout the poem also asserts the subjectivity of the Indigenous poetic voice and debunks the idea that First Peoples lack individuality. This pervasive stereotype maintains that *I* is always lost in an Indigenous collective identity, and, as they cannot think for themselves individually, claims that Indigenous peoples are not fit to lead in politics, business, education etc. In the fourth stanza, a collective ethic appears in speaking of “*timaseualmej tlen ni yankuik tlaltipaktli*” (“we Indigenous peoples of this new land”; 27). Though an individual forms part of a collective ethic, she or he is not lost in it. The knowledge production of this *macehualli* (Nahua/Indigenous)

collectivity does not tie down the subject, but rather strengthens her or him in approaching adversity. In the fifth stanza, Hernández's poetic persona underscores the importance of the individual in the line "uan namaj ika nimotlakaneki ni tlajtoli" ("and now with this word I love myself as a person/man"; 27). Hernández transforms *indio* (Indian) and *macehualli* to signify a living subject rather than the connotation of *tlapiyalli* (livestock) that coyotes attempt to impose upon them. A poem from the first section entitled "Nouhquia na nitlakatl" (I Am Also a Man), which I briefly mention in relation to "Na ni indio," highlights with its title this human subjectivity and challenges colonialism in its attempt to argue that Indigenous peoples were not humans with souls (51). Hernández claims the status of subject and declares that the *coyomeh* (coyotes) can no longer make him feel ashamed. Writing in Nahuatl is itself a performative act against coyotes' attempts at silencing him.

The poetic voice alludes to corn once more in "Na ni indio" (I Am Indian) when the poetic voice repeats that he has his own roots and his own thoughts, face, observance, and way of life in the eighth stanza:

Na ni indio:
uan namaj nijmati nijpixtok
noixayak, notlachialis uan no nemilis. (27)

I am Indian:
and I know I have
my face, my observance, and my way of life.

Again this suggests the conception of intellectual as one who knows things with his face. He articulates a nation-state in which the validity of one's own knowledge production is not dependent upon the supposed superiority over nature itself nor the inadequacy of

others' epistemes. To speak of decolonization, one can speak of *decoyotlization*, or when one ceases to represent the perspective of the *coyotl* (coyote). Hernández underlines language in this decoyotialism with the declaration that he is really Mexican because he speaks Mexican (27-28). Nahuas use more the term *mexicanoh* (Mexican) to refer to their language and view *nahuatl* as a term popularized by outside studies.⁶⁹ Hernández uses *nahuatl* only once in the text and prefers to speak of Mexicans (Nahuas) and the Mexican language. It is through this language that Hernández articulates different options for the nation-state. This is significant on a number of accounts. For one, it allows the poet to refer to the Mexican nation (i.e. Nahua nation) without denoting necessarily the country Mexico (nation-state boundaries). Hernández implicitly argues for a plurinational state in which Nahuas or any Indigenous peoples are not second-class citizens. He decenters the notion of a homogenous nation-state by claiming that the subalternized group is more Mexican—since Mexican means Nahua—than the prototypical citizen of national discourse. Decolonial strategies would consist in people within the nation-state becoming truly familiar with the languages and cultural practices of Nahuas and Indigenous peoples in general and respecting them as equally valid among other systems of knowledge.

The word *indio* turns into something of an anagram in the Spanish version of the ninth stanza:

Na ni indio:
uan namaj nijmati melauak nimejikano
pampa nitlajtoua mejikano, tlen inintlajtöl nokoluaj. (27)

I am Indian:
and now I know that I am truly Mexican
because I speak Mexican, the language of my grandparents/ancestors.

Yo soy indio:
ahora sé que soy verdaderamente mexicano
porque hablo el *idiona* mexicano, la lengua de mis abuelos. (sic, 28, emphasis mine)

Hernández deconstructs and shifts *indio* with the word *idiona* (*idioma* or “language” written with an *n*) to represent Nahuatl as a language and not disdainfully as a “dialect” or, as popularly said, *indialecto* (“[In]dia[n]lect”). The cacophony of *k*’s associated with the *coyomeh* (coyotes) contrasts with the majority of *n*’s and *m*’s associated with Nahuas, phonetically reminding one of *nahuatl*, *mejikanoj*, and *indio* (27). The apparent misspelling of *idioma* as *idiona* highlights to an even greater extent an opposition to the pejorative classification of Nahuatl as a subdialect or *indialecto* due to its similarity to the word *indio* (there are in fact regions in Mexico where Indigenous subjects say *toindiona*, “our Indian language,” with the same empowering connotation).⁷⁰

Idiona also resembles the phrase “*idioma nacional*”⁷¹ and displaces Spanish as the de facto language of the Mexican nation-state. *Na* constitutes the first person pronoun *I* in Nahuatl, and Hernández asserts Nahuas and himself as subjects with valuable discourse and language. As mentioned earlier, the Nahuatl language is one tied to the land and surges forth from carefully observing social and physical landscapes. The word for *nation-state* in Nahuatl is *hueyi altepetl* (large city) or *tonana tlaltipactli* (our mother earth) in “*Na ni indio*,” both fixed on the landscape as opposed to the state-centered society that *nation-state* denotes. This contrast evidences itself in Hernández’s recent translation of the Mexican constitution, which I mention here to underscore its importance in understanding “*Na ni indio*” (I Am Indian). Where the original Spanish

declares that the land pertains to the Nation, in Nahuatl the text sustains that it belongs first and foremost to mother earth.⁷²

With *Na ni indio* in Nahuatl and *Yo soy indio* (I Am Indian) in Spanish continually repeated facing one another in the poem, another anagram appears. The juxtaposed first person *na* in Nahuatl and *yo* in Spanish begin to create a negation on the page: n(a) / (y)o, *no*, in other words, *No soy indio*. Instead of internalizing the pejorative connotations of *indio*, Hernández purges himself of it and marks that he is different from the coyote in positive ways regardless of the term used.

As in the poem “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words), in the twelfth stanza of “Na ni indio,” Hernández’s poetic persona wishes “namaj sampa yeyeksij nijkaki / ayakachtlatsotsontli uan xochitlatsotsontli” (“now again I hear beautifully / the music with rattles and the flower song”; 29). Once more the text underscores the importance of corn ceremonies and the land. Here though rather than wishing for these ceremonies, he declares that he will hear them straightway. The poetic voice has gained strength and switches from using optatives to using the present tense with *now*.

Seen in the previous sections of this chapter, a nation-state with Indigenous representation would exemplify a respect for the landscape, as the last stanza of “Na ni indio” indicates:

Na ni indio
uan namaj sampa nechneluyotia tlaltipaktli,
tonana tlaltipaktli. (29)

I Am Indian
and now again the earth spreads her roots into me,
our mother earth.

As a subject with the power to name and observe (*tlachiya*), the poetic voice appropriates the word *indio* (Indian) and resignifies it with the positive sense of *macehualli* (farmer/Nahua/Indigenous) and the wisdom and aesthetic connected to that. *Na ni indio* (I am Indian) initiates each stanza a total of fourteen times like a ceremonial chant petitioning the raising of a crop. As the poem repeats this phrase, *indio* loses its stigma and transforms into a powerful subject by the poem's end.

Part of decoyotlization is the valorization of work in the fields and manual work. The working of the earth is essential to the psychological well-being of an individual and a reminder that sustenance comes from the land. Highlighting physical labor also debunks the widespread stereotype that Indigenous peoples are lazy, and would rather spend their time in carousals. In the poem “Nomaseualikniuaj tlen monelkoyochijkej” (My Indigenous Brothers Who Have Truly Made Themselves into Coyotes), from the first part “Sempoalxochitl” (Twenty Flower), Hernández's poetic persona recounts the friends he has seen who have abandoned their families and communities in an attempt to embody the supposedly superior coyote.

I now turn from “Na ni indio” to an analysis of “Nomaseualikniuaj tlen monelkoyochijkej” and how it expounds upon the consequences of coyote discourse. This poem laments that when absent family members do return to their communities to visit, they refuse to work in the fields. A superb Nahua student who left with scholarships to study bilingual education in the city returns having learned to deceive others and lie about his grades to the authorities. He refuses to speak Nahuatl with his parents, who struggle to communicate with him in Spanish, such as his mother who tells him, “Quele comel”

(“You want to eat”), exchanging the *r*, a phoneme absent in Nahuatl, in *quiere* for *l* (67). Her son asserts that he can no longer “live among the trees” (67). He associates work in the fields with people devoid of rationality, representative of an ideological legacy passed down since the arrival of Spaniards.⁷³

In “Nomaseualikniuj tlen monelkoyochijkej” (My Indigenous Brothers Who Have Truly Made Themselves into Coyotes), the poetic voice tells of another son who “ayok kineki miltekitis” (“who no longer wants to work in the fields”; 69). This son abandons his community and breaks communication with his parents, who have only heard rumors that “‘tropa’ kalakito” (“he went to enter the ‘troop’”; 69). He abandons the cornfields for the war field, symbolic of the destructive nature of coyotialism / colonialism. Through these tragic examples, Hernández makes clear that the “fieldwork” of research and classroom education must be balanced with literal fieldwork among the crop.

Though emphasizing that Nahuas and Indigenous peoples in general have valid knowledges to direct the nation-state in Mexico, Hernández does not confine himself to nation-state borders. In the poem that follows “My Indigenous Brothers Who Have Truly Made Themselves into Coyotes,” “Maseualsemanauak” from the first part, he speaks of *maseualsemanauak* (Indigenous universe), a conception similar to that of *Abya Yala* to refer to the Americas. In contrast with war fields created by coyotes (Hernández wrote *Xochikoskatl* during some of the worst years of the Guatemalan Civil War with its state-sponsored genocide against Indigenous populations), the poetic voice claims that numerous Indigenous populations offer:

tlajlamikilistli tlen kijaoktialtokej nomaseualikniuaj:
denes, dakotas, jopis, rarámuris, nauas, mayas, kunas,
kechuas, aymarás, uan sekinok nomaseualikniuaj. (71)

knowledges that my Indigenous brothers have come protecting:
Denes, Dakotas, Hopis, Raramuris, Nahuas, Mayas, Cunas,
Quechuas, Ayamaras, and other of my Indigenous brothers.

As mentioned earlier, this articulation of an Indigenous brotherhood is especially significant, considering that other originary populations in Mexico comment that Nahuas often take advantage of a government sponsored status to overshadow them. As mentioned in the introduction, within the field of Indigenous literature, many view Nahuas as usurpers in its close relationship with the celebrated national discourse. Hernández alternately imagines a space in which the Americas are Indigenous and thus appropriately led by Indigenous peoples. As on the national level, he articulates and roots this new space in *tonana tlaltipactli* (our mother earth).

The poem “Maseualsemanauak” (Indigenous Universe) speaks to mother earth, also referred to as *nomaseualtlaltipac* (my Indigenous land) in the first and fourth stanzas. Hernández goes on to state that the coyotes have brought many things, both good and bad. Nonetheless, they represent a discourse that “bleeds” the land in order to feed their “monsters” (71). They believe themselves to be the owners of everything and rob the earth. The poetic voice relates that they suppose their children to be wise, because they attend universities in which they are taught how to destroy the earth, earn money, and issue commands, instead of respecting the earth and dialoguing with their hearts:

Nojkia kiijtouaj tlajlamiki[j] inkoneuaj
pampa youij koyokalmekak;
kampa kinnextili[j] kenijki mits payanisej
kampa kinnextiliaj kenijki tominkixtisej,

They also say that their children are wise
because they go to coyote universities;
where they show them how to crush you
where they show them how to take money,

kampa kinnextiliaj kenijki tlanauatisej;	where they show them how to rule;
axkanaj kinnextilia[j] kenijki mits tlepanitasej,	they do not show them how to respect,
kenijki tlapaleusej, kenijki moyolnojnotsasej. (70)	how to help, how to dialogue with the heart.

Indigenous epistemologies contrasted with *coyotl* (coyote) knowledges (or anti-epistememes) reflect the disparity between the *ixtlamatquetl/ixtlamatini* (“one who knows things with her/his face”) as an intellectual and the Western conception of one with erudition received mostly from books. Such a contrast is common to Indigenous epistemologies throughout the Americas.⁷⁴

8. Huehuehtlahtolli: Different Temporality Where the Past Renews the Future

As stated in section four of this chapter, in this penultimate section I will address how Nahuas view the past and ancestors not behind the subject but rather in front, offering knowledges to help guide dynamically through the present and future. In the first stanza of “Na ni indio” (I Am Indian), the poetic voice calls the Americas a “new land” (29). I briefly return to this poem to highlight its significance in relation to perceptions of temporalities and respect for ancestors. “New land” popularly treats the hemisphere as if no peoples were here when the Europeans arrived. Nonetheless, here Hernández gives the term an alternative meaning. This new land alludes to later references to a “new sun,” “new day,” and “new sunrise” in the tenth stanza. A new sun symbolizes a revival of Indigenous cultural practices after a long period of colonization and colonialism. In this new cycle First Peoples no longer figure as agents of pre-history, but as agents in contemporary society. The repetition of the word *namaj*, “now,” ten times as well as numerous other linguistic markers stress this cogent presence in the present and future.

This paradigm challenges the linear trajectory of Western modernity. The poem itself is an alternative genesis, as the overall chiasmic structure of the poem denotes. It is composed of fourteen stanzas total, and in the seventh stanza there is a significant shift. The first six stanzas speak of the error of the *coyomeh* (coyotes), and then in the seventh stanza the poetic voice finally asserts, “uan namaj nijmati nijpixtok / noneluayo uan notlajlamikilis” (“and now I know I have / my roots and my remembrance”; 27). *Chicome*, “seven,” is symbolic of a genesis in its allusion to *Chicomoztoc*, the “place of the seven caves,” the mythical origin of the Mexica.⁷⁵ The reference to a new sun also highlights a cyclical time, as the Nahuas spoke of cycles on earth passing with different suns. This poem treats the last five-hundred years of history not as one of “progress” toward some ultimate Enlightenment, but rather as centuries of suffering and sacrifice, a cycle to be left behind.

The number seven also alludes to *Chicome Tepetl*, the toponym in Nahuatl that refers to the municipality of Chicontepec (seven hills). Seven sacred hills in this area as well as numerous others were formed, according to oral histories, from one original mountain, called *Postectitlan* (Place of Breaking). As tradition tells, excessively curious people climbed this mountain and overheard what the gods discussed, and then descended to share the gossip. The gods, perceiving this problem, decided to break this mountain into numerous pieces—hence the orotonym *Postectitlan* (Place of Broken Pieces). Hernández alludes to this mountain in the poem “*Tepeiluitl*” (Festivity in the Hills), which I mention here in relation to the significance of the chiasmic structure centered on seven in “*Na ni indio*” (I Am Indian), and describes two young warriors who

on the seventh day of the ninth month depart Mexico City to visit the great lord *Tepoztecatl* and receive *huehuehtlahtolli* (wise words) (207).

Even more significantly, *Postectitlan* (Place of the Broken Pieces) and *Chicome Tepetl* (Seven Hills) with the number seven suggest the ceremony of *Chicomexochitl* (seven flower). Though represented in the two figures mentioned previously, *chicomexochitl* resides anywhere there is maize and this corn crop is key in this conception of a dynamic cyclical time. The total fourteen stanzas in “Na ni indio” (I Am Indian) also allude to corn, as the *tlapixquetl* (diviner) tosses fourteen corn kernels to tell of future events (Sandstrom 233-235). This meaning directs Nahua knowledge production toward the present and future. The rising of the sun brings new seasons and a new crop. Seen earlier in the analysis of the term *tlaixpan* (altar, “that which is in front”), this view affects relations with people, especially with elders. As the past is in front of you rather than behind, ancestors have insights that help to guide the subject in making decisions. Rivera Cusicanqui analyzes this perspective in the Aymara term *Nayrapacha*, a temporal perspective shared among Indigenous movements across the continent: “the past, but not just any vision of the past; rather, ‘past-as-future,’ that is to say, as a renovation of space-time. A past capable of renewing the future, or turning over the lived situation” (*Violencias*, 51).⁷⁶ Historical remembrance helps renew the present and future, and is not something to leave behind on a linear, positivistic progression toward modernity.⁷⁷ Hernández’s poetic persona states in the thirteenth stanza of “Na ni indio” (I Am Indian) that “uan namaj sampa nikinita / uan nikintlakakilia ueuetlakamej” (“and now again I see / and hear the wise/elderly people”; 29). These ancestors serve as a base

to making decisions *now*, not in the past.

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, *Xochikoskatl* is replete with allusions to the novel *Brave New World* and the frightening future it represents.⁷⁸ Exploring these similarities and his response to the novel helps to understand Hernández's invective against a colonized discourse that does not respect elders' wisdom and presumes to strip Indigenous populations of agency. In contrast to the society of *Brave New World* with its "beautiful and inspired" Fordian phrase quoted by The Controller, "History is bunk" (35), Hernández values the past for the knowledges that it offers. He argues against the view that technological advancements are the genuine signs of progress and that anything predating and unrelated to those advancements is obsolete, as in the previously analyzed poem "Maseualsemanauak" (Indigenous Universe): "namaj tikitaj kenijki miak moeso / tlen ika kin olinisej teposmej, / kiijtouaj nochi inaxkaj, / yek mits ueloniaj, yeka mitspayaniaj" ("now we see a lot of your [the earth's] blood / with which they [the coyotes] move their metal devices, / they say that everything is their property, / that is why they topple and crush you [the earth]; 71, insert mine). *Teposmej* or literally "metal" is translated as *monstruos* (monsters) in Spanish and effectively depicts technological developments that deplete natural resources as anything but "progress."

For the poem "Na nojkia nitlakatl" (I Am Also Human) from the first part "Sempoalxochitl" (Twenty Flower), Hernández uses diction similar to *Brave New World* in Spanish: "Algunos hombres blancos y mestizos / dicen que soy un salvaje, un animal, / que es inútil mi existencia" ("Some white and *mestizo* men / say that I am a savage, an animal, / that my existence is useless"; 52). The reference to savage suggests the fictional

character John “the Savage,” from the novel *Brave New World*, and his reduction to spectacle. The dominant Alpha society of *Brave New World* measures and calculates everything, resembling Hernández’s descriptions of coyotes appraising all elements with metal in “Xijkakikaj koyomej” (Listen Coyotes). Both the poetic voice of *Xochikoskatl* and John do not fit in this measurement and categorization of individuals, and their societies depict them like extinct animals or artifacts. The national discourses of Progress are unable to compute with living Indigenous peoples, as they are articulated as an old stepping-stone toward modernity. In this quest for “modernity” and “newness,” old age itself is undesirable and a disease, even completely eliminated in *Brave New World*, in both Huxley’s novel and the society the poetic voice criticizes, as quoted earlier.⁷⁹

A respect for elders stands out in the first part of *Xochikoskatl* in the poem, “Nopiluj: Xikonkakikaj ueuetlajtoli” (My Children: Listen to the Wise/Old Words). He begins by stating, “ximoyoltlapokaj nopiluj” (open yourselves up with your hearts) to hear the words of the elders (55). Analyzed in greater detail in the last section of this chapter, the heart is a key metaphor representative of an affective intelligence. It is a tool through which to perceive one’s surroundings. The poetic voice describes the ancient words, *uajapantlajtoli*, as a locus of observation in the first stanza: “tlajlamikilistli tlen ika titlachixtialtokej” (“knowledge with which we observe / are born and live”; 55). He once more highlights the continuities between Pre-Columbian era and elders in the present, as he refers to his grandparents while speaking of “ancient words.”

The poetic voice refers to the contrast between orality and writing, in the third stanza of “Nopiluj: Xikonkakikaj ueuetlajtoli” (My Children: Listen to the Wise/Old

Words), when he argues “pampa tomaseual tlajtol axmoneki tikijkuilosej” (“because our Indigenous words/discourse does not need to be written”; 55). Another general common misperception is that Indigenous languages cannot be written because they lack cohesive grammatical structures. He dismisses this (obviously since he himself is writing) and states that this wisdom from elders does not have to be written in Latin scripts on a page. Rather, such writing is only another way to record memory, along with textiles and oral tradition. In turn language itself carries the wisdom of elders, as it has been passed down from one generation to another. Found within the language itself is an accumulation of knowledges and, in order to communicate them, Nahuas do not need to write them down on paper.

This relates to debates based on the false dichotomy of orality and the written word. There are numerous ways of “writing” in addition to inscribing a series of characters on the page. In Nahuatl the smoke from incense is said to be “writing on the air” that carries messages to deity and deceased ancestors. The remains of this communication, *tlicolli* (ember), can also be used as a writing instrument and by extension this word refers to blackboard markers. Resembling the Ojibwe images written on birchbark analyzed by Lisa Brooks, Hernández “spin[s] the binary between word and image into a relational framework” that challenges the “oppositional thinking” that situates orality as Indigenous authenticity and written script on the page as “contaminated” indigeneity (Brooks, xxi). The idea of illiteracy based on reading Latin characters is parochial in its scope and does not account for the multitudinous ways in which one may communicate and write a message on the heart of the recipient. The

knowledges that Hernández communicates were handed down to him through participation in community ceremonies, and these ceremonies firmly recorded these writings on the air upon his heart.

With these knowledges, Hernández's poetic persona goes on to affirm in the fifth stanza of "Nopiluj: Xikonkakikaj ueuetlajtoli" (My Children: Listen to the Wise/Old Words) that "moneki xitepaleuikaj, moneki xitlapaleuikaj" ("it's necessary that you help others") because "nochi titeikneltijkej" ("we all were orphans"; 56). A communal ethic is key to overcoming the challenges that arise through migration. All Nahuas are migrants either in leaving their community or else with coyotes invading their territories and bringing in different linguistic and cultural practices. A community ethic is reflective of one's relationship with surroundings and the landscape. It is one of reciprocity in which one does not position herself or himself as center. Hence the poetic voice confirms the importance of this interchange in the fifth stanza: "yeka moneki ma timotlachilikaj" ("because of this it is important that you observe/take care of one another"; 56). Again is highlighted the importance of seeing others, as with the observation of the landscape. Rather than observing others and surroundings to interpellate them according to one's wishes, one does so to understand from personal experience and know how to help in times of difficulty.

Like in "Iknotlajtoli" (Orphan Words), these knowledges are elevated like the corn crop. Hernández's poetic persona instructs explicitly in the sixth stanza, "xikintlepanitakaj ueuetlakamej, / xijtlepanitakaj xochitl" ("respect the elders, / respect the flower"; 57). He parallels elders here with the "flower and song," and their wisdom is

rooted in the knowledges described previously. As noted in the Nahuatl dictionary from IDIEZ, *tlepanitta* (with its root itta, “to see”) carries the following meaning: “1. nic. Macehualli tlahuel quineltoaca tlen quillia ceyoc pampa momachtihoc zo ixtlamati ica ce tlamantli” (“when an Indigenous person really believes what another says because that person has learned or knows something from personal experience [with his face]”; *Tlahtolxitlahuquetl*). When saying “I respect you,” one in fact communicates, “I see you as a subject with valuable insights.”

In Nahuatl *tlepanitta* carries great weight, perhaps due to centuries in which outsiders have challenged that respect, and it emerges throughout the text. Hernández takes up again metaphors related to corn and roots in the final seventh stanza of “Nopiluj: Xikonkakikaj ueuetlajtoli”: “moneki xijtlalanakaj uan xikajokuikaj / xikajokuikaj ipan imoyolo uan imotlajlamikilis” (“it is necessary to lift it up and keep it / keep it within your heart and your remembrance”; 57). The elders’ words, highly esteemed, come back like the corn crop and renew the present and future.

9. *Yollotl* and Affective Intelligence: Thinking with the Heart

In this last section of chapter one, I will look at how Hernández proposes an affective intelligence that does not separate emotions from rationality. He shares what he has seen, and establishes firmly the first person singular *na* of the poems throughout *Xochikoskatl*. This testimony enters into a politics of memory that challenges the official state history of progress toward integration. In the apostrophic poem “Xijkakikaj koyomej” (Listen Coyotes), analyzed previously in the fifth section of this chapter, the poetic voice shifts from the testimonial *na* to speaking directly to an absent audience of

“you all *coyomeh*.” I return to this poem to analyze its importance in relation to affective intelligence. Hernández speaks with authority based on the knowledge gained from his experiences and from this position now gives explicit commands and recommendations to those who have oppressed him. He speaks from a collective ethic that stresses the need to live “with the heart” and respect the environment.

The corporal metaphor of the heart appears throughout the poem. Hernández writes in the third stanza that:

ijatsaj timatlantokej nojuaj tiyoltokej
pampa **yoltok toyolo**, nojuaj tiyolchikauakej,
nojuaj ueli tomoyolnojnotsaj;
timoyolnejnemiliaj uan timokuanejnemiliaj
kenijki sampa uelis timeuasej uan tinejnemisej
kenijki sampa timoyolkusej (59, emphasis mine)

although we have suffered we **are** still here,
because our **heart** is alive, we are still strong **in the heart**,
we can still dialogue **with the heart**;
we contemplate **with the heart** and we contemplate with the mind
how we can again rise up and walk
how we can **recover from illness**

The stanza is replete with parallelisms in which the prefix *yol* and other roots related to *yollotl* (heart) appear repeatedly with varying syntax. *Timoyolnejnemiliaj* (we contemplate with the heart) and *timokuanejnemiliaj* (we contemplate with the mind) represent a *difrasismo*⁸⁰ that again highlights the conjugation of affect and conscious decisions in the formation of the subject as they parallel the roots *yol* (heart) and *kua* (mind/head). *Yolcui*, from the last line of the citation, refers to recovering from illness, but, as mentioned earlier, literally means “to take heart.” Hernández translates this phrase twice in Spanish as “cómo podemos revivir, cómo volver a tener vida propia” (“how we

can live again, how we can again have our own life”; 60). As stated earlier, *tiyolchikauaj* (We are strong of heart) centers on corn, as *yollotl* (heart) also signifies *seed* and *chicahuac* (literally “hard”) can refer to maize that has dried and hardened. The heart is associated with both physical and psychological well-being and this is something to a large extent lost in translation.

In contrast with the Indigenous heart, the *coyomeh* (coyotes) have a heart, referred to in the second stanza, that has been slowly dying. In the seventh stanza of “Xijkakikaj koyomej” (Listen Coyotes), the poetic voice declares their heart is already lifeless. Due to this he worries that, as indicated in the seventh stanza, the *coyomeh* to whom he speaks will not be able to understand what he is saying: “Uelis ouijtok inehtlakakilisej / uelis ouijtok ineckuamachilisej / ouijtok inechneltokasej” (“It might be difficult for you to listen to me / it might be difficult for you to understand me / It is difficult for you to believe me”; 61). Ironically, it would be very difficult for his audience to listen because most likely none of them understands Nahuatl. He directs himself to them first in a language that they literally do not understand, but at a deeper level it represents an alternative worldview. Even if they were to learn Nahuatl, Hernández doubts that they would understand his philosophies or that they would respect them.

The distinction between Indigenous subjects and the *coyomeh* (coyotes) should not be reduced to the romanticized vision in the “mythic-magic mentality” (Quijano 9). This is instead an affective intelligence and not simply the following of instincts. Affective intelligence constitutes the viewing of emotions as an integral part of one’s reasoning. In this manner “Xijkakikaj koyomej” (Listen Coyotes) flips Western

rationalism on its head and deems it unnatural and irrational in its disregard for affectivity. Hernández does not reduce cultural and religious practices such as corn ceremonies to irrational performance apart from the rational bounds of the sciences. The bodily metaphor of the heart represents an (a/e)ffective resistance to practices and epistemologies that have attempted to erase them. This heart represents a clear collective ethic in which capital is not supreme and in which relations with others and the environment must be carefully cultivated.⁸¹

The poetic voice criticizes *mestizos/blancos* back in the first stanza of “Listen Coyotes”: “miak tlamantli imoaxcatikoj, / imoaxcatikoj totlalli / imoaxcatikoj notatauaj intekitikayo, intlajlamikilis” (“you took many things as your own property, / you took our land as your property / you took the work of my parents, their wisdom/philosophy”; 59). Constant mention is made from Manuel Gamio to the present of how Indigenous peoples are symbols of the *patria* (nation). Symbols from Nahua culture abound on money, flags, place names, etc. Nonetheless, these are treated as mere symbolism and not ideas for governance of the country. Hernández turns upside down this view and demands that the *coyomeh* (coyotes) begin to take contemporary Indigenous subjects seriously as agents in the present as opposed to relics of the past.

In the poem “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words), Hernández translates *niinochoca* (I cry like an orphan) into Spanish as *lloro de sentimiento* (I cry with feeling), and this highlights a dichotomy recurrent throughout the book in which the coyotes lack the sensitivity of Indigenous subjects (25-26). I now turn from “Listen Coyotes” to an analysis of “Orphan Words” and its relation to affective intelligence. The contrast of

coyote insensitivity and Indigenous affect is also highlighted in the translation of “Iknotlajtoli” (“Orphan Words”) into Spanish as “Sentimiento” (“Feeling”) (26). Emphasis on feeling throughout *Xochikoskatl* (as well as future works by Hernández) argues for an affective intelligence as the basis for applicable solutions to societal dilemmas. Such an approach, as philosopher Martha Nussbaum describes, “adopt[s] plausible rather than implausible pictures of ethical change, and we understand (in connection with our normative arguments) what it might mean for a political community to extend to its citizens the social bases of imaginative and emotional health” (15-16). With this affective intelligence, the visceral metaphor of the heart combines with that of flowers and Mesoamerican deities to give an alternative genesis and framework to that of modernity. Hernández hopes that these songs will find a place in the *yollotl* (heart) of the readers and will “flower” within them. The real intellectual not only understands things of the mind in relation to her or his personal experience, but also recognizes emotions as a key part of one’s cognition.

At odds with this affective intelligence, the paring of “blancos y mestizos” (whites and *mestizos*) in “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words) unveils *mestizaje* as a cover for whiteness, in which the Indigenous subject and his practices must assimilate into the “progress” of modernity in order to escape his backwardness. *White* and *mestizo* differ little in their end result. Perceived *whiteness* “naturally” entails superior “rationality” and knowledge, and the concentration of capital in the hands of those perceived as “white” has functioned in conjunction with and perpetuated this racism.⁸² As analyzed previously, the poetic voice crying with feeling in “Iknotlajtoli” marks this violence

inflicted upon First Peoples. The poem contrasts the oppressive practices of the coyotes with the liberating Indigenous ones of “the heart.” *Mestizaje* discourse teaches originary subjects to integrate, but then they are marginalized even when they attempt to do so. Any marker of Indigenous identity in the present, either in clothing, speech, or darker skin, is a certain path to discrimination. Those who benefit most from the discourse of *mestizaje* are labeled white, speak Spanish with no “accent,” and have fully assimilated into the “national” culture.

Out of this physical and epistemological violence comes the visceral resistance of the poetic voice in “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words) and throughout *Xochikoskatl*. In the poem that immediately precedes “Iknotlajtoli,” entitled “Xokoyotsin moyolnojotsa” (Xokoyotsin Has an Inner Dialogue with His Heart), Hernández writes:

Asijka tonatij timoyolnojotsas
miak tlamantli kiajokui moyolo;
yeka tipatstlami, yeka tiyokuitlamiki,
kemantika tiiknochoka,
kemaya timoyolpitsaua (23)

The day has already arrived for you to dialogue with your heart
your heart holds many things,
that is why you get irritated, why you get furious,
sometimes you cry as an orphan
at other times you scatter yourself out with the heart

Out of the hostile environment of coloniality emerges a visceral rejection of oppression and a feeling body with agency that seeks to transform this situation. The heart is the symbol *par excellence* of resistance, and it challenges the assumed separation of mind and emotions basic to European Enlightenment and in turn the racial hierarchy that

marginalizes the subaltern as too near nature, too emotional, and thus incapable of participating in the “higher” forms of government, economy, and society.

In “Xokoyotsin moyolnojotsa” (Xokoyotsin Dialogues with His Heart) and “Iknotlajtoli” (Orphan Words), lack of feeling differs from what can also be denoted affective intelligence. Though Sanjinés does not refer explicitly to affective intelligence in his theory, it nonetheless plays a key role in his concept of viscosity and moves away from the classic dictionary definition of *viscerality* as “unreasoning” and “not intellectual” (“Visceral,” def. 2). Hernández purposefully uses the word *filosofía* (philosophy)⁸³ in the Spanish versions of poetry to highlight that Nahuas have valid knowledges to offer that have been marginalized for centuries and that are essential to leave the destructive time/space of what Quijano refers to as “colonial modernity” (4). The key elements of this philosophy from the heart are music, dance, song, the language Nahuatl, and a respect for nature. This feeling is intrinsic to Nahuatl, and arguably *yollotl* (heart) is untranslatable into English without qualifying its additional meanings beyond mere “heart.”

Moyolchicahua, one strengthens herself or himself with the heart, with these different cultural practices and the philosophies attached to them. Song and dance come together in religious ceremony and represent an ethic in which nature is respected, in which individuals are strengthened with the heart and laugh with the heart. This sensing body, as philosopher Erin Manning explains, makes the state apparatus uncomfortable, as the state seeks to maintain people within static categories. Yet a politics of touch exceeds this restrictive organization. The sensing body is an “agrammatical invention” in that

through “atypical expressions” it is able to stretch and move outside the strict confines of the state (xxi). It represents the “deterritorialization of language,” as it moves elements beyond their “known forms and conventional functions” (xxiii). Speaking Nahuatl in itself is an agrammatical political statement and one that challenges a state discourse that even in the guise of multiculturalism still proclaims a single official history, a hegemonic language (Spanish), and a homogenous identity (the *mestizo* subject). Dance and music take on powerful meaning, and, in that vein, Hernández refers to *xochitlatzotzontli* (flowered/maize music) throughout *Xochikoskatl* (25, 29, 37, 65, 223). The movements of this sensing body challenge strict state territorialization and the Mod(el)ern *mestizo* subject of national discourse.

The Same Questions Persist: Present-day Relevance of *Xochikoskatl*

Xochikoskatl raises numerous questions that lead to pertinent debates for the present: Who is capable of offering ideas in the construction of the nation-state? Who wields the power of inclusion? Who defines “progress”? Programs to aid Indigenous peoples all too often exclude their target population from seriously taking part in debates to answer these questions and instead paradoxically imagine them as the provincial beneficiaries of a system that insists on excluding them from governance. Hernández’s text serves as a forerunner in both posing and answering these questions, displacing discriminatory practices as products of a colonial era and proposing alternative knowledges in the construction of the nation-state. He now plays, as mentioned in the introduction, a recognized role within the Mexican intellectual establishment and receives invitations to participate in numerous prominent forums on Indigenous rights and

interculturality. This begets the question of the implications of the legacy of the first Nahua writer to publish a single-author book of poetry in an Indigenous language. In addition to demystifying prevalent stereotypes toward Indigenous populations, Hernández offers alternative views of what constitutes representation, progress, and intellectualism that are pertinent to our present.

Written almost a decade before the surge in postcolonial studies and Quijano's influential analysis of coloniality, *Xochikoskatl* approached many of the questions raised in this academic movement. Tracing earlier explorations of the questions involved in discussions of postcoloniality and decoloniality, as Rivera Cusicanqui notes, reveals a series of intellectuals south of the U.S.-Mexican border who tackled these issues in innovative and effective ways well before academics in the North gave them adequate attention (*Ch'ixinakax*, 63-69). While primary documents of SEP and INI paint an image of progressive rhetoric, Hernández writes in counterpoint to them and through poetry depicts how this discourse contrasts with actual practices, giving a window to a more complex view of this historical period. To use a visceral metaphor, this text helps to put affect and flesh on the skeleton of a historical period in Mexican bilingual education not sufficiently researched.

The byword now in describing Indigenous education is *interculturalidad* (interculturality), and no mention is made of this term's origin with SEP and Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán's pedagogy for Indigenous education from the early seventies. Moreover, the question of who sets the framework and the terms of this interculturality is for the most part only approached rhetorically or not raised at all. Indigenous practices are still

treated as symbols of a mythic authenticity for the nation-state and *folklore* in the sense of provincial knowledges. “Interculturality” becomes a one-way process in which the nation-state administration “allows” Indigenous subjects to keep their practices but requires that they learn “superior” ones in order to integrate into the Mexican state. Hernández calls for a genuine interculturality, in which Indigenous epistemological systems are on a level playing field of knowledge production, like the bilingual lines of *Xochikoskatl* performativity produce.

Interculturality was far from Hernández’s mind when he wrote *Xochikoskatl* in 1985, but this text is key to understanding his espousal of this concept from the 1990s to the present. The basis of this interculturality, which makes possible the coexistence described by Rivera Cusicanqui, is the positing of differing epistemologies as equally valid. Interculturality cannot remain solely on a rhetorical level in which one superficially asserts such equality. In a personal interview, Hernández made this point by contrasting Guillermo Bonfil Batalla with Miguel León Portilla.⁸⁴ He explained that, though Bonfil Batalla focuses explicitly on interculturality, it was not his place to do so. His interculturality remains on a rhetorical level and lacks lived experience. On the other hand, Miguel León Portilla, who rarely speaks explicitly about interculturality, has performatively represented interculturality in learning Nahuatl and actively promoting Nahua philosophy and cultural practices. Again, this reflects the conception of an intellectual explained at the beginning of this chapter and the primacy of personal experience.

Interestingly, literary critic and novelist Carlos Montemayor (1947-2010) later commented to Hernández after the publication of *Xochikoskatl* that the text did not properly constitute literature.⁸⁵ This is not surprising, considering that Hernández wrote the text with animosity against Spanish as it represented epistemological violence against his own language. He was not attempting to imitate or write himself into the literary canon in Spanish. Montemayor commented that the text was not sufficiently “universal,” though this conflict depicted in *Xochikoskatl* could without a doubt be considered pertinent on a global scale in its representation of discriminatory discourses against Indigenous populations throughout the world.⁸⁶ “Universality” used in this manner is a Eurocentric notion based on problematic Enlightenment ideals that displaced and relegated Others’ knowledges. Though an important advocate for Indigenous literary production, Montemayor still used the flawed categorization of “universal.” Hernández in turn shifts Eurocentric configurations of “universality” on their head by centering the modern knowledge production of those least deemed to have such production and provincializing the knowledge production of those who claim a monopoly on transcendental epistemes.

Montemayor reportedly told Hernández, “¿Sabes qué, Natalio? Tu primer libro no sirve como literatura” (“You know what, Natalio? Your first book is not any good as literature”; personal interview, 26 August 2012).⁸⁷ Taken aback at this stark criticism toward a book in which he had invested much time and effort, Hernández asked Montemayor why he would say such a thing. His reply was that it was too local, overly direct and focused on social problems that do not ring true on a global scale. In short, the

book was not universal. This is symptomatic of the criticism that numerous Indigenous authors have received. The text is universal if readers take the time to understand its contextual landscapes, worldviews, aesthetics, and language.

Xochikoskatl deconstructs within Nahuatl the false binary of city/community, which often relegates rural Nahua settlements to the periphery of knowledge production. While the distinction between *altepetl* (large settlement) and *chinanco* (small settlement) can have reductive connotations similar to *city* versus *community*,⁸⁸ in *Xochikoskatl* the *chinanco* represents a loci of intellectual contributions for large cities. In quotidian Nahuatl across many areas of the Huasteca, *hueyi altepetl* (large *altepetl*) denotes a large city like Mexico City and *pilaltepetzin* (small *altepetl*) refers to a smaller city or community. The difference is not qualitative but rather quantitative in regards to population and area, and does not carry the reductive undertones of the term *community*.⁸⁹

Hernández has been so put off by the continual victimization of Indigenous peoples as the sufferers of colonialism, social ills, and globalization, that for the most part he has ceased to write explicitly of these ills in his poetry and is reluctant to give readings of previous poems that do so. Apparently poems he wrote in the eighties openly denouncing discrimination were interpreted more within the usual framework of victimization than in the intended new framework of empowerment. Victimization strips Indigenous subjects of eyes and face, often name as well, and treats them as solely primary source informants instead of intellectuals and colleagues. Under this condescending eye, they are the outcome of an event rather than an agent to enact

outcomes. The question still persists as to when the general public will begin to listen, understand, and treat as equally valid marginalized intellectual traditions such as those of Nahuas.

In addition to Hernández, there is a growing corpus of Nahua writers and Indigenous writers in general who challenge victimization. This chapter is an attempt to offer a close analysis of one of these texts, seminal in contemporary Indigenous literatures, and underscore the importance of not settling for translations into Spanish or English. There are numerous paths of research suggested in this chapter, such as the need to explore Nahua literatures up close in relation to Indigenous literatures throughout Mesoamerica and *Abya Yala* as a whole. Numerous similarities exist among these different Indigenous nations and studies that compare them prove promising. It is important to avoid isolating Nahua literary production and recognize the numerous influences from other languages and Indigenous nations. This is imperative in the Huasteca where Tepehuas, Totonacos, and Ñhähñus live in close proximity with one another, often with shamans from one community visiting another. Such interaction is even more apparent in urban contexts, in which one can network with any one of the over sixty-two Indigenous nations in Mexico and hundreds of Indigenous nations from throughout the world.

The following chapter explores a theatrical work of Ildefonso Maya, a Nahua author encouraged by Hernández to produce literature in Nahuatl. This analysis considers how Maya uses education, language, dress, and respect for elders to comment on the deficiencies of government educational programs in Indigenous communities. I argue that

first generation Nahuatl authors like Maya as well as Hernández use their literary production to repudiate folkloric and exotic displays of their cultural practices within national discourse. Their texts focus on these practices as sources of valid alternative epistememes and complex worldviews, contrasted with *gente de razón* (“people of reason”) or *mestizos* who represent themselves as the inevitable norm to which everyone must aspire. Education, language, clothing, and ritual—the battlegrounds upon which *mestizos* assert an inherent superiority—are crucial elements within the works of the authors analyzed in denouncing everyday racism targeted against Nahuatl.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, translations from Nahuatl and Spanish into English are the author’s.

² As Aníbal Quijano theorizes, economic subalternity is intimately tied to a colonial system of racism and discrimination that has outlived the era of colonialism. This *coloniality*, as he terms it, associates “races” with “social roles and geohistorical places” (Quijano 3). Colonial society associated Indigenous subjects as well as other subalterns “naturally” associated with manual labor and for the most part prohibited them from participating in knowledge production or “higher” professions. This division of labor was transmuted into the social classification of the world’s population under global capitalism. Discussions regarding *coloniality* are more common to Latin American studies, and it is an approximate equivalent of *colonialism* and *settler colonialism* in Indigenous Studies within the United States. The *-ity* of *coloniality* insists that, in spite of nominal nation-state independence, colonial discriminatory practices continue to the present. That said, the term has varying interpretations as well as numerous opponents, among them Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui. She argues that the terms *coloniality* and *decoloniality* are products of colonialism within Latin American Studies Programs from the United States, and instead opts for *internal colonialism*, a concept rooted among intellectuals south of the U.S. border (*Ch’ixinakax*, 67). Nonetheless, others reject both *coloniality* and *internal colonialism*, arguing that the former suggests that nominal independence actually brought change while the latter recognizes nation-state borders (Burman 127). While acknowledging these valuable criticisms, I find Quijano’s analysis useful for conceptualizing present-day colonial practices that Hernández denounces in *Xochikoskatl* (Flowered Necklace).

³ Personal interview, 15 February 2013. To my knowledge, Editorial Kalpulli only published one other work the same year in its short-lived existence: independent scholar Arturo Meza Gutiérrez’s monolingual Spanish study, *El calendario de México / Cauhpohualli: Cómputo del tiempo Azteca y su correlación actual* (1985). While I am unsure about the success of *El calendario*, Hernández says that all 3,000 copies of *Xochikoskatl* quickly sold out. Apparently this was not enough to keep Editorial Kalpulli going though. The publishing house was located on Manuel María Contreras No. 16, Col. Mexico in Ciudad Nezahualcoyotl, Estado de México. Today no evidence remains of there having once been a press at this location, and it is now a personal residence.

⁴ This version is more readily accessible than the full text of *Xochikoskatl*, especially now with an electronic copy publically available online. See <http://www.historicas.unam.mx/publicaciones/revistas/nahuatl/pdf/ecn18/283.pdf>.

⁵ Natalio Hernández has served in numerous public roles since the publication of *Xochikoskatl*. He became the first President of Escritores en Lenguas Indígenas, Asociación Civil (ELIAC) in 1993. That same year Nobel Prize Laureate Rigoberta Menchú designated Hernández “Distinguished Spokesperson,” and he collaborated with her in two World Summits of Indigenous Peoples. Hernández received the

Nezahualcōyotl prize for literature in Indigenous languages in 1997 and the Bartolomé de las Casas prize from la Casa de América de España in 1998. Natalio Hernández has given numerous interviews and participated in numerous newspapers and television programs, among them *La Jornada* (9 March 2010; 10 March 2013), *Informador* (5 May 2013), *Excelsior* (29 October 2013), a televised series of debates surrounding the centennial and bicentennial of Mexican Independence and the Mexican Revolution, and a recent television program interviewing Indigenous figures in Mexico.

⁶ Stated in email from Natalio Hernández, 21 December 2013.

⁷ Interestingly, one of the *tlamatini* (“shamans”) who has visited Hernández’s community for the last four decades is N̄hāñũ.

⁸ The Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) was created by the Mexican Congress on 3 October 1921, with the express goal of complying with the Mexican Constitution’s Third Article and its promise to offer free, secular compulsory education at a national level. Since its inception under the leadership of José Vasconcelos to the present, the Secretary of Public Education, through programs of varying names, has continued with the overriding goal of creating a “national unity” of model nation-state citizens. As seen in an analysis of Hernández’s work and interviews with other Indigenous teachers from this period, a first explicit and later covert goal of SEP in creating this national unity has been the assimilation of Indigenous populations to a discourse of the idealized *mestizo* subject and adoption of the hegemonic Spanish language. Though terms used in SEP such as *educación indígena* (Indigenous education), *bicultural*, *pluricultural*, and *intercultural* seem to suggest otherwise, in personal interviews Nahua professors from the period, among them Natalio Hernández, indicate that these were hollow terms that in many instances have done more to erase Indigenous knowledge production than did programs with the explicit goal of assimilation and “Mexicanization.” For more in depth analysis of the history of SEP, see María Luisa Escalante Correa, *Utilización de algunos medios de difusión en la educación indígena; Historia de la educación pública en México*.

⁹ In his 1999 essay “Del indigenismo del siglo XX al humanismo del siglo XXI,” Hernández stresses that in the late seventies “the discourse changed, true, but in reality nothing changed” (“cambió el discurso, es cierto, sin embargo en la realidad nada cambió”; *De la exclusión*, 24). Changing the names of this praxis did not displace centuries of deeply entrenched discrimination, especially when the name change came from the proponents of the former discourse. In 1969 Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, Director of the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI), spoke of how “México very soon can have the luxury of permitting that its unassimilated Indians remain Indian if they so desire” (“México muy pronto podrá darse el lujo de permitir que sus indios supérsites permanezcan indios si así lo desean”; Prologue, 39). He stated that by 1970 only 8% of the Mexican population would speak Indigenous languages. In the seventies and eighties this “luxury” began to be preached as policy, but with an attitude similar to the one reflected in Beltrán’s statement. Ideally, Indigenous subjects would assimilate to the nation-state—a message that is implicitly imbedded in actual pedagogy on the ground even to this day—but the government could now “allow” them to continue in their backwards ways if they so chose. This “luxury” serves as the Other of progress from which to measure present-day accomplishments. Not necessarily adverse to GDP, such an exotic Other also becomes a tourist attraction. Hernández reverses this paradigm in arguing that Indigenous subjects have valid knowledges for the present. For examples of discourse regarding Indigenous education from SEP and INI, see Beltrán, *Teoría y práctica de la educación indígena*; SEP, *Delegaciones estatales*; SEP, *¿Ha fracasado el indigenismo?*; SEP, *Organismos*; SEP, *Política educativa*.

¹⁰ Personal interview, 22 September 2012.

¹¹ As Hernández jokingly narrates, the first Catholic priests and missionaries in the region asked community members their names. Upon hearing Nahuatl names, the priests proclaimed, “Your name is not *Cuauhquemoc*. It is Hernández. Oh, and you, your name is not *Citlalmína*. No way! It is María Hernández.”

¹² Some critics view *Xokoyotzin* as an appeal to a Pre-Columbian past with Nezahualcōyotl or Moctezuma Xokoyotzin (hence the accusations of “Nezahualcōyotl wanna-be” mentioned at the beginning of this chapter), but this is contemporary. Even in present-day Central Mexican Spanish, *xokoyotzin* denotes the youngest of the family.

¹³ In personal interview, 31 August 2012. Hernández also speaks of this intuitive process in *De la exclusión al diálogo intercultural con los pueblos indígenas*: “¿Por qué llamé *Sempoaloxchitl* a mis primeros 20

poemas? Dentro de la cultura náhuatl, la flor de *sempoalxochitl* simboliza la vida y la muerte. Es una flor que está presente en toda nuestra existencia: en los nacimientos, en los casamientos, en las defunciones; en la fiesta de todos santos o día de muertos; en las ceremonias al maíz: cuando sembramos, cuando hay elotes, cuando cosechamos; también en las ceremonia de petición de lluvia que denominamos *chicomexóchitl*, que significa ‘siete flores,’ ceremonia tradicional que se lleva a cabo en los cerros para ofrendar a nuestros dioses. Por eso, **de manera intuitiva**, en los momentos más difíciles de mi vida recurrí al simbolismo de mi propia cultura para sobrevivir y no morir de angustia en la gran ciudad” (176, emphasis in bold mine).

¹⁴ There is a deep affective attachment to these ceremonies, in spite of centuries of persecution from various religious and political factions both within and without the community. This attachment can in part be attributed to the history behind these practices. *Chicomexochitl* (Seven Flower) figures represent maize and are one of the most prominent symbols in Nahua ceremonies. As elders in the community describe, the sacred *Chicomexochitl* returned during a drought in the 1940s or 1950s. Nahuas earlier had abandoned these corn ceremonies and thus had incurred a dearth. Neighboring Ñāhñus reintroduced the ceremony and a successful crop resurged. Hernández grew up with these rituals and describes them as key in the development of his worldviews.

¹⁵ Personal interview, 31 August 2012.

¹⁶ Personal interview, 31 August 2012.

¹⁷ For more information on *campesino* uprisings in the Huasteca during this period, see Frans J. Schryer, *Ethnicity and Class Conflict in Rural Mexico*.

¹⁸ Personal interview, 31 August 2012.

¹⁹ Personal interview, 31 August 2012.

²⁰ This is an aspect common to most contemporary Nahua cultural production. Authors cite influences that vary from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) to Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quijote* (1610; 1615). Such a view is especially evident in Natalio Hernández’s and Ildefonso Maya’s appropriation of Catholicism. Instead of attempting to return to pre-contact practices and far from stereotypes that misrepresent them as isolated, Nahua artists interact in a wide network of cultural production and do not restrict themselves to works deemed “Indigenous.”

²¹ Hernández’s copy in Spanish was published in 1972 with the title *Un mundo feliz*.

²² Beginning in the late 1950s and 1960s appear the beginnings of this surge in Nahua studies. In 1959, Miguel León Portilla and Ángel María Garibay founded the journal that continues to the present, *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl*. They helped initiate the recovery and translations of dozens of documents from the colonial period, within publications such as from Garibay, *Historia de la literatura náhuatl* (1953-1954), *Veinte himnos sacros de los nahuas* (1958), and *Poesía náhuatl* (1964-1967), and from Miguel León Portilla, *La filosofía náhuatl estudiada en sus fuentes* (1956), *Visión de los vencidos* (1959), and *Los antiguos mexicanos a través de sus crónicas y cantares* (1961).

²³ While *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl* has made great strides in bringing attention to contemporary Nahua cultural production, the emphasis by far and large is on Pre-Columbian and colonial studies. This can be seen in the most recent issue, in which all articles address the seventeenth century and prior. See *Estudios de cultura náhuatl*, vol. 47 (2014). Within the last five years, the earliest document they have shared is an nineteenth-century poem from Manuel Altamirano. See *Estudios de cultura náhuatl*, vol. 45.

²⁴ See León Portilla, *Yancuic tlahtolli: La nueva palabra*.

²⁵ See Garibay, *Poesía indígena de la altiplanicie* (1940) and *Poesía náhuatl* (1964-1968); León Portilla, *Visión de los vencidos* (1959), *Los antiguos mexicanos, a través de sus crónicas y cantares* (1961), *Trece poetas del mundo azteca* (1967), *Quince poetas del mundo náhuatl* (1994).

²⁶ See *Antología de la poesía mejicana* (1975); *Omnibus de poesía mexicana* (1980)

²⁷ Consultation of Natalio Hernández’s home library. 30 August 2012.

²⁸ These ceremonial aspects are based on first-hand participation while I conducted research in Natalio Hernández’s hometown, Lomas del Dorado, for two years. There are also sources that touch upon these elements, though often with unique differences from communities near Lomas del Dorado. For additional discussion on the elements of these ceremonies, see Alan Sandstrom, *Corn Is Our Blood* and Arturo Gómez Martínez, *Tlanetokilli: La espiritualidad de los nahuas chicontepecanos*.

²⁹ In Colonial New Spain, *mestizo* (literally “mixed”) referred specifically, within an elaborate system of *castas*, to the children of “español con india” (Spaniards with Indigenous women). The term carried negative connotations, as their fathers did not recognize many of these children. Particularly in the twentieth century, with the Mexican Revolution, *mestizo* became a flagship for Mexican national discourse and a symbol of an imminent national unity through miscegenation. Nonetheless, as seen in the works of intellectuals from this period, such as José Vasconcelos, this *mestizaje*, though recognizing a distant Indigenous heritage, still privileged (and privileges) whiteness as the rational side within the ideal *mestizo* (akin to “Mexican” under this logic) citizen. For an exceptional study of *mestizo* construction within nineteenth and twentieth century Mexico, see Joshua Lund, *The Mestizo State: Reading Race in Modern Mexico*. The Spanish term *Ladino* originates from the Roman conquest and designated natives who could speak Latin. In the sixteenth century, *ladino* could refer to someone who spoke Spanish (Castilian) as a second language (“Ladino,” *Encyclopedia of Latin America*). A *ladino* was also an Indigenous scribe who learned Latin in order to work at the behest of a local priest. Similar to *mestizo*, *ladino* began to refer to people of mixed race, with a privileging of whiteness. As Arturo Arias observes in Guatemala, applicable also to Mexico, “Ladinos, . . . regardless of their ancestry, generally consider themselves ‘white,’ are proud of their European origins, frequently deny that they have any Indigenous blood in their ancestry, and invariably consider themselves Western in outlook” (“Constructing Ethnic Bodies”). In the Huasteca, *mestizo* and *ladino* are interchangeable and both privilege whiteness (evident in *Xochikoskatl* with Hernández’s translation of the same term *coyotl* as *mestizo*, *ladino*, and *blanco* [white]).

³⁰ In spite of numerous attempts within the last decades to standardize Nahuatl orthography, a majority of Nahuas has not come to a conclusive agreement. In *Xochikoskatl*, Hernández used a system agreed to in 1973 by a group of Nahua professionals (OPINAC) in which the graphemes *c*, *q*, *z*, *h*, and *ll* are eliminated in favor of *k*, *s*, *j*, and *l*. Within this paper, direct citations of the text keep this orthography (“sempoalxochitl” for *cempohualxochitl* [twenty flower]; “ueuetlajtoli” for *huehuehlahtolli* [wise words]). Nonetheless, outside of direct citations I use the orthography promulgated by the Nahuatl Institute at IDIEZ, University of Zacatecas. Nahua researchers have tested successfully this system of graphemes in the first monolingual Nahuatl dictionary soon to be published by IDIEZ through the University of Warsaw Revitalizing Endangered Languages Project. Inspired by the alphabets used in Nahua literature from the colonial period, this writing system makes more evident the continuity between Classical Nahuatl and present-day texts. Rather than privilege this writing system, my principal aim in standardizing the orthography outside of direct citations is to increase readability and consistency in analyzing the works of Nahua authors who each use her or his preferred orthography.

³¹ The term intellectual is a problematic term that tends to privilege cognition over emotions. Also, use of the word implies that there are people, generally the “popular masses,” who are not intellectuals. According to such a framework, “intellectuals” constitute a small elite class set apart for their superior ideas. The Community of Mapuche History criticizes this hierarchy in its rejection of an *intelligentsia* “de tipo elitista” and of rationalism that sees intellectual work as apart from the body, the heart, spirit, and social life (Nahuelpan Moreno 20). With the use of words such as *filosofía*, Hernández seeks to deconstruct such an *intelligentsia* and affirm that Nahua knowledge production lies in heterarchical relation to “Western” thought. For further discussion on this topic, see also Freya Schiwy, “Indigenous Media and the End of the Lettered City.”

³² This shift is indicative of his later books in which the explicit protest found particularly in the section *Sempoalxochitl* is absent. Understanding Hernández’s first poems is essential to comprehending his later poetic production, especially, as analyzed in greater detail in chapter three, in relation to the current criticism he receives from the younger generation of Nahua authors for not openly denouncing plights within Indigenous communities.

³³ Unless indicated otherwise, all translations from Nahuatl are the author’s.

³⁴ This continuity and also the questioning of continuities will be explored more within the analysis of *Xochikoskatl*.

³⁵ For exceptional discussions of the importance of storytelling in Native American and Indigenous literatures, see Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places* and Lisa Brooks, *The Common Pot*.

³⁶ The reader will note that the orthography used for words such as *xochitlatzotzontli* (flowered music) do not match directly cited text (*xochitlatsontsontli*; *huehuetlacameh* instead of *ueuetlakamej* [wise people]; *cempohualxochitl* instead of *sempoalxochitl* [twenty flower]). As explained in note 15, in this essay I use a writing system proposed by IDIEZ. This orthography, though not without its disadvantages, functions well across different regional variants of Nahuatl. I do not use this orthography to discount other writing systems, but rather to help bring consistency to the spelling apart from direct quotations. Spelling within *Xochikoskatl* itself is not always consistent. Hernández later changed his orthography in the 1990s to one that closely resembles the orthography used by IDIEZ (one in which he writes *xochitlatzotzontli* and not *xochitlatsontsontli*). As shall be seen throughout this study, each author has her or his preferred systems of spelling. Nahua playwright Ildefonso Maya even went to so far as to create his own system of hieroglyphs to write the language.

³⁷ I thank John Sullivan for this observation.

³⁸ One can see this continuity especially in parallel structures and repetitions, as in “Xopancuicatl otoncuicatl tlamelauhcayotl”: “**oncan** ahuachtonameyoquiauhimani, / **oncan** cuicuica in nepapan tlaçototome, / **oncuicatl**ça in coyoltototl” (“**where there** is rain with shining dew, / **where** a various precious birds sing continually, / **toward there** the *coyoltototl* throws his songs”; León Portilla, *Cantares mexicanos*, 22, emphasis mine).

³⁹ For another example that Natalio Hernández himself gives from ceremonial language in Zongolican, Veracruz, see Hernández, “Presencia contemporánea de los nahuas,” 54.

⁴⁰ Such reiterations, common to Mesoamerican literature, sometimes receive criticism as simplistic. Because of this misreading, it is not unusual for people to ask Indigenous authors if their literature is for children. For an account of renowned K’iche poet Humberto Ak’abal being asked if his poetry is for children, see Rogachevsky 24.

⁴¹ *Tepetl* in Nahuatl refers to both “hills” and “mountains.”

⁴² Nahua researcher Victoriano de la Cruz highlighted the importance of planting four types of corn in his presentation “*Nicpehpenaz cintzin*: Raising the Corn Constitutes Raising the Spirit,” given at NAISA 2012. *Itonal* signifies both *soul* and *shadow*. The root of the word *tonal*, relates to the light and heat emanated from the sun, *tona*. This connection with the sun is indicative of the alternate meaning of *itonal*, his shadow. Someone with no shadow has no soul, in essence has distanced himself from sunlit landscape and corn, which receives its life giving power from the sun.

⁴³ Personal interview, 31 August 2012.

⁴⁴ For a more in depth analysis of the *Chicomexochitl* ceremony, see Sandstrom, *Corn Is Our Blood*, chapter 6.

⁴⁵ In the brilliant theatrical work *Ixtlamatinij* (The Wise Ones), Nahua playwright Ildefonso Maya similarly displays this contrast between the traditional clothes of the community and those of the city.

⁴⁶ Armando Hernández, Nahua teacher from *Tepeco*, proposed the following translation for “Pienso luego soy” (I think therefore I am), after explaining the importance of that intimate relationship with nature: “Achtohui nimoyolmati, huan teipan nicmati nican niitztoc” (“First I know with my heart, and then I know that I am here”). *Nimoyolmati*, composed of *yol-* (heart) and *mati* (to know), reflects the affective intelligence in which thoughts and feeling are conjugated, which is analyzed later on in this chapter.

⁴⁷ See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*; Erin Manning, *Politics of Touch*; George E. Marcus, *Affective Intelligence and Political Judgment*; Harold Napoleon, *Yuuyaraq: The Way of the Human Being*.

⁴⁸ *Castellanización* refers to SEP and INI educational programs that sought to assimilate Indigenous youth into the “national” Spanish language and the use of undesirable Indigenous “dialects” served only as a medium to this end. Even though the term gradually fell out of use in the 1970s, the concept remained strong and pervades even to the present.

⁴⁹ Personal interview, 31 August 2012.

⁵⁰ For a more in-depth analysis of these agrarian struggles, see Frans J. Schryer, “Ethnicity and Class Conflict in Rural Mexico.” Such Indigenous resistance had a considerable influence on Hernández, and, as he explains, his support for them in part provoked his transfer as Regional Director of bilingual education over Hidalgo in the seventies to Mexico City. His backing of these agrarian struggles also intensified his frustration while working as Deputy Director of Bilingual Education at SEP from 1978 to 1989, as he felt

that government bureaucracy prevented him from making meaningful and enduring changes on behalf of these Indigenous movements. Personal interview, 31 August 2012.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Quoted in Jiménez, “Las palabras indio e indígena.”

⁵⁴ Later *letrado* would come to refer to Latin American intellectuals and excluded Indigenous peoples not only from their legal rights but also knowledge production itself. For a greater discussion of this topic, in addition to Ángel Rama’s *La ciudad letrada* (1984), and the varied meanings of *letrado*, see David Rojinsky, “The Violence of the *letrados*” from *Companion to Empire: A Genealogy of the Written Word in Spain and New Spain*.

⁵⁵ See Louise M. Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth: Nahuatl-Christian Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico*, 6-7.

⁵⁶ See James Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries*.

⁵⁷ *Nepantlah*, used in colonial-era documents to refer to an in-betweenness theorized by Gloria Anzaldúa, apparently has a short *a*, *nepantlah*, while the *nepāntlah* that refers to the border between fields has a long *a* like *pāmitl* (furrow) to refer to a division or furrows in the field. Nevertheless, *nepāntlah* and *pāmitl* as metaphors parallel closely with the in-betweenness of Anzaldúa’s *nepantlah*.

⁵⁸ It is interesting to contrast the adoption by Walter Mignolo of the abstract term *nepantlah* that appears in colonial documents (even employing it as the name for a journal he edited), with *nepāntlah* and *ōme pāmitl*, terms that are contemporary and tied to the landscape. Similar to the tangibility of the concept of *coyotl* (coyote) vs. coloniality, contemporary metaphors centered on *pāmitl* are rooted more in everyday experiences and, as such, arguably elicit a greater affective response.

⁵⁹ Personal interview, 31 August 2012.

⁶⁰ Alonso de Molina defines this word as “crianza o tutoría tal” (f. 166r. col. 1).

⁶¹ While I was staying in the community of Lomas in summer 2012, Armando Hernández, a bilingual primary teacher from the area, asked Natalio Hernández why the same ceremonies had to be performed each year. Natalio Hernández responded that each year was a new cycle, and that these same ceremonies needed to be performed in order to face what the year had in store.

⁶² Nahuatl researchers from the eighties also make this point, evident in Nahuatl researcher Rosa Reyes Martínez’s 1982 study *La comunidad indígena de Tlacolula, Veracruz*, with her descriptions of the city as a place where Indigenous people often “desarrollan actividades más bajo que puede haber en una ciudad, llena de contaminación y con un sueldo más bajo” (“perform the worst jobs that there can be in a city, full of contamination and with the lowest wages”; 102).

⁶³ Traditional anthropological studies tend to focus on a false notion of Indigenous peoples’ lack of mobility and unshakeable locality. Such studies freeze Indigenous communities both temporally and geographically. Contrary to this pigeonholing, Nahuatl recognize fluidity but also consider place to be of great significance. This validation of physical geography is something that the migrant brings with her or him and does not apply solely within her or his originary community. By “traditional anthropology” I refer to an approach that posits Indigenous peoples as mere informants and not as knowledge producers on equal terms with the researcher. Though arguably less so today, this perspective is still prevalent and can be seen in the attitude that, even if modern knowledge production is recognized within Indigenous communities, they are incapable of consciously understanding and analyzing it themselves. Kirsten Hastrup expresses this polemical view in *A Passage to Anthropology* (1995) when she distinguishes between the “implicit Indigenous knowledge” and the “external and explicit comprehension” of expert anthropologists (56). There have been significant challenges to these traditional approaches, particularly with the famed “The Magnificent Seven” and their publication of *De eso que llaman la antropología* (1970) and subsequent movements toward activist anthropology. Nonetheless, the predominant paradigm within anthropology still tends to be one in which the researcher searches out “informants” and contrasts their “outlying practices” with the “norm” of modernity and the nation-state. For more details surrounding this perspective and critiques of it, see Hale, “Unfinished Conversations.”

⁶⁴ Indigenous migrant organizations formed within Mexico City, such as the Organization of Nahua Indigenous Professionals Civil Association (OPINAC), and other urban contexts evidence the forging of this representative space.

⁶⁵ *Coyote* and *coyotaje* possibly originate in Nahuatl, as Nahua migrants crossing the U.S.-Mexican border were often at the hands of abusive “whites and *mestizos*” who self-interestedly herded people like livestock in exchange for excessive sums of money. David Spener suggests this connection in tracing the genealogy of border crossing lexicon: “. . . *coyote* remains the colloquial term most widely used by Mexicans to refer to those who facilitate the clandestine passage of migrants. This is not surprising, given that the coyote has been a prominent figure in Mexican mythology, folklore, and popular culture since before the Spanish conquest” (85).

⁶⁶ *Nahuatla* (to govern/direct) has a short *a* whereas *nāhuatl* (to speak Nahuatl) has a long *a*. Nonetheless, in script their roots are written the same.

⁶⁷ Nahua researcher Joaquín Romualdo Hernández, in his 1982 study *Relaciones políticas entre indígenas y mestizos en Xochiatipan, Hgo.*, highlights this false dichotomy in the labels that coyotes attempt to assign *macehualli* (peasant farmer/Nahua/Indigenous) and *indio* (Indian): “. . . he lacks elegant clothing, whiteness, money, a good house, good food, shoes, transportation to take his harvest home and to the market, beds above the floor, cigarettes to smoke, Spanish language, organization in work, politics, economy and religion similar to that of the *mestizo*” (156). Original in Spanish: “carece de vestuario elegante, color blanco, dinero, casa buena, alimentación buena, zapatos, medios de transporte para acarrerar sus cosechas a su domicilio y al mercado, camas para dormir en alto, cigarros para fumar, una lengua española, organización en el trabajo, política, económica y religiosa semejante al del mestizo.”

⁶⁸ In numerous personal interviews conducted from 2012 to 2013 with individuals from Hernández’s home community as well as Hernández himself, *pinahua* repeatedly emerged as the term used to describe why people avoided using Nahuatl.

⁶⁹ The endonym *mexicanoh* is more common among Nahuas, and there are Nahuas who enter urban universities unaware that they speak “Nahuatl.” Hernández tells the story of a governor asking a Nahua leader if his people considered themselves Mexican. The leader responded that of course they did, rather *mestizos* were the one who were not truly Mexican. See Natalio Hernández, *De la exclusión al diálogo intercultural con los pueblos indígenas*, 59-60.

⁷⁰ For a greater analysis of terms of resistance such as *toindioma* against *dialecto* and *indialecto*, see Flores Farfán, “Efectos del contacto nahuatl-español.”

⁷¹ I thank Arturo Arias for this observation.

⁷² This is apparent in Hernández’s translation of Article 27 of the Constitution: “La propiedad de las tierras y aguas comprendidas dentro de los límites del territorio nacional, corresponde originariamente a la Nación, la cual ha tenido el derecho de transmitir el dominio de ellas a los particulares, constituyendo la propiedad privada” (18). Hernández translates *Nación* as *totlalnanzin* (“our earth mother” or “mother earth”): “In axcayotl tlali ihuan atl mani ipan iitihco anahuac tlaltipactli, achtohui iaxca totlalnanzin, tlen yehua mopialihtoc ihuan quipia itechpohui quinmactilis san tlacameh, tlen ica mochihuas sentlapiali” (“Property over land and water lying within the land of *anahuac*, first is property of our mother earth, who has the right to confer them to men, with which is created all ownership”; 49).

⁷³ John Sullivan explores how Indigenous peoples appropriated this “nomad threat” discourse to argue against ill treatment at the hands of Spaniards that might cause them to flee into the woods. See Sullivan, “Un diálogo sobre la congregación en Tlaxcala.” It is interesting to note the great irony of this discourse from the Indigenous point of view, as the Spaniards were the ones destructively wandering around like nomads far from their homes.

⁷⁴ In speaking about commonalities among Indigenous epistemologies throughout the United States, Brian Yazzie Burkhart emphasizes lived knowledges (also referred to as *non-propositional* knowledges). This view is radical in its questioning of what is traditionally considered philosophy by the West. See Burkhart, “What Coyote and Thales Can Teach Us.”

⁷⁵ The number seven connotes genesis in most Mesoamerican cultures. For example, in the *Popol wuj*, one of the twin brothers is Seven Junajpu.

⁷⁶ Original in Spanish: “pasado, pero no cualquier visión de pasado; más bien, ‘pasado-como-futuro,’ es decir, como una renovación del tiempo-espacio. Un pasado capaz de renovar el futuro, de revertir la situación vivida.”

⁷⁷ Joel Martínez Hernández and other Nahua researchers from the eighties also emphasize this veneration of ancestors in relation to classroom education: “As such, elders should be taken into account; because they possess many knowledges that operate in the student’s formation” (16). Original in Spanish: “Para tal virtud se deben tomar en cuenta los ancianos; porque son ellos los que tienen muchos conocimientos que sirven para la formación del educado.”

⁷⁸ As stated at the beginning of the chapter, within Aldous Huxley’s futurist novel, the fictional character John, labeled “the Savage,” is removed from one of the few remaining Native American reservations, preserved as voyeuristic honeymoon destinations, and transported to a so-called “civilized” society of upper class Alphas. This society, under the rule of a mysterious Controller, classifies and quantifies people like merchandise and machines. Resembling a colonial system, each social class is strictly associated with certain jobs and conditioned for them by a series of slogans directed by the Controller. John, reduced to spectacle in a reality television-like entertainment for the society, feels alienated and, at the novel’s end, commits suicide upon finding himself unable to escape this gaze.

⁷⁹ Nahua researcher Agustín Reyes Antonio, in his 1982 study *Plantas y medicina nawa en Matlapa indígena*, also makes this distinction between coyote “civilization” where elders represent nuisance and Indigenous cultures where she or he “is the guide, is the one who has the words from his or her experiences for political and ideological ends of the community” (168). Original in Spanish: “es el guía, es el que tiene la palabra por su experiencia para los fines políticos, ideológicos de la comunidad.”

⁸⁰ *Difrasismo*, a term coined by Ángel María Garibay, “consists in pairing up two metaphors that, together, serve as the symbolic medium to express a single thought” (“consiste en aparear dos metáfora que, juntas, dan el simbólico medio de expresar un solo pensamiento”; Garibay 19). *In xochitl, in cuicatl* (flower and song) is one of the most well known difrasismos in Nahuatl and the pairing of flower and song evokes the idea of ceremonial music and art.

⁸¹ Such a position represents a stark contrast with the approach of the Secretary of Public Education (SEP) and National Indigenista Institute (INI). While the Indigenous subject views them as an integral part of her or his rationality and health, the *mestizo/blanco* (white) treats the rituals and spirituality of Indigenous communities as exotic and irrational.

⁸² In “Stratification by Skin Color in Contemporary Mexico,” Andrés Villareal gives overwhelming statistical data confirming this privileging of whiteness. He concludes that “dark-brown individuals” have “50.9 percent lower odds than whites of being affluent” (19).

⁸³ This emphasis on *philosophy* is highly influenced by the work of Miguel León Portilla, who is a close friend of Hernández. Upon presenting his dissertation *Filosofía náhuatl* in 1956, León Portilla stated that the idea that “the Nahuas had developed philosophical thought seemed to some an insane suggestion” (“Kalman Silvert Award,” 4). León Portilla defines *philosophy* as a “human inquietude, fruit of admiration and doubt, that impels one to ask and inquire rationally regarding the origin, being, and the destiny of the world and man” (*Filosofía náhuatl*, 4). In the process of writing *Xochikoskatl*, Hernández had read this text and more so the primary documents that León Portilla analyzes. Where Hernández differs profoundly with León Portilla is in correlating the practices found in these colonial Nahuatl documents with present-day practices.

⁸⁴ Personal interview, 31 August 2012.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Carlos Montemayor was a key promoter of literary production in Indigenous languages and a close friend of Natalio Hernández beginning in the 1990s. He edited the anthology *La voz profunda* (2004) and co-edited with Donald Frischmann the anthology *Words of the True People* (2007). Interestingly, in personal interviews with other Indigenous authors, the authors also mentioned that Montemayor had made similar criticism of their works as being excessively “local” and not “universal.”

⁸⁷ Personal interview, 26 August 2012.

⁸⁸ Brigitte Bonisch-Brednich problematizes *community* for the baggage it carries “from past academic frameworks” and “suffers from the same pitfalls and ideas that locality is constructed,” placing them on the

periphery (5-6). Within in this old framework, researchers “praise the little community and strip it of its history” (5).

⁸⁹ The etymology of *altepetl* itself connotes a proximate relationship with the landscape, composed of *atl* / water and *tepetl* / hill, mountain. *Chinanco* is also deep-seated in the landscape and derives from the term *chinamitl*, a piece of land set off by a fence of cornstalks or canes and from which the famous *chinampas* (land plots constructed on the lake surrounding Tenochtitlan) also derive their name. These significations of *altepetl* and *chinanco* provincialize residents of Mexico City, as they have alienated themselves from the landscape and hence are the ones who lack a properly organized metropolis. Urbanites bury hills under home construction, even though people are not supposed to construct on mounts, let alone completely bury them under homes and streets. Nahuas reserve the ascension of a sacred hill for ceremonies.

Chapter 2. Beyond the Exotic Displays of the *Indio*: The Power and Aesthetics of Ritual in Ildefonso Maya's *Ixtlamatinij*

During an interview in 2010, Nahua playwright Ildefonso Maya (1936-2011) presaged, “Los puristas van a llevar el náhuatl a la extinción” (“The purists will drive Nahuatl to extinction”).¹ By *puristas*, he meant Nahua authors who eschew loan words from Spanish or other foreign languages. These authors see fit to correct even native speakers—to say *cahuítl* instead of *horah* (hour), *moillia* and not *pensaroa* (to think), *tepoztlahcuiloloni* rather than *computadora* (computer). Such censure leads many to feel that their own Nahuatl is somehow deficient, and they become increasingly less willing to speak it. After our conversation, I thanked Maya for his time and said farewell with the common *hazta moztla* (until tomorrow). *Hasta* (until), a loan word from Spanish, has become lexicalized, especially in *hazta moztla*, to the extent that monolingual speakers of Nahuatl are unaware of its origin. Maya corrected me: “No se dice *hazta moztla*. *Hazta* no es náhuatl. Se dice *moztlayoc*” (“You don’t say *hasta moztla*. *Hasta* isn’t a Nahuatl word. You need to say *moztlayoc*.”).

I share this anecdote because it is revealing of the “first generation” of contemporary Nahua authors²—the *puristas* Maya criticizes. While these writers have heated debates with one another, they share an avid concern for cultural practices and language revitalization. Members of this group espouse different views about defending those practices, as highlighted by Maya’s comment. He is one of few writers from the first generation who uses conspicuous loan words from Spanish, and his play *Ixtlamatinij* (The Wise Ones)³ (1987) uses an abundance of them. Maya imitates speech from present-

day Huastecan communities, loan words and all. Nonetheless, with his insistence that I say *moztlayoc* instead of *hazta moztla*, Maya showed that he was perhaps not so far removed from the affinities of “purista” authors—at least when it came to interacting with a *chontaltlacatl* (foreigner / invalid)⁴ from Texas.

The younger generation of Nahua writers would also group Maya with the first generation authors he himself criticizes because of his emphasis of cultural practices. As shall be explored in this chapter and the following, older authors cannot be reduced to *culturalistas* nor younger authors to *populares*. They contend with one another—as well as among writers of their own generation—but at the same time they share numerous affinities in their efforts to defend both Nahua cultural and political rights. Their separation along the lines of culture and political struggles is based more on degree of emphasis of these approaches than an absence of cultural practices or explicit social demands within their works. Both generations of authors are equally innovative in their strategies for cultural and political demands. Focus on cultural practices seeks to change the political context in which those with positions of power discount Nahua perspectives, and in turn an emphasis on political struggles carries with it the demand that Nahua perspectives be taken seriously.

In this chapter and the following, I argue that first generation Nahua authors use their literary production to repudiate folkloric and exotic displays of their cultural practices within national discourse. Their texts focus on these practices as sources of valid alternative epistemes and complex worldviews, contrasted with *gente de razón* (“people of reason”) or *mestizos* who represent themselves as the inevitable norm to

which everyone must aspire. Education, language, clothing, and ritual—the battlegrounds upon which *mestizos* assert an inherent superiority—are crucial elements within the works of the authors analyzed in denouncing everyday racism targeted against Nahuas.

The present chapter begins with an overview of who constitutes the first generation, detailing the advantages and disadvantages of grouping together such a diverse community of writers. Beginning with the section “Putting the *Ix* back in *Ixtlamatinij*: Epistemes in Nahua Ritual and Educational Spaces,” this chapter explores Idefonso Maya’s *Ixtlamatinij* (The Wise Ones) and offers an “observant reading” of hybrid Nahuatl-Spanish wordplay and references to ritual. I analyze how Maya uses education, language, dress, and respect for elders to comment on the deficiencies of government educational programs in Indigenous communities.

The concept of “observant reading” is inspired by the Nahuatl words *tlachiya* (to observe) and *tlachiyaliztli* (observance).⁵ Observation is a key aspect to Nahua approaches, as especially evidenced in this chapter with words such as *ixtlamatiliztli* (knowledge gained with the face) and other related terms that emphasize personal experience. *Tlachiya* connotes the importance of closely looking at fields and surroundings in general. When a child opens his eyes for the first time, the verb *tlachiya* describes an awakening of a conscientious subjectivity that includes watching and learning from surroundings. I use this term for a careful analysis of the play *Ixtlamatinij* to emphasize a particular approach in which an encounter with a text should be an intimate personal experience.⁶ These visual-textual encounters relate to Aymara intellectual Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui’s concept of *sociología de la imagen* (sociology of

the image), which challenges the privileged status of the written word. Cusicanqui attests that under colonialism “las palabras no designan, sino encubren” (“words do not designate, they conceal”), as colonial powers attempt to discount the personal lived experiences of marginalized subjects and forge an esoteric language full of “dobles sentidos, sentidos tácitos, convenciones del habla que esconden una serie de sobreentendidos que orientan las prácticas, pero a la vez divorcian a la acción de la palabra pública” (“double meanings, tacit meanings, conventions of speech that hide a series of implied messages that influence customs, but at the same time divorce action from public discourse”; 20). Such entangled language poses a discussion in which Indigenous subjects supposedly cannot participate and their own texts—a wider view of what constitutes a text including the visual—are figured as “folklore” instead of intellectual production.

Cusicanqui argues for “una metodología y una práctica pedagógica” (a methodology and a pedagogical practice) that transits between the image and the word to “cerrar las brechas entre el castellano standard-culto y los modos coloquiales del habla, entre la experiencia vivencial y visual de estudiantes—en su mayoría migrantes y de origen aymara o qhichwa—y sus traspies al expresar sus ideas en un castellano académico” (“close the gaps between standard-highbrow Spanish and colloquial forms of speech, between lived visual experience of students—the majority of them migrants and of Aymara or Qhichwa origin—and their missteps when expressing their ideas in academic Spanish”; 21). This methodology and *tlachiyá* (to observe) can be applied to

the reading of a text that *views* it as part of a larger, vivid context related to actions and lived experiences.

An observant reading pays close heed to an array of elements in this expansive context, and at the same time gives detailed attention to structure and language. I use “observant reading” in strict contrast with the connotations of the more common term “close reading.” As Terry Eagleton describes, New Criticism with “close readings” attempted to set “Literature” apart from daily experience, “plucked free from the wreckage of history and hoisted into a sublime space above it” (42). Divorced from social implications, this “objective” approach led to “‘disinterestedness,’ a serene, speculative, impeccably even-handed rejection of anything in particular” (43). Conversely, observant readings pay close attention to the language of a work while reading it in relation to the context in which it is created, performed, and read. Cusicanqui centers the experience of migration in her explanation of “sociology of the image,” and *ixtlamatiliztli* and *tlachiyaliztli* bring the experience of deracination to the forefront—closely observing *with the eyes* the different meanings that arise and collide from the transit through multiple spaces and becomings.

Who Constitutes the “First Generation of Authors”?

First generation Nahua authors share five main characteristics: 1. a perceived focus on cultural practices; 2. experience as bilingual professors for the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) or else as teachers of their own informal classes for Nahuatl language revitalization; 3. participation in the Organization of Nahua Indigenous Professionals Civil Association (OPINAC), the Nahua Studies cohort at Universidad

Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), and/or House of Indigenous Writers (ELIAC);
4. migration to urban areas by the seventies and eighties; and 5. date of birth before 1968.

Authors who belong to this generation include José Concepción Flores Arce (1930–2012) (Milpa Alta); Ildefonso Maya (1936–2012) (Huasteca Veracruzana/Hidalguense); Severo Hernández (1945–) (Huasteca Veracruzana/Hidalguense); Natalio Hernández (1947–) (Huasteca Veracruzana); Librado Silva Galeana (1942–) (Milpa Alta); Eustaquio Celestino Solís (1950–) (Xalitla, Guerrero); Juan Hernández Ramírez (1951–) (Huasteca Veracruzana); Matías Marcos Alonso (1956–) (Guerrero); 3 (1957–) (Northern Puebla); Pedro Martínez Escamilla (1966–) (Huasteca Hidalguense); Crispín Amador Ramírez (1965–) (Huasteca Hidalguense); Isaías Bello Pérez (Tlaxcala), Alfredo Ramírez Celestino (Guerrero); and Delfino Hernández (Huasteca Veracruzana).

All these authors migrated to cities. For example, Natalio Hernández resides in Mexico City, Juan Hernández Ramírez in Xalapa, Alberto Becerril Cipriano in Zacapoaxtla, Crispín Amador Ramírez in Toluca, and Ildefonso Maya lived in Huejutla de los Reyes. Even authors from Milpa Alta, a municipality near Mexico City, have spent extended periods in the Distrito Federal during attempts to disseminate their works. Migration is key in relation to the present study as a whole and functions as a mediator in the articulation of Nahua knowledge. Many of the authors moved to cities to receive training as teachers for SEP and then served in multiple areas throughout Mexico. This experience in urban centers not only helped open doors to publishing houses, but also made authors readily aware of knowledge production from their own communities.

Publication in turn became a means to defend cultural practices linked to philosophies centered on affective intelligence and reciprocity.

Nahua authors' first venue for publication in the seventies was through UNAM's *Estudios de cultura náhuatl*, beginning particularly in 1978 with short pieces.⁷ Many of these writers already knew one another through participation in OPINAC that same decade. Natalio Hernández along with other Indigenous authors sought to secure their own spaces for distribution of their works, and they pushed for government support to create ELIAC in 1993. All first-generation authors collaborated with either *Estudios de cultura náhuatl* or ELIAC, or in some cases both. There is a somewhat contentious relationship between UNAM's Nahuatl Studies and ELIAC. The principal collaborators at UNAM are from Milpa Alta, and, according to authors from surrounding regions, they tend to censure other Nahuatl variants.⁸ These corrections, such as saying *nictlazohitla* (I love) instead of *nicnequi* (a calque from Spanish *yo quiero* to signify "I love"), are often comparable to someone from England correcting an American for saying *pants* instead of *trousers*. Because of its arguably greater similarity with Nahuatl from Central Mexican colonial documents (the locus of UNAM's Nahuatl program), the Milpa Alta variant carries a prestige that has elicited tension with other variants (in spite of the fact that, fulfilling Maya's prediction, few speak the language there today).⁹ Those who participate in UNAM's program view ELIAC's literary production as more popular and removed from classical Nahuatl and academic rigor. Regardless of the organization with which a first-generation author affiliates himself, or if he straddles both, this contention over language reveals a shared concentration on cultural practices among these writers.

In personal interviews, these authors state that they “apuntan por lo cultural” (rely on the cultural approach) to signify that defense of cultural practices constitutes an effective strategy to battle general discrimination.¹⁰ Addressed in greater detail within chapter three, younger Nahua authors’ critique of the older generation for an overemphasis on culture at the cost of more active political organization and open protest reveals a key point of contention. This criticism might first surprise readers because of Natalio Hernández’s politically charged and confrontational poems in *Xochikoskatl*. His style changed dramatically after his first book, and the younger generation views Hernández and other authors as copouts participating in programs sponsored by the federal government such as Consejo Nacional para la Cultural y las Artes (CONACULTA).¹¹ Subsequent dependence on state funding and recognition, according to these younger authors, took the momentum out of a potentially revolutionary Nahua movement.

Younger authors view themselves as participants in movements and projects that seek to challenge social and economic inequalities and not in movements that are a vindication of culture for culture’s sake. Some of these writers have taken part in armed resistance movements and public protests.¹² Less centered on authenticity of cultural practices and purist preservation of language, they are more open to Nahua writers who do not speak Nahuatl and who openly criticize problems within Indigenous communities. In contrast, for the older generation, language is a determining factor of Nahua identity (language for the younger generation is still important but not imperative), and they tend to avoid addressing the inner conflicts within their communities in their works.

The first generation tends to view younger authors as immature, if not “locos.”¹³ When older authors began writing and participating in Nahua organizations in the seventies and eighties, they were also aggressive in their resistance to discrimination. In *Xochikoskatl*, Natalio Hernández has a confrontational attitude that he describes as one of *arco y flecha* (bow and arrow). With time, he came to consider that this was an ineffective strategy that reinforced stereotypes of Indigenous peoples as victims or rebels. After *Xochikoskatl*, he shifted his writing to emphasize interculturality.

It might seem incongruous that I highlight a respect for elders in the previous chapter, but then younger writers reveal a contentious attitude toward the first generation. They still treat these authors with respect (many recognizing Hernández as a harbinger of Indigenous literary production); however, at the same time, they criticize the older generation for distancing themselves from where the true elders reside—in Nahua communities where local *tlamatinih* (shamans) and *huehuehtlacameh* (wise elders) deal with dynamic and complex changes in the communities. The following chapter analyzes in greater detail this generational tension and the reaction of older authors. From the perspective of younger authors, the older generation has removed itself from this context to form distant Nahua elite in urban centers, even appropriating the language of shamans and wise elders to promote their own literary productions.¹⁴

There are pitfalls in generalizing the first generation of Nahua authors, particularly because this categorization can obscure the great diversity among them. Nonetheless, there are also distinct advantages to this approach. For one, this is the general perception among contemporary Nahua authors themselves. In research

conducted throughout Mexico since 2009, I have been told repeatedly that there are two generations of Nahua authors.¹⁵ While significant differences abound among these authors, one can speak of a pan-Nahua literary movement divided by generational tensions. Grouping an older generation of authors together also helps bring greater understanding to their influence on one another and the dialogue among them.

Putting the *Ix* Back in *Ixtlamatinij*: Epistemological Encounters in Nahua Ritual and Educational Spaces

The first time I met Ildefonso Maya in summer 2010 was awkward to say the least. My greeting of *piyali* (hello) at the front porch of his *tlapepecholli* (mud plastered) home in Huejutla, Hidalgo went unanswered. Perhaps this would have seemed normal if Maya had not been sitting directly in front of me on the porch, very still in his chair. He sized me up for a long, silent minute. When Maya realized I was not going away, he asked in an accusatory tone, “Who sent you?” I explained that our friend Natalio Hernández had recommended I visit him. He looked incredulous. I dialed Hernández on my cellphone and passed it to Maya, and they talked for about a minute greeting one another. After the call, Maya welcomed me into his home. We spent most of the next three days speaking about his literature, paintings, cultural programs, and the many experiences in his eventful life.

A beautiful depiction of Maya’s hometown in Veracruz, painted by him, stood propped up on the floor against a coffee table near where we sat. He explained that, months earlier, two foreigners had visited him to show off this painting of his. They had purchased it for a considerable sum. Maya informed the visitors the work had been stolen and demanded they return it. Their protests failed to overcome his determination—and

there lay the painting on the floor. It was evident that he was both used to foreigners and suspicious of them. He sought to defend his cultural practices and artistic creations from those who would attempt to mistreat them. Maya apparently was unconcerned with the economic value of his paintings, because dozens of works worth thousands of dollars lay scattered about his home.

I share my experience in meeting Maya to highlight that the first generation of Nahua authors, despite differences, worked closely together. Maya and Hernández were close colleagues and collaborated in the creation of ELIAC. I probably would have never had the opportunity to meet with Maya for such extended interviews if it had not been for Hernández's recommendation. Hernández recounted to me that in the mid-1990s, after the formation of ELIAC, Maya had told him that he had grown tired of life in Mexico City.¹⁶ He returned to Huejutla, Hidalgo, and cut off communication with other writers. When I met Maya, Hernández and he had not spoken for at least a decade. Maya, as he told in personal interviews, viewed the group of Nahua authors in Mexico City as an elite group withdrawn from their communities and decided to leave it. Their literature was not reaching communities. In many instances they used a synthetic, esoteric Nahuatl foreign to the variants within their own communities. According to Maya, these authors served a privileged non-Nahua audience within Mexico City—a readership drawn to this literary production because of its exotic appeal or ability to calm the conscious of readers who felt they were practicing interculturality by purchasing this literature, much like in the situation of his painting that the two foreigners had wanted to show off.

My experience with Maya also echoes a similar tension seen in the play *Ixtlamatinij* (The Wise Ones) (1987). In this work, a fictitious Nahua named Epitacio has received government training as a bilingual teacher and now seeks to destroy his own community's traditions. He proclaims himself the representative for modern progress and a bastion of reason for his "backward" hometown, which reflects a discourse that will be analyzed in detail within this chapter. In his own life, Maya had all too often seen researchers and educators enter Nahua communities and perform an unequal dynamic in which they constituted the "civilized" and Nahuas as objects of study and State developmentalist programs.

Given Maya's apprehensiveness toward academics, it is no surprise that he was wary of a *coyotl* (coyote) researcher from the United States. Education has constituted a battleground for Nahua authors—a field in which, notwithstanding discursive advances and constitutional promises, they have been losing ground.¹⁷ Educational programs, in particular "intercultural" programs that proclaim to defend traditional practices and Indigenous languages, are rapidly displacing Nahua cultural practices and language as "backward" and "pre-modern." In part, "interculturality," which proclaims equality among practices, eliminates the language because it treats Nahua knowledge production as "culture" and not knowledge, as "tradition" and not effective life strategies. Under this framework, Nahuatl begins to lose relevance in everyday life and becomes a relic of an exotic past. In the same vein of criticism Maya adheres to about *puristas*, language and cultural practices begin to become a question more of authenticity and purity rather than dynamism and negotiation of practices within the present.¹⁸

For Maya, *Ixtlamatinij* (The Wise Ones) serves as a medium to criticize the destruction of cultural practices, as theatrical performance brought the work to community audiences. The play takes place during *Ilhuitl* or *Xantolo* (Day of the Dead), presumably in 1986, the year before Maya completed the play. Though performed extensively in the Huasteca, this play was not published until 2007 in the trilingual anthology *Words of the True Peoples / Palabras de los seres verdaderos*, edited by Carlos Frischmann and Carlos Montemayor. Maya wrote two versions of the work, one in Nahuatl (in many cases a mix of Nahuatl and Spanish) and another mostly in Spanish.

This play helps put flesh and bones on a criticism that has existed up to the present toward bilingual, multicultural, and intercultural programs—in which the terms change but in which ultimately Indigenous peoples and their languages are depicted as deficient and a target of mockery. Particularly in the 1980s, the discourse changed, but the practices on the ground did not. Maya kept performing this play and criticizing the extant racism running throughout urban areas for the next two decades until his health no longer allowed him to travel.

Literary critic Diana Taylor argues that the rift between Indigenous knowledge production and Western epistemes lies not in the dichotomy of written and spoken word, “but between the *archive* of supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones) and the so-called ephemeral *repertoire* of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e. spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)” (19). She emphasizes the power of the “repertoire,” with its emphasis on continual change, to challenge the “archive,” which claims immutability (xviii-xx). Maya places on the stage the everyday performances of

ritual and social interactions to consider the importance of local knowledges within students' education. In contrast, supposedly superior government education is shown instead to consist of everyday practices—as repertoire—that senselessly try to displace any contrary perspectives. Through lyric poetry, as seen in the previous chapter, Natalio Hernández similarly questions a repertoire within poetry itself that attempts to relegate Indigenous peoples to a distant past, and also denounces similar rhetoric across political discourse.

This chapter's analysis of *Ixtlamatinij* begins with a brief literary review of those who have analyzed this play and Maya's work in general, followed by a short biography of Maya and description of the context surrounding *Ixtlamatinij*. In the section "Losing *Ixtli* (Face): Contrastive Epistemologies and Pedagogies in the Introduction to *Ixtlamatinij*," I study Maya's allusions to the face (*ixtli*, *ixayac*) and the implications of these references within the introduction. Most of my analysis focuses on the first act because the principle conflict occurs within it. The brief second act in turn represents a swift resolution. The section "Xantolo Offerings: Contrastive Rituals during the Days of the Dead in the First Act" explores the significance of ritual elements. I look at scenes one to three from the first act, paying close attention to the mention of faces and masks in Epitacio's conflictive encounters with ceremonial spaces. "De razón on: Language and Education in the First Act" offers an observant reading of references to language, their significance, and the complex wordplay throughout the performance—especially in *nahuañol* (like "Spanglish" but a mix of Nahuatl with Spanish) exchanges. Shameful and aggressive *coyotl* (coyote) language contrasts with reciprocity and respect as expressed in

the Nahuatl language. The following section, “The Uilinkij Teacher’s New Clothes: Significance of Dress in the First Act,” analyzes the significance of clothing and Epitacio’s conflation of dress with authority to produce knowledge. In “Epitacio and Cirilo Come Face to Face in the Seventh Scene,” I finish my examination of the first act by exploring the climax of the play in its seventh and final scene. The final observant reading, in “*Tlatlepaniliztli*: Respect for Elders in the Second Act,” considers *tlatlepanittaliztli* (respect) in the second act of *Ixtlamatinij*. I conclude the chapter remarking on the significance of the work and what it can teach regarding Nahua approaches to the experience of migration, violent encounters, and strategies against discrimination.

Previous Studies on Idefonso Maya and *Ixtlamatinij*

There are a limited number of studies on Maya and his literary production, and only two literary analyses of which I am aware. In “Peasants and the Law: A History of Land Tenure and Conflict in the Huasteca” (1986) and *Ethnicity and Class Conflict in Rural Mexico* (1990), sociologist Franz J. Schryer describes the conflict area in which Maya wrote and performed *Ixtlamatinij*. He argues that Maya exemplified an “Indian intellectual” who critiques the government but then benefits from the “indigenismo establishment” as an educated spokesman for Indigenous communities (255). According to Schryer, Maya served as a mediator between peasants and the government. While Maya criticized *mestizos* for their racism against Indigenous peoples, he also sought to dissuade radical peasants from armed uprisings. I will address Schryer’s observations further on in this same chapter.

Theatre scholar Adam Versényi, in “Translation as an Epistemological Paradigm for Theatre in the Americas” (2007), notes the palpable effect that the play *Ixtlamatinij* (The Wise Ones) and theatrical performances of Maya’s work in general had upon the Huasteca Hidalguense. After viewing a staging of *Ixtlamatinij* by secondary students, twenty distinguished guests spoke to the audience. All of them, now in positions of importance in the region, had acted in one of Maya’s plays and “credit Maya for inspiring their pride in traditional Huasteca cultural forms and for providing them with the self-confidence and dignity necessary to have achieved their current positions” (445). Schryer’s and Versényi’s studies help frame the context in which Maya produced *Ixtlamatinij*, but they do not offer readings of the play.

In the anthology containing *Ixtlamatinij*, entitled *Words of the True Peoples / Palabras de los seres verdaderos* (2007), literary critic Donald Frischmann offers an overview of the plot in relation to his personal interviews with Ildefonso Maya. Of particular interest for this study are Frischmann’s citations of Maya in which he describes the varying audience reactions to *Ixtlamatinij*. Like Versényi, such reactions underscore the power of this performance to elicit responses and reflection. Frischmann places Ildefonso Maya alongside Maya playwrights (forgive the redundancy) from Chiapas and Yucatán, and emphasizes how these works warn of self-destructive behaviors and seek to offer solutions toward harmony.

Kelly McDonough conducts an excellent analysis of *Ixtlamatinij*, the first and only in-depth examination of this play, in *The Learned Ones: Nahua Intellectuals in Postconquest Mexico* (2014). She argues that *Ixtlamatinij* represents an invective against

colonial practices that did not cease with nominal independence. At the same time, the play highlights a loci of Indigenous knowledges centered in ceremony, landscape, and language. McDonough identifies the Nahuatl concept of *ixtlamatiliztli* (literally those who know with their face/eyes, which denotes knowledge gained from personal experience) and employs it in her study of Maya and other Nahuatl intellectuals.

I seek to build upon McDonough's analysis of *ixtlamatiliztli* in *Ixtlamatinij* (The Wise Ones) and offer an observant reading of the play's language, particularly within the mostly Nahuatl version and its complex mix of Nahuatl and Spanish. Her study offers an invaluable examination that invites and opens up to diverse analyses of Maya's theatrical works. McDonough touches upon the positive aspects of *ixtlamatiliztli*, but the term also carries contested meanings. In the context of Maya's play, *ixtlamatiliztli* takes on greater significance when one takes into account that, in Huastecan communities, Nahuas presently use this word to refer to teachers within public education who have gained their knowledge from books and studied away from the community. Through *Ixtlamatinij*, Maya questions this use of the term within academic circles and proposes to recuperate the real meaning of *ix* linked to local knowledges. He also employs concepts analyzed in the previous chapter on Natalio Hernández of *coyotl* (coyote), *tlaixpan* (altar), *tlatlepanittaliztli* (respect), and *yolchicahualiztli* (strength of heart). I look at these approaches in relation to the repeated symbolism of face through wordplay, representations of clothing, and respect for ancestors.

Brief Biography of Ildefonso Maya and Context of *Ixtlamatinij*

Ildefonso Maya was born in Chahuatlán, municipality of Ilamatlán, Veracruz in 1936 to Nahua parents. He lived in Huejutla, Hidalgo, from 1956 until his death in 2012. As McDonough documents, Maya had an immense influence on the region. Like she did, I too found his home by hailing a random taxi and asking the driver to take me to the *profesor*'s house. Everyone seemed to know Maya within a population of tens of thousands. During the three days we talked, he retold (and retold) many of the same stories that McDonough records.¹⁹ Maya had a habit of repeating the accounts of his life in interviews—which led some in Huejutla to suggest he was becoming senile—but he was entirely consistent in the telling of these life experiences.²⁰

In his youth, Maya traveled to Mexico City to work and study. There he took on many odd jobs, and at one point worked as a house servant for Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo. He proudly described in our interviews how he received training in the arts during this time at the Palacio de Bellas Artes. Maya later became a teacher in bilingual education and served in numerous Indigenous communities throughout Mexico. Maya's critique of the government education system within *Ixtlamatinij* comes from first-hand experience. He commented in interviews that SEP sent him to work in numerous Indigenous regions regardless of the language, reflective of an attitude in which Indigenous "dialects" were viewed as one in the same (not to mention the dismissal of the over twenty variants within Nahuatl itself).²¹ This was indicative not only of SEP's lack of concern for cultural specificities, but even more so of the express mission of national education—there was no reason to really know the Indigenous language of the

community because the goal, explicit or implicit, was to extinguish these languages. A case in point, Maya taught in a Yaqui community. Nonetheless, he went against assimilationist discourses that taught teachers to speak only Spanish (represented in *Ixtlamatinij* by the figure of Epitacio). Maya learned the Yaqui language as well as other Indigenous languages during the times he served in numerous areas.²²

One of his favorite stories—he repeated it three times over the course of our interviews—was his visit to José López Portillo at Los Pinos (Mexican equivalent of the White House) during López Portillo’s presidential administration (1976-1982). As Maya recounted, the government flew him there by helicopter and then had the nerve to make him wait for the president without offering food or drink. With great pride Maya told me that, offended at this disrespectful treatment, he called President López Portillo a *cabrón*.²³ As analyzed later in this chapter, this clash with the president relates to *Ixtlamatinij* and Maya’s view of politicians and officials—also referred to throughout the play as *cabrones* in the two versions of the play, in Nahuatl and Spanish.

During the 1980s, Maya put on numerous plays and produced a large corpus of unpublished manuscripts. According to the manuscript of *Ixtlamatinij*, Maya completed this work in 1987, only two years after Hernández’s *Xochikoskatl*. The publication of *Xochikoskatl* encouraged Nahuas, Maya among them, to write in Nahuatl. Scenes in *Ixtlamatinij* resemble those depicted in poems from *Xochikoskatl*, such as Hernández’s poem “Nomaseualikniuaj tlen monelkoyochijkej” (My Indigenous Brothers Who Make Themselves Coyotes). In the poem, Hernández describes the youth who have gone off to become soldiers or teachers. Like the character Epitacio in *Ixtlamatinij*, they return to the

community and refuse to speak Nahuatl. Maya and Hernández worked closely together until the mid-1990s, and so Maya was no doubt familiar with Hernández's work. I analyze the significance of these similarities between *Xochikoskatl* and *Ixtlamatinij* later in this chapter.

McDonough and Schryer mention that Hidalgo's governor Guillermo Rossel de la Lama (1981–1987) funded Maya's open-air theater productions "in exchange for Maya's work as cultural mediator between Nahuas and mestizo during the violent agrarian struggle of the Huasteca Hidalguense" (Schryer, *Ethnicity* 289-91). McDonough adds, "While couched in terms of cultural revitalization, *teatro masivo* (theater for the masses) was often staged in 'trouble spots'" (178). According to this critique that resembles the younger generation of Nahua authors' criticism toward older authors, theatre served to dissuade audience members from armed resistance and turn them to cultural practices as a way to battle injustices. Critics of Maya argue that cultural recognition as a central goal failed to offset deep-seated, institutionalized inequalities. There were *campesino* uprisings in the Huasteca Hidalguense during this time (which, as mentioned in chapter one, led to Natalio Hernández's transfer as director of Indigenous education from Hidalgo to Mexico City). Amid these conflicts, one of Maya's own sons was assassinated—a topic on which Maya was mute. The most information that I could gather from speaking with others in Huejutla was that landowners opposed to his defense of Indigenous lands had assassinated his son, a trained lawyer (also cited in Versényi 446). After such a loss, Maya sought to dissuade from violent movements.

Maya continued to write plays as well as short stories, research, and novels in the 1990s. In his lifetime he wrote over 278 theatrical works (Frischmann 37). He also continued to produce artwork, leaving over 185 murals throughout Veracruz and Hidalgo. Through his own initiative, he founded and directed the Centro Cultural de la Huasteca Hidalguense [Hidalgo Huastecan Cultural] in Huejutla, which received accreditation from the Secretariat of Public Education. As mentioned previously, he collaborated with ELIAC in the 1990s and was an honorary member of this organization. He was grantee of the Mexican National Fund for Culture and the Arts in 1993. Shortly after this one of his few published works appeared with a collection of his plays, *La ofrenda / Tlatsikuini* (1994). In 2003 he collaborated with literary critics Donald Frischmann and Carlos Montemayor to include *Ixtlamatinij* within volume three of the trilingual anthology *Words of the True Peoples / Palabras de los seres verdaderos* (2007). As Frischmann recounts, Maya continued to put on plays during this time, among them *Ixtlamatinij*. Maya considered it to be one of his best works. When I met him for the first time in 2010, his diabetes had taken its toll. He was restricted mostly to sitting on his porch at home. In spite of fraile health, he lit up when telling about his works and life. He constantly reminded me in every visit, “You had better come today, because tomorrow I might not be here.” Unfortunately, he knew all too well the little time he had left. He died due to health complications from diabetes the following year, leaving behind a large corpus of artistic works and far-reaching influence throughout the Huasteca.

Losing *Ixtli* (Face): Contrastive Epistemologies and Pedagogies in the Introduction to *Ixtlamatinij*

Ixtlamatinij is divided into two acts, the first made up of seven scenes and the second of five short scenes. Within the first act, ceremonial spaces that educate the community contrast with the foreign, destructive education brought by Epitacio. The play begins with preparations for *Xantolo*²⁴ underway. While his family begins to make the offerings for their deceased relatives, Epitacio and his brother Nicolás wait on the road for their brother Cirilo to arrive from army service. With no sign of Cirilo, Epitacio asks Nicolás to go to their mother and father and compel them to put on the urban clothes he has brought. He wants his parents to change out of their traditional clothing, cease doing Nahua ceremonies, and use only Spanish (“castía”). Cirilo arrives midway through the first act and reprimands Epitacio for his condescending attitude. This tension between them serves as the crux of the play until its climax at the end of first act.

The character Epitacio brings migration center stage in *Ixtlamatinij* (The Wise Ones). He embodies a figure who contrasts with the poetic voice of *Xochikoskatl*. While Natalio Hernández writes from the perspective of someone who moved to Mexico City and chose to resist the discrimination he experienced there, Epitacio receives training as a bilingual professor and returns indoctrinated and ready to impose *coyotl* (coyote) discourse. Through my reading of *Ixtlamatinij*, I propose that the performance of Nahua rituals serves as a deeply psychological experience that deconstructs and shifts the dominant discourses of *coyomeh/mestizaje* championed by Epitacio.

In a quick second act, a third the length of the second act, Epitacio has been imprisoned by community leaders for having in a drunken rage physically assaulted his

brother Cirilo and inadvertently cut his mother's hand. A now repentant Epitacio seeks forgiveness from the family members he has offended and, symbolic of this change, he returns home wearing traditional Nahua clothing. The family eats together to celebrate this Epitacio's transformation and honor deceased relatives. Nevertheless, the play's swift denouement and a grandson's stealing food from off the altar in the final moments hint at a short-lived resolution and the future repetition of this cycle of threats against Nahua practices with the younger generation. In other words, five hundred years of colonialism has been a long first act and Epitacio is merely a blip on the map of a long drawn-out struggle.

The title of the play *Ixtlamatinij* centers these polysynthetic meanings of the word. In the previous chapter, I analyzed the implications of *ixtlamatini* (wise one) and related words *ixtlamatiquetl* (*ixtlamatini* with alternate agentive suffix) and *ixtlamatiliztli* (wisdom). The *ix* of *ixtlamatini*, with its sense of people who have gained their knowledge from attending school and reading books, relates to the verb *tlaixpohua* (to read). The *ix* of *tlaixpohua* avoids confusion with *tlapohua* (to count) and specifies the interaction between the reader and the surface/face (*ixtli*) of pages. By extension, *ixtlamatiliztli* has come to signify someone who knows things from formal education and the study of books. Maya's introduction, which I proceed to analyze closely in the following paragraphs, brings to the stage this more recent meaning of *ixtlamatiliztli* in conflict with the knowledge and teachings of local elders. Its plural form with an aspiration at the end (*Ixtlamatinij*, the wise ones) highlights the conflict among these meanings, as a singular form would lead one to believe that the title only represents

Epitacio. As he parades around claiming to be a learned one, Epitacio clashes with the wise members of the community. While the footnote at the end of the play defining *ixtlamatini* as “wise and experienced” would hardly lead you to associate it with Epitacio (*Words of the True Peoples*, 247), the conflicting meaning of *ixtlamatini* as someone who claims superiority based on outside formal education certainly refers to him.²⁵

Aside from the title, the word *ixtlamatini* is absent from the play; however, Maya subtly alludes to it throughout the performance and its introduction. He also underscores the title’s importance by choosing to leave it untranslated for the Spanish version. Although only one paragraph in length, these introductory words are especially important in framing the play, and for this reason I closely analyze its language in the paragraphs that follow. The introduction, *Tlajtolkalakilstli* (Words of Entrance), prepares and leads the reader into the play’s first act:

Ni ti maseualmej timo pinauaj pampa tij matij axtij piaj tlanmamikilstli kej kaxtiltekamej. Tijtlamielkajkejya to maseualtlalnamikilis, yejeka timoluiya ayok tij pia chikualistli tlen ika tech xayak nextia, timo uiuipolojkejya; yon ayok tij piaj topatij; pampa kaxtiltekamej tech tlami ixpolojtiauijya, kejuak ayok tleno tinesij; yejeka uajkema tikalakij tlamaxtiloyaj uan ti peuj timochtiaj ti tlapouaj uan ti tlajkuiloa, timoluij, ti peujya timotsontlananaj, pampa tij konanaj ti ixtlamatij kej kaxtiltekamej; ijkinaj ti peuj timo ueyi nekij, pampa kejuak tij kajtiauiyajya maseualistli; uakinoj tij konanaj tikin pinajtia uiuimaseualmej, pampa tojuantij tij kajtiauiya maseualiatli uan ayok tij tlepanitaj yon tlen, timo koyonekij uan ti peuj timo sisiniya. (232, sic)

Here we Indigenous peoples are ashamed because we know that we do not have knowledges like the Spaniards. We already forgot our indigenous knowledges, and that's why we think that we no longer have strength with which to show our faces, we have wandered off; we no longer have worth; because the Spaniards erased us, like we no longer exist; that's why we enter school and begin to read and to write, we think a lot of ourselves, we already begin to boast, because we make claims to be wise like the Spaniards; such that we begin to become prideful, because in this way we go leaving suffering behind; then we pressure we shame the dumb Indians, because we go on leaving behind an indigenous way of life and no longer do we respect it at all, we want to be like coyotes and we begin to get angry.

This introduction's limited end punctuation underscores the social and emotional instability of these Nahuas who have abandoned or rejected their Indigenous heritage. After the opening statement that Nahuas have forgotten their knowledges, the second sentence occupies the entire paragraph. The face of the page itself gives a visual representation of Nahuas "losing face" or, in other words, losing their ancestral knowledges. The introduction strings together a series of verbs that highlight this erasure: *tijtlamielkajkejya* (we already forgot), *uiiipolojkejya* (we already wandered off), *ixpolojtiauijya* (already erased), and *tij kajtiauiyajya* (we already have gone on abandoning). These Nahuas are left wandering because they abandon their communities' epistemes for a discourse that does not offer other knowledges, but rather an anti-

epistemic approach that constitutes itself through the negation of Others' knowledges. Maya points to the destructive nature of this *coyotl* (coyote) discourse with the verbs *timotsontlananj* (we pull off/lift our heads), *tikin pinajtia* (we shame), *ayok tij tlepanitaj* (we no longer respect), and *timo sisiniya* (we get angry).

These conflictive approaches resemble what Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire addresses in *Pedagogia dos oprimidos* (Pedagogy of the Oppressed), a text first published in Spanish in 1970 and which had a direct and profound influence on the Nahua movement of first generation authors such as Maya.²⁶ Freire contrasts *a visão bancária da educação* (the “bank perspective” toward education), in which the teacher acts as a bank of knowledge that makes informational deposits in the passive minds of students with the healthier perspective in which teacher-student and student-teacher come to the classroom with a wealth of knowledge from their personal experiences (Freire 69-72). This view combines well with Nahua perspectives of pedagogy and knowledge production, and Nahua resistance against assimilationist practices of the SEP in the earlier 1970s coincides with the publication of *Pedagogia dos oprimidos*. What constitutes education in the play *Ixtlamatinij* is not only what goes on in the classroom, but also the clothes, language, and everyday practices the characters perform—highlighted by Epitacio's focus on these latter elements as opposed to the supposed location of his work within the classroom. In fact, the space of the classroom is never mentioned once in the play. *Mestizos* and *blancos* (whites) attempt to represent their practices as *the* unquestionable norm and impose the empty signifiers of their practices on Nahua communities as if they were passive receptacles who should be grateful for

such condescension on the part of the dominant sector of society. In his introduction, Maya criticizes Nahuas such as Epitacio who internalize this discourse in an attempt to gain access to the dominant sector.

Maya refers to the shame Nahuas feel because of their communities' knowledge (*tlallamiquiliztli*, spelled *tlanmamikilistli* in the introduction), and in doing so lose their "faces," a metaphor for the possession and production of knowledge. The root of *tlallamiquiliztli* is *namiqui* (to find), which relates to discovering or encountering things through personal experience. Nonetheless, Nahuas feel embarrassed because "[amo] *tiixtlamatij kej kastiltekamej*" ("we do not possess knowledge like the Spaniards/*mestizos*"; 232, emphasis added).²⁷ This loss of personal experience is underscored to an even greater extent when Maya states in the introduction that Nahuas feel ashamed and are discriminated against because "[amo] *titlapouaj uan titlajkuiloa*" ("we do not read and we do not write").²⁸ Within the introduction (and Maya's own translation into Spanish), *pohua* clearly refers to reading. This polysemic word carries the other meaning of "counting," and brings to mind the calculations that Hernández describes in *Xochikoskatl* as reducing everything to commodity and market value. Thus, *amo titlapouaj kej koyomej* in Maya's introduction could be translated as "we do not read/count like coyotes." In *Ixtlaminij*, Maya condemns this focus on counting everything commercially, such as through the parodies of Epitacio's and Nicholas's boasting that they can buy everything (especially beer) with the wad of bills Epitacio received from his teaching position.

Maya criticizes Nahuas who try to imitate Spaniards or *mestizos* (his version in Spanish gives “españoles y mestizos” [Spaniards and *mestizos*] as the translation for *caxtiltlacameh* [literally “men of Castilla”]). When these Nahuas,²⁹ gain access to higher education, *timotsontlananaj* (literally, “we pull off our heads”), which most likely is the more common *timotsontlalanaj* (“we lift our heads”) mistyped. Regardless of the verb intended, *tlanana* (to lose) or *tlalana* (to raise) both imply a loss or displacement of “face” from the body and of losing the real wisdom centered on personal experience that *ixtlamatini* should entail.³⁰ Raising the head implies separation from the community, a lack of contact with its members that breaks the reciprocal bonds that should exist. Epitacio’s “education” leads him to affirm dominance over his hometown rather than to serve it.

As explored in this study’s introduction, the shift in *ixtlamatini*’s meaning from community knowledges to distant formal education especially arose with the arrival of teachers from SEP in the mid-twentieth century. A questioning of elders’ knowledge within the community emerged especially when SEP-trained professors began to arrive and still prevailed when Maya produced *Ixtlamatinij* in the mid-1980s (and is still prevalent today despite changes in official government rhetoric). The *macehualtlallamiquiliztli* (Nahua knowledges) that Maya refers to at the beginning of the play’s introduction are discounted and discarded as worthless. *Quilcahua* (to forget), the verb Maya uses to refer to this dismissal, has at its root “to leave behind.” Community elders represent the atavistic practices and superstitions that teachers were taught to celebrate as quaint at best and more often than not as vestiges of the past. It is interesting

to consider that, in Nahuatl, Maya uses *macehuatlallamiquiliztli* (Indigenous/Nahua/*campesino* knowledges), whereas in the Spanish version of the play he refers to “conocimientos de los indios” (knowledges of the Indians). As has already been explored in the previous chapter’s analysis of Hernández’s “Na ni indio” (“I Am Indian”), *indio* carries derogatory connotations. I recall asking Maya in our interview what he thought of the term *indio* in Spanish, and he, as theatre scholar Adam Versényi also attests in his article “Translation as an Epistemological Paradigm,” had no problem with the term and used it himself “to remind Spaniards and mestizos of their stupidity” (445). This explanation is significant, because the introduction states that Nahuas feel ashamed because they do not possess knowledges “kej kaxtiltekamej” (“like the ‘Castilla people’”; 232).³¹ In the Spanish version, Maya translates *kaxtiltekamej* as “españoles y ahora mestizos” (Spaniards and now *mestizos*) (264). This resembles Hernández’s translations of *coyotl* as Spaniard, *mestizo*, *ladino*, and white (*Xochikoskatl*, 26, 28, 32). Maya uses *kaxtiltekamej* synonymously with *coyotl*, apparent in the final line of the introduction when he refers to Nahuas’ desires to be like *kaxtiltekamej* (“Castilla people”) as *timocoyonekij* (“we want to be like coyotes”).

Maya went on to explain in our personal interview that, in addition to *macehualli*, Nahuas should really be called *mexicahtlacameh* (“Mexican people”), because they speak the Mexican language or *me(x/h)icanoh*.³² The play questions the monologic of “the Mexican citizen” under the banner of one language, Spanish, and one form of being—the type of *mestizo* criticized in the introduction. As in *Xochikoskatl*, again pre-dating Quijano’s analysis of coloniality, Maya assumes a continuity of colonial practices from

the Spanish conquistadors to the present “model citizen” *mestizos*. In Nahuatl, he uses the same word—*kaxtiltekamej* (“Castilla people”)—to refer to Spanish and present-day colonizers and the discrimination they impose through language, dress, and “education.” In Nahuatl, the idea that colonial practices of discrimination continued after nominal nation-state independence in the nineteenth century and the Mexican Revolution is often expressed and is not a recent perspective. From Spaniards to *mestizos*, both *caxtiltlacameh*—in short *coyomeh* (coyotes)—fundamentally not much has changed.³³ *Coyotl* (coyote), which Maya uses abundantly in the introduction and throughout the play, is rooted in the experience of people who have denounced such rule for centuries.³⁴

Under the discourse of revolutionary *mestizaje*, its metaphors depict Indigenous peoples as faceless. Gamio’s *Forjando patria* represents Western tradition as a steel head of reason and Indigenous people as a bronze body of brute spiritual strength in the forging of a nation (24). The racial overtones of this metaphor present Indigenous peoples as vessels of physical energy absorbed within the “face” of logic and reason of European descent. Though Maya does not refer explicitly to Gamio in *Ixlamatinij*, he dialogues with the legacy of his ideas perennial throughout Mexico. It is no accident that the face is at the center of the play. The body becomes a key text in expressing discourses about who possesses power over knowledge production. The State’s crafting of the “normal citizen” implies biopower relations that police, through relentless mechanisms such as medical examinations, health education programs, and developmentalist initiatives, a particular physical look as standard to a given society.³⁵ Theatrical performance allows

Maya to highlight Native knowledges inscribed upon the bodies of the actors—
Indigenous actors with their own faces.

Maya's juxtaposition of "those of reason" against Nahuas might at first seem like a simplistic, idealized binary (non-Indigenous vs. Indigenous) that contrasts demonized *mestizos* against the backdrop of romanticized Indigenous peoples. Such is not the case though, as the Nahua character Epitacio embodies the destructive discourse of *coyomeh* (coyotes). Epitacio resembles what Arturo Arias identifies in Nahua author Crispin Amador Ramírez's novel *Infierno del paraíso* with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participating in colonial practices ("Nahuahtlizando La Novelística," 18). Far from the romanticizations or victimization of Indigenous nations found with *indianista* and *indigenista* literature, Maya offers a multi-faceted picture of discriminatory discourses and counter-discourses within the Huasteca.

Maya continues in the introduction by coming back to the face, stating that the *coyomeh* (coyotes) teach them that they no longer have strength (*chicahualiztli*), which "tech xayak nextia" ("shows our face"), and that "ayok tij pija topatij" ("we no longer have worth") (232). *Ipatiuh* (worth/price) carries the connotation of both worth in the sense of valid ideas and of a monetary price. *Ayok tij pija topatij* marks both an epistemic discrimination that discounts Nahua knowledge production and economic inequalities in which Nahuas are *a priori* the lowest echelons of society, outside the modern market with nothing of significant value to offer. The *coyomeh* try to displace Nahuas' face and subjectivity: "kaxtil tekamej techtlami **ixpolojtiauijya**" (the Spaniards and *mestizos* end

up **erasing** us) (232, emphasis added). *Ixpoloa*, literally “to erase the face,” carries the suffix *ix*, alluding to the title of the play, *Ixtlamatinij*.

Maya was familiar with the meanings associated with the face in colonial Nahuatl. *Noxayak* (my face) metaphorically represents one’s thoughts and way of being. Combined with *noyollo* (my heart), it represents one’s personality and discourse in general (León Portilla, *Filosofía náhuatl*, 68). Maya has engaged with colonial writings in Nahuatl and worked as an independent researcher, specifically of documents related to the Virgin of Guadalupe and Juan Diego. The use of the first person plural throughout the introduction (*tech xayak nextia*, literally “show **us** with face”; *ayok tij piaj topatij*, we no longer have worth) implicates Nahuas themselves, by extension the audience viewing the play, in the erasure of their knowledges rather than exculpating them as victims of *coyomeh*. Through participation in ritual and use of the language, and through the performance of *Ixtlamatinij* itself, Maya seeks to empower Nahuas to defend their worldviews and cultural practices and truly *face* those who devalue their contributions. *Ixtlamatinij* is meant especially for school-age children who grow up with discriminatory discourses still present in their public education. Children have performed the play in secondary schools as a mode of teaching against the idea that they have no worth.³⁶ Although short in length, the introduction serves as a key part of the play that prepares the audience for the wide ramifications of the rituals and family conflict depicted.

Xantolo Offerings: Contrastive Rituals during the Days of the Dead in the First Act

After Maya’s introductory words, in the opening scene of the first act, Epitacio’s family prepares for *Xantolo* while Nicolás and he wait on the street for their brother

Cirilo to arrive. Corn serves as a key component in the home's ceremonial space when Epitacio interrupts in a paroxysmal condemnation of these traditions in the third scene. The first cues and lines mark the centrality of maize. Epitacio's mother Nichaj selects ears of corn from the altar to make tamales (233). His grandfather Juantsi, in the first line of the play, brings to the forefront these preparations for *Xantolo*: "Naman kena kuali uaktok ni koauitl, intlaj in tech tamaluise, ax ouijtis molonis chachapali" ("Now this wood has dried out well, if you make tamales for us, it won't be difficult for the pot to boil"; 233). Tamales represent the culmination in development of the most sacred crop in the Huasteca. Nichaj, Juantsi's daughter, comments on the good corn received: "Kuali tlaelki ni xopanmili, mokajki kuajkuali tlatokli" ("This spring crop has been great, it left a really good corn crop"; 233). Maize marks a series of communal relationships that go beyond the grave. With the tamales, they will invite their deceased relatives to come eat. The work-intensive cooking of tamales for an entire day is an act that convokes the community. *Ixtlamatinij* begins by setting an ideal scene in which all the elements for the celebration are in place, reflected in the good corn and a strong fire.

The family continues in the first scene to prepare offerings at the altar. Juantsi stresses the importance of these ceremonies in a prayer for family members who have died: "xikajcokuikaj ni tlamanali, tle ika **timech ixnamikij**... toyolo, totlalnamikilis, tochikaualis" ("keep this offering, with which **we come before you** . . . our heart, our remembrance, our strength"; 234, emphasis added). Through this ceremony they literally "find their relatives with their faces" (*timechixnamikij*), coming "face to face" with them. Ceremony is essential for "our heart, our wisdom, our strength," and comes from that

close personal contact enabled through ceremony. This contact relates closely to theoretical perspectives such as *yoltlallamiqiliztli* (philosophy from the heart), mentioned in the previous chapter, connected with the heart. The affective intelligence described earlier relates to the emphasis on personal experience, as one must have first-hand contact with situations to develop any kind of affective understanding. Knowledge of the existence or form of these ceremonies is far removed from participation in them. In contrast, personal involvement develops a communal ethic of reciprocity and remembrance of elders to the heart of each community member.

In the community where I resided in the Huasteca, *tlaixpan* (altar) also denotes the stage on which a play's performance takes place.³⁷ The ceremonial space and stage serve as modes of transmitting important knowledges in personal and intimate ways. The play in this sense is performative in bringing the audience into ceremonial spaces, and in part explains Maya's own preference for open-air theatrical performance. The first scene continues with a convergence of all the different elements that go into *Xantolo*. Juantsi says to the deceased relatives, "xitlakuakaj, xikajkokuikaj ni tlauili, ni popochtli, ni sempoal xochitl tlen san tlemach amechpaktia" ("eat, keep this light, this smoke, this *cempohualxochitl* that will make you happy"; 234). As mentioned in the previous chapter, *cempohualxochitl* symbolizes the connection between ancestors and the present. Smoke carries messages to these ancestors, and light helps guide them along their paths. All these elements combine to lead the deceased to their homes and turn the minds of the living toward them.

This personal “face” education contrasts with the arrival of Nicolás and Epitacio in the second and third scenes of the first act. Nicolás enters in the second scene as a Sancho Panza-like messenger for his brother Epitacio. He tells the family that they must wear the urban clothing that Epitacio has sent them. Nicolás explains that Epitacio is ashamed that his parents “dress like Indians” (235). Especially since he is a bilingual teacher, Epitacio seeks to protect his image and cannot stand to think that he was born to “ignorant Indians” (235). He regurgitates the insults of which he himself has been a target in his pedagogical training, and he parrots the supposed superiority of *mestizo* cultural practices.

At the end of the second scene, Juantsi and his brother Akostij dance the *cuanegro* (literally “wood black”³⁸). With this dance, they parody their grandchildren, the brothers Epitacio and Nicolás, and their attempts to make their father Kosej dress like a *coyotl* with an urban shirt, pants, and boots. Grandfather Juantsi tells his shaman brother Akostij: “Xi tech on puleui, xij poj poua ne ome **xayakatl** kuapilojtok” (“Help me, clean those **masks** that are hanging”; 236, emphasis added).³⁹ *Xayakatl*, mask, is literally another word for “face,” and Juantsi and Akostij parody how Epitacio has attempted to put on a ridiculous face that is not his own. He is wearing a mask without realizing it.

In the third scene, Epitacio and Nicholas burst in on this dance. Epitacio demands that they put away the masks. His first words in the play, in broken Spanish replete with vulgarities, reflect his now vicious nature and blindness to his own ignorance:

“¡Quihubo! ¡Quihubo! Qué chingaos pasa aquí. A ver, a ver, viejitos cabrones, qué les ha dado por enmascararse, a ver, por qué tanto iscándalo con esos máscaras” (“What’s going

on! What's going on! What the devil is going on here. Let's see, let's see, old *cabrones*, why do you put on those masks, let's see, why all the ruckus with those masks"; 236). The fact that he structures his questions, such as "why do you put on those masks," as statements and exclamations underscores that he offers only assertions and criticism, and that he does not care to understand the nature or reason for the dance.

The great irony is that, alluded to in the very dance he interrupts, Epitacio is the one who has donned a mask. He changes into another set of urban clothes at the end of scene three and tells Nicolás, "Tenemos que igualarnos como los de razón [sic]; tenemos que usar zapatos, pantalón, hablar como los coyotlakamej; la escuela es pa que los hijos aprendan" ("We have to become just like those of reason; we have to use shoes, pants, speak like the coyotes; school is there so that the children learn"; 236, sic). He seeks to put on the mask of the *coyomeh* (coyotes), stressing the importance of *mokoyochiuaj* (making themselves coyotes)—to reconstruct himself as the dominant discourse dictates. Unaware of his own mask, Epitacio thinks that his costume of foreign education and outward apparel have made him wiser.

In scene three, Nicolás tells Epitacio that he wants to speak "bunito" (pretty) like him (269). Nonetheless, Epitacio's speech is just as ill-fitting as the city clothes with which he attempts to mask his own ignorance. Nicolás tells him, "Tó como mayestro, **kenkiluiyah**, monek meseñas tudo lo que sabes osté, pa que yo también lu vas decir ansina" ("You as a teacher, as a bilingual teacher, you need to teach me everything you know, so that I can also say it like you do"; 236, sic). Epitacio gains his first disciple of the way he champions in Nicolás, and he continues proselytizing to the rest of his family.

He asks Nicolás to bring him a mirror to change his clothing: “y uro el ispejo ¿On tá?” (“and now the mirror, where’s it?”; 237). Nicolás in turn asks him: “¿Timo **xayak** tlachilis? Teskatl, ispejo, amantsi urita” (“Are you going to look at your **face**? Mirror, mirror, right away”; 237, emphasis added). This exchange between Eпитacio and Nicolás highlights the mask that Eпитacio wears after having just criticized Juantsi and Akostij for their *xayakatl*, masks. Eпитacio attempts to erase his face and imagine himself with a superior face of “los de razón” (“those of reason”). He seeks to distance himself from the practices he grew up with in his community, claiming unfamiliarity with them and rejecting even the sight of them. Conversant with a wide array of literary production, Maya alludes with these changes of clothing to “Exemplo XXXII” from *El conde Lucanor* (published in 1575 and precursor to Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Emperor’s New Clothes”) and Cervantes’ *El retablo de las maravillas* (1615). Eпитacio looks in the mirror and fashions himself as a pure-blood *coyotl* (coyote) in spite of everything about him being ill-fitting and uncomfortable. Maya reveals the naked deficiencies of Eпитacio’s discourse through the rest of the first act.

Any acknowledgement of Eпитacio’s Indigenous family origins and their practices would jeopardize his claim to *mestizo* status—like those who admit their inability to see the clothes in Don Lucanor’s “Exemplo XXXII”—and so he exercises all his efforts in eradicating any sign of indigeneity. These parallels also underscore the persistence of colonialism, because a caste system inherited from the colonial era pervades Eпитacio’s discourse through the hierarchical categorization of *coyotl* over *indio*. I continue my analysis of the performance’s progression in the first act in the following section and

particularly how Epitacio's "pedagogical" discourse spans out and is satirized through numerous plays on language.

De razón on: Language and Education in the First Act

This section closely analyzes this linguistic complexity and the importance of language reflected in this complexity within the first act. I focus on the first act because it is within its scenes where the large part of this language play takes place. Maya depicts Spanish as a dialect from a foreign region, as he refers to it as *Castilla* and *castellano* (236). He does so to discredit the common perception that applies the misnomer *dialecto* (dialect) to Indigenous languages and *idioma* (language) to Western languages. This suggests that Native forms of speech lack complexity and grammar. If any language is a dialect in the true sense of the word, it is "Spanish" or *castellano* (Castilian), a specific dialect from the Castilian region of the Iberian peninsula. This viewpoint appears in Maya's unpublished Nahuatl grammar book (1953), which I cite to aid in my analysis of *Ixtlamatinij* and importance of Nahuatl names within the first act in the subsequent paragraphs:

Esta modesta aportación que pongo en sus manos, es para que conozcan y aprendan no como dicen el dialecto nauatl, sino como la lengua nauatl, que como tal, está al nivel de cualquiera de las lenguas modernas de nuestro tiempo, como: el inglés, Alemán, Español, Ruso, Italiano o Frances. [. . .] **a pesar de la imposición oficial del uso del español, que a saber claramente el castellano sí es dialecto del español de la península Ibérica.** Insisto y me resta ofrecer esta pequeña obra para que aprendan el nauatl o mexkatl que realmente es la lengua

nuestra que no hay que dejar perder nunca, como perdí mi nombre de Piltat y que hoy me llamo: Ildefonso Maya Hernández, aunque nunca ha sido de mi conformidad. (unpublished manuscript, 1953; cited in McDonough 161, emphasis added)

This modest contribution that I put in your hands, is so you will come to know and learn the language, not like those who say Nahuatl dialect, but rather as the Nahuatl language, such as it is, on the level of any of the modern languages of our time, such as English, German, Spanish, Russian, Italian, or French. [. . .] **in spite of the official imposition of Spanish, and it is clear that Castilian is a dialect of Spanish from the Iberian peninsula.** I insist and I am pleased to offer this small work so that you learn Nahuatl or Mexican, which is really our language that we should never lose, as I lost my name Piltat and now am called: Ildefonso Maya Hernández, although I have never liked it.

Maya frames this description of language with the loss of his Nahuatl name, *Piltat*. In *Ixtlamatinij* all the characters' names derive from Spanish, though many of them with Nahuatl pronunciations and in apocopated form: Cirilo, Epitacio/Pitacio, Nicolás/Colás, Nichaj (Dionisia), Juantsi (Juan with Nahuatl diminutive/reverential *-tzin*), Kosej (José), Akostij (Agustín), Tilaj (Dormitilia), Órcilo, and Tachoj (Epitacio, uncle of the main character with the same name). With these names, Maya suggests the loss of Nahuatl mentioned in his grammar. Nonetheless, hybrid monikers such as *Juantsi* suggest a persistence of Nahuatl. In spite of imposition of the Castilian dialect in people's names

and toponyms (such as the states Hidalgo and Veracruz), the Nahuatl language continues to resist assimilation under *castellanización*. Maya expresses this defiance when he states that Nahuatl is his language and that, though he has lost his name *Piltat*, he will never lose his maternal tongue.

Epitacio represents a violent language, the *coyotlahtolli* or the “language of the coyotes.”⁴⁰ Epitacio desires to speak and act like a coyote, representative of this coloniality. In the diatribe in broken Spanish against his family in scene three of the first act, Epitacio tells them, “qui hablin la castía” (“to speak Castilian”) and “ma timo koyonekikaj on” (“we have to be like the coyotes *cabrón*”; 236). Ironically, Epitacio *does* speak “Spanish” well in the sense that the Spanish language is *coyotlahtolli* (“language of the coyotes”). The violations of grammar in Epitacio’s Nahuatl and Spanish reflect the brutal discourse he embodies. It is a two-fold colonial discourse that seeks to 1) to depict the community’s knowledge as inferior, as not even knowledge but rather superstition and magic and 2) to argue that First Peoples are meant for physical labor, equated with animals, from which the only escape hatch is acquisition of Spanish and imitation of *coyomeh*.

In the exchanges between Epitacio and his family members, the word *pinahua* (to feel shame) appears repeatedly. This word carries great weight from centuries of incursions and abuses against Nahuas and their cultural practices. More profound than merely “shame,” *pinahua* signifies lack of knowledge and intellectual production. It is closely tied to language—in fact, to the stigma of speaking only a “dialect,” with the sense of that such deficient forms of speech are devoid of complex grammar and ideas.⁴¹

A pervasive system of discriminatory practices has devalued Nahua knowledge. It is not merely an isolated incidence of shaming. *Pinahua* serves to mark a bottom rung on the social hierarchy in strict contrast with the *coyotl* (coyote).

Nicolás informs his parents of how Epitacio feels: “uan siej ki pia ueruensa totatua nemi ikxikatsa uan sa de calzoncio” (“and he feels shame that our parents are barefoot and only use Indigenous clothing”; 235). He tells them to change so that they will look like a “lecenciao” (mispronunciation of Spanish *licenciado*, lawyer) and a “probesura” (mispronunciation of Spanish *profesor*, teacher). Nicolás’s mispronunciation of *vergüenza* (shame) in Spanish as *ueruensa* juxtaposes it with the word *huehuetzin* (elder) with its similar pronunciation and elders’ knowledges. This juxtaposition of shame with the elders underscores how Epitacio attempts to position himself as superior intellectually to the community elders. However, Epitacio and his accomplice Nicolás are the ones who are an embarrassment (with their ignorance reflected in the mis-pronunciation of the word *vergüenza* [shame] itself).

Epitacio’s mother Nichaj protests that he tries to shame her by making her change: “Semejante [yajaya] te pinajtij ken ki neki ma timo patlakaj” (“How shameful, how he wants us to change”; 235). As in English, *mopatla* and *cambiar* (*change* in Nahuatl and Spanish) not only refer to their clothing but to their lifestyle in general. When Epitacio learns of the family’s protests to his plans for them in scene three of the first act, he states: “Asina como andan **me da harta vergüenza**. Palabra, carnal, que ser hijo de un indio es pior, **me arde la cara de vergüenza** haber nacido de unos ignorantes cualquiera, siento refeó que me miren mis cuates, los di razón, que yo soy hijo de unos

indios” (“the way you live **makes me horribly ashamed**. The truth, brother, is that being the son of an Indian is the worst, **my face burns with shame** for having been born to ignorant nobodies, I feel horrible when my buddies look at me, those of reason, and see that I am the son of some Indians” (237, emphasis added). Epitacio references the symbol of the face in paralleling his shame with a burning face. He attempts to “burn off” the knowledges represented by a Nahua face and replace it with an allegedly superior one of “those of reason.” This metaphor underscores how he has internalized the discrimination against his own people. To stress this internalization, not a single *coyotl* character appears in the play, but the *coyomeh* are nonetheless a suffocating presence throughout the first act. While not physically present, they are psychologically extant in the minds of all the characters as a threat or, in the case of Epitacio, as models to be emulated.

His Spanish loan words and vulgarities underscore an epistemic and physical violence. *Kafroj* (roughly translatable as “virile bigshot”), from Spanish *cabrón*, and derivative forms of this word appear repeatedly throughout the play (explicitly at least eight times and more within code-switching puns). Epitacio’s great uncle Akostij, upon seeing the “gift” of clothes, uses *kafroj* in scene two of the first act to refer to Epitacio: “**Kafroj**, uan ni koyotl, nejlia ki neki an mech patlas” (“**Cabrón**, and this coyote, he really wants to change you all”; 235, emphasis added). In the first act, *cabrón* refers for the most part to those in positions of power (*coyomeh*) and their attempts to dominate others. In Epitacio’s first words cited earlier, he calls the elders *cabrones*. In this case, he underscores that the elders are no longer relevant, that they attempt to hold positions of power but are now expendable. It is not by accident that the altered pronunciation in

Nahuatl, *kafroj*, resembles the Spanish word *cafre*—one who is arrogant and out of control like Epitacio.

Epitacio underlines that “indios” (Indians) must go to school and learn to speak like the *coyotlacameh* (coyote men):

. . . tenemos que igualarnos con los de razón; tenemos que usar zapatos, pantalón, hablar como los coyotlakamej; la escuela es pa que los hijos aprendan, pa que si tienin que sopear y no seguir judidos, trabajando la milpa, nimas güingaro y güingaro, la docación nos va a sacar de la uigüeras de los viejos; qué xayacate, ni qué las danzas, hayi más mejor, muchis cusas que la música de viento y la de fiolín; hay bailar sí; pero con el conjunto y traer una mi chamaca bailando hasta que el cuerpo guante, en lugar de andar tlatsinteuijtinemis con esa pinchi música concacaj, concacaj concacaj conca conca concacaj concacaj . . . (236–37, sic)

. . . we need to be just like those of reason; we need to use shoes, pants, speak like the coyote men; school is for children to learn, so that they get ahead and aren't cheated, working the fields, no more cutting and cutting, education is going to save us from the stupidity of the old men; what mask or what dance, there's better things, many things better than the music of wind instruments and violin; yes, we need to dance; but not all together and dance with a girl until the body can't anymore, instead of moving your bum to that crappy music concacaj, concacaj, concacaj conca conca concacaj concacaj . . .

Epitacio contrasts the community dance with the supposedly superior urban ones of abrupt movements. His attempt to do away with the music and sounds of his community

resembles what Luis Cárcamo Huechante terms an “acoustic colonialism” (50). Eпитacio reduces community music to a repetitive “concacaj,” also even more inappropriate because of its resemblance to “con caca” (with shit). The language Eпитacio champions, that of the *coyotlacameh* (coyote men), resembles the aggressive thrushes of the music he advocates and with which he attempts to displace a plurality of sonorities.

Maya employs numerous wordplays with Eпитacio’s spoonerisms to highlight how *los de razón* (those of reason) comes to signify a violent assertion that one is right instead of having reason in the sense of cognitive faculties. This is underscored in pronouncing *razón* in Nahuatl just like *raso* in *soldado raso* (soldier with rank of private). *Razón* and *soldado raso* are both pronounced *rasoj* (235). As seen later, there is great irony in this because Eпитacio’s brother Cirilo is a *soldado raso* (private soldier), and returns to the community with a humble attitude opposite Eпитacio. The sounds of Spanish itself are hostile as the phonemes *r* (*razón*) and *b* (*cabrón*) violate the language with cacophonous pronunciations foreign to Nahuatl.

The pronunciation of *razó* also resembles *cabrón* with its proximate rhyme. In scene three of the first act, Eпитacio states in the Spanish version that “vamos a creernos que somos de razón cabrón” (“We are going to believe ourselves to be of reason *cabrón*”; 268). The combination of *razón* with *cabrón* emphasizes a relationship between the two terms. These are paired with the *coyotl*: “ma timo koyonekikaj on” (“we need to want to be like coyotes *cabrón*”; 236). *Razón*, *cabrón*, and *coyotl* constitute an antithetical axis in the play that Maya locates opposite a community ethic. The *razón-cabrón-coyotl* triad attempts to maintain power by force and assert its intelligence by the same means.

Epitacio tells his brother in the Spanish version of *Ixtlamatinij* that he wears cologne, “pa que güele a perjumi, como on hombre di razón” (“so that he smells like cologne, like a man of reason”; 270). There is a subtle play on the *on hombre* here, instead of *un hombre* (a man). *On* may be an apocopated form of *cabrón* as it appears numerous times in the performance, and so *on hombre* could also be understood as a *cabrón hombre*. The play’s characters constantly refer to Epitacio as a *cabrón* in the sense of one who seeks to dominate and break with a community ethic. The smells of the perfume clash with the aromas of ritual in the community and scents of the fields. Nicolás himself dissents from Epitacio’s opinions for the first time here and expresses repulsion at the perfume’s stale smell like that of an office or a school. Epitacio gets angry and replies, “Carnal, no se te olvide que yo soy maestro y me tienis que me respetas; porque yo ya no soy igual que ustedis que son indios. . . . que leyan en castiano, que hablin como los de razón” (“Brother, don’t forget that I am a teacher and you have to respect me; because I am not the same as you Indians . . . read in Spanish, speak like those of reason”; 237). In other words, he emphasizes the need to *coyotlahtoa*, to speak like coyotes.

Those who attempt to embody the *cabrón* use the term to allege their dominance. Nicolás tells his brother Epitacio in scene three of the first act, after his opening words and reference to music, “Tiveras tó soyis cofró, kualtsi tij yecoua nompa castia . . . mejur me lu enseñas asina como hablas . . . yektli ti nesi la rerasó” (“Truly you are a *cabrón*, you speak that *castia* real pretty . . . you should teach me how to speak like you . . . you look good like one of reason”; 237, sic).⁴² When Epitacio criticizes the elders as “viejos

cabrones” (old *cabrones*), he marks a politics of dominance, of pushing out what he views as the old regime of those who previously attempted to dominate.⁴³

The continual repetition of *cabrón* throughout *Ixtlamatinij* alludes to when Maya called José López Portillo a *cabrón* during his presidency (1976-1982).⁴⁴ Nicolás highlights that the *cabrón* seeks to obtain financial advantage. When Epitacio tells him of the superiority of the *coyotl* (coyote), Nicolás responds, “nejlia, ni ti intios tech pinajtia; ya ni me lu digas osté, ya ni me lu digas” (“that’s true, here we Indians are shamed; I don’t need you to tell me, it goes without saying”) and “más mejor re razó, asina tij pias miyak billetes” (“it’s much better to be of reason, that way you’ll have lots of money”; 237). Epitacio and Nicolás champion a stratified economy in which one gains financial advantage by outdoing others. This is in contrast to a community ethic.

After Epitacio changes clothes and criticizes his family’s offerings on the altar in the third scene, Nicolás exclaims, “Pota, cafró, ke yejyektsi la camisa!” (“Dang, *cabrón*, what a nice looking shirt”; 237). He goes on to state that, “Naman kema ti porobesor de uilinkij; no hay como el istudio, nejlia ti chingó” (“Now you are really a bilingual teacher; there’s nothing like school studies, you really are a *chingón*”; 237). Vulgar loan words fill the actors’ lines and mark a *coyotl* discourse replete with metaphors of rape and pillaging.

Epitacio honors a disrespectful discourse, and this is why he needs to emphasize repeatedly that it is in fact he who is respectful. He sees Indigenous peoples as having no knowledge to offer. At the end of scene three, Epitacio reveals a physical violence that accompanies this discourse: “Mi cuchio, esti no lo puedo dejar ondi quiera que vaiga,

siempre que lo tieni que me lo cumpañas” (“My knife, this I can’t leave wherever I go, it always comes along with me”; 238). He displays a menacing attitude: “Ura sí, que se mi punga el que seya. Así hasta Panchi Via me tieni miedo. Vámonos” (“Now yes, let whoever wants to get in front of me. With this, even Pancho Villa is afraid of me. Let’s have at it”; 238). His tragicomic reference to Pancho Villa subtly suggests that the Mexican Revolution was a failure in the Huasteca because social inequality persists. Villa, one of the idealized figures of the Revolution, is reduced to simply another *cabrón* with whom to compete. As mentioned in chapter one, Huastecan Nahuas refer to the Revolution as “The Scare”—a conflict with no benefits for Indigenous communities but rather vulnerable times in which they had to hide from conscription and attacks from competing groups.

This physical violence, in addition to epistemic violence, surfaces in the wordplay with *güingaro* (long machete for cutting weeds) and *uigüeras* (236). *Uigüeras* is a hybrid word, constructed from Nahuatl *uiui* [idiot] with a Spanish suffix to express “idiocies,” that plays on the word *güingaro* and makes jest of work with the machete in the fields. Epitacio contrasts this labor with his own ability to cut with his treasured knife. In this disparity though, he is the one shown to be the *uiui* (idiot). Epitacio explains to Nicolás, “Pa que veigas lo qui hace el istudio, asina se sopera ono. Asina dejas de ser indio, ignorante, uigüi como los animalitos” (“So that you see what studies do, that’s how one gets ahead. That’s how you stop being Indian, ignorant, *uigüi* like animals”; 237). In his comments, Epitacio unintentionally underscores that he is really the ignorant one. He deems the Nahuas of his community animals, but ironically uses animals to describe

himself: *coyotl* (coyote) and *cabrón* (literally “big goat”). Epitacio attempts to dominate those around him, violently swinging around in his antics like the *güingaro* machete he criticizes. The knife he carries matches his garb and underscores the brutality he embodies, a prop that will appear in the climax of the play.

Epitacio as the real *uiui* (idiot) is emphasized in these turns on language. *Bilingüe* (bilingual) in Spanish is transformed into something else: “Como mayestro: kenkiliuiyaj” (“As a teacher: as they say”; 236). *Kiluij* (*quilhuiah*, “they say it”) resembles *bilingüe* (bilingual) in its pronunciation and functions as a satire of “bilingual” education. Such bilingualism is really only asserted as opposed to practiced. The characters never refer to Epitacio as *bilingüe* (bilingual), but rather numerous mispronunciations of the word appear. Nicolás, as already cited, states, after seeing Epitacio with his urban shirt: “Naman kena ti porobesor de uilinkij” (“Now you are really a bilingual professor”; 237). His status as a bilingual professor has nothing to do with his craft as teacher. The different pronunciations of *bilingüe* with *ui* suggest the word *uiui* (idiot), again alluding back to the other times *uiui* appears in relation to a knife and Epitacio’s own blunderings.

The Uilinkij Teacher’s New Clothes: Significance of Dress in the First Act

Epitacio parades around like Don Quijote in his ill-fitting clothes with his Sancho Panza-like companion Nicolás. Maya mocks Epitacio as a man on a mission to save his community. His clothes parallel his drinking habits. Grandfather Juantsi refers to drinking as taking a *preba* (“prueba”), a “shot” or “chug”: “Uelis tijneki tikontlalis la preba ika ni achichik cirfeza” (“You might want to try this ‘bitter water’ beer”; 238). While Juantsi is moderate in his alcohol consumption within ceremonial contexts,

Epitacio is an alcoholic. Throughout the first act, Maya plays with the word *prueba* in different contexts to condemn his consumption of beer and additional excesses. Nicolás explains to his parents in scene two that if they try on the clothes that “*uste vas estar como in lecenciao, uan taua ke de probesura*” (“You are going to be like a lawyer, and you will be like a professor”; 235). The pronunciation of *profesor* as *probesura* resembles *probar* (from which the word *prueba* originates, “to try” such as “to try on” clothing). Epitacio expresses that changing to urban clothes (“*haciendo la prueba*” or “trying a change of clothes”) makes the man. In admiration of Epitacio’s new garbs, Nicolás tells him, “*Naman kema ti porobesor de uilinkij; no hay como el istudio, nejlia ti chingó*” (“Now you are a bilingual professor; there’s nothing like studies, you really are a *chingón*”; 237). Again, Maya plays with the pronunciation of *profesor*. They try on, or *prueban*, the clothing (in the cues it states *prueban la ropa*). Epitacio, the bilingual teacher, or *profesor*, makes them try different clothing, a different language, and alcohol in excess.⁴⁵ In these plays on the word *prueba*, Maya alludes to a three-fold mission brought by the Spaniards and inherited down to the present—to inebriate, dress, and indoctrinate Indigenous peoples in a position of inferiority.

Clothing is also key in references to the *cuanegro* (“wood black”) dance within the first act. After Nicolás has finished imparting Epitacio’s injunction and left, Akostij tells his brother Juantsi, “*Naman kena mo montli mo patlas ken se kuanegro*” (“Now your son-in-law [Epitacio’s father Kosej] is going to change like a *cuanegro*”; 236). Kosej has gone to try on the urban clothes his son has given him.⁴⁶ In a *cuanegro* performance, one dancer represents a Spaniard/mestizo and another represents a *macehualli* (Indigenous

person) or black slave. At the climax of the dance, they compete with knives or swords for an Indigenous girl. To understand these allusions to the *cuanegro* in *Ixtlamatinij*, it is important to know that this dance represents a parody of contemporary *mestizos*, not solely of colonial-era Spaniards. “Wood black” refers to the black *mestizo/ coyote* boots that the dancers wear to step heavily on a wooden stage. This sheds light on Akostij’s comment about Kosej leaving to dress like a *cuanegro*, because Kosej goes to put on black boots. This present-day relevance contrasts with how government cultural institutions depict this dance. Government descriptions such as this one whitewash the satire of present-day *mestizos*.⁴⁷

Conversely, *Ixtlamatinij* underscores colonialism in the present, how it has significant implications for the contemporary. He parodies how even Epitacio has a difficult time wearing his *coyotl* clothes. Near the end of scene three, he declares to Nicolás, “Porque lo que nos vamos pa grandes” (“Because we are going to be big”; 238). This quixotic declaration is directly followed by a humorous complaint, “unque chingao, estos pinches butas me lastiman las patas” (“but damn it, these damn boots hurt my feet”; 238). He attempts to force others to wear clothing and by extension a discourse that even he has difficulty bearing. In addition, he refers to his feet as *patas*, literally “paws,” after having just ridiculed the members of his community as animals.⁴⁸

In scene three, after he changes into another set of *coyotl* clothing, Epitacio criticizes the abundance of offerings on the altar.⁴⁹ To understand the ramifications of his rejection of these observances in *Ixtlamatinij*, it is important to know a foundational narrative that warns against this. Nahua rituals represent a strong ethic to bring ancestors

to remembrance. There is a story—known by all community members and retold every year—of a *macehualli* (Indigenous person/Nahua) who decided to ignore his deceased relatives during *Xantolo* and cease with the altar and offerings, which in turn results in his own death.⁵⁰ Like the tragic man of this story, Eпитacio states that he does not understand these ceremonies. He looks at the altar and complains, “No sé pa que la ofrenda, los tamalis, el chicolate, ura los santos y las floris, las ceritas; u que chingao; el Sucristo y los santos, hay que combatirlos pa quitar el banatismo como dice el koyotlakatl” (“I don’t know what such offerings are for, the tamales, chocolate, and even the saints and flowers, the candles; oh *chingao*; the Christ and the saints, all this has to be fought to get rid of the fanaticism like the coyote man says”; 237). Eпитacio automatically assumes, a priori, that his community lacks knowledges worth investing the time to understand.

Eпитacio has literally just changed his clothing at the altar,⁵¹ symbolic of burying himself and his heritage in the ground like the man who ignores *Xantolo* in the traditional story. He states twice that he wishes his parents would simply die (242), but he himself is already deceased spiritually by rejecting *Xantolo* practices and the ethical framework tied to them. This is suggested also when Juantsi observes how a candle’s flame begins to brighten, which foretells of imminent visitors, in this case deceased ones for *Xantolo*: “Xikita, xikita; kej kauani ni candela, asituaajya to animajua” (“Look, look; how the candle burns bright, ‘our souls’ [deceased relatives] have already arrived”; 234). Eпитacio himself, though physically alive, is seen as one of these relatives.

In scene five of the first act, Eпитacio’s brother Cirilo arrives from his position as a *soldado raso* (private) with the army. In contrast with Eпитacio and Nicolás, he speaks

clear Spanish and supports his parents' cultural practices. Cirilo does not come dressed as a soldier, which underscores that Epitacio has arrived like a soldier ready to attack his own community. There is another play on pronunciation with *mantas* for *mandas* ("you command" in Spanish"). When the family reacts negatively to Epitacio's "gifts," Nicolás responds, "Pos Pitacio dijió, que se lo tienes que se lo puncas osté, nemo do que amo tij tlepanitas tlen mits **mantas**" ("Well Epitacio said, that you have to put them on, you're going to have to respect what **he commands** you to do"; 235, emphasis added). *Manta* plays with the word *manta* (blanket) in Spanish, in turn a Spanish loan word used in Nahuatl to refer to traditional Nahua clothing for men. Again, this alludes to the idea that the clothes make the person, that Epitacio can command, *mandar*, because of the way he dresses, *mantas*. Epitacio seeks to claim superiority, but Maya mocks this, playing with a Nahuatl word to refer to clothing that is supposedly superior because of its difference from Nahua apparel.

Epitacio and Nicolás grow impatient while waiting for their brother on the road, and they wander off to get drunk. The family is surprised when Cirilo arrives unaccompanied by his two brothers. Cirilo is even more surprised to see his parents dressed in the clothes Epitacio has brought. He inquires, "Díganme, ¿Por qué se visten así? . . . No me digan que van a participar con los cuanegros" ("Tell me, why are you dressed like that? . . . Don't tell me that you are going to participate in the *cuane*gros"; 239). Epitacio's failure to receive Cirilo reflects how he is unwilling to pay the respect due either living or deceased relatives. Cirilo refers to the *cuane*gros dance and wonders

if his parents will be participating in it because of their clothes. He cannot understand why they would wear these clothes unless it is meant to parody them.

His family tells him of Epitacio's and Nicolás's attitudes toward their practices, and Cirilo responds that "en estos días se esperan a nuestros difuntos, a nuestros parientes ya muertos, a mi abuela, a mi hermanita muerta, qué hermoso es todo y qué alivio para el espíritu" ("during these days we wait for our dead, our deceased relatives, my grandmother, my little sister who died, everything is so beautiful and a relief for the spirit"; 239). He understands the ethical purposes of these ceremonies. Cirilo goes on to call performance of these rituals "life" (would be *nemiliztli* in Nahuatl):

A esto es a lo que yo le llamo vida. Yo sé, abuelo, como me has dicho siempre: que el día de mañana, cuando nos toque dejar este mundo, también vendremos cada año a la gran fiesta de Xantolo, y yo sé que nuestros hijos nos esperarán con flores, incienso, tamales y chocolate, como esta vez nosotros estamos esperando a las ánimas (239)

This is what I call life. I know, grandfather, what you have always told me: that some day, when it's our turn to leave this world, we will also come every year to the great festivity Xantolo, and I know that our children will wait for us with flowers, incense, tamales and chocolate, like now we wait for the souls.

Cirilo's family comments on how his words exemplify a good heart (*yollo*) and respect (*tlatlepanittaliztli*). His mother Nichaj tells him, "Ni pil hijo, asina hablas bonito, guen curazú" ("Little son, you speak pretty like that, a good heart"; 239). His father Kosej and his grandfather Juantsi echo these praises. Kosej tells him, "Tó asina rispetas todo, nejlia

bueno genti no telpokaj” (“You respect everything, really you are good my son”; 239). Juantsi states, “Taua nejlia kuali mo yolo. Bonitos que piensas osté, respetas uan uey mo corazú” (“You have a really good heart. You think pretty, you respect and your heart is big”; 239). They emphasize that Cirilo has a good heart, and, for a reader unaware of the profound meanings associated with the heart, this could appear overly repetitive. *Yollotl* represents what Arturo Arias calls a “space of affectivity” (226), in which knowledge is not invalidated for not falling within the Western vision and the supposed superiority of Western “reasoning.” This exchange between Cirilo and his relatives also displays Maya’s acceptance of a mixture between Spanish and Nahuatl. Even when not coerced to speak Spanish, the family attempts to speak it with numerous words from Nahuatl. This *nahuañol* reflects the dynamics within Huastecan Nahua communities, in which nearly all inhabitants are at least partially bilingual.

In scene five of the first act, Cirilo chastises Eпитacio for his attitude toward their parents. He tells the family that they should ignore Eпитacio, that “ma ti mech tlenpanitakaj; yo también quiero usar la ropa que se usa en este rancho” (“We should respect you; I want to use the clothing of the community”; 239). Not only does Cirilo arrive without army apparel, he requests that the family bring a *coton* for him to wear (239). The *coton* is a traditional long sleeve white shirt worn by men which forms part of the full *manta*. The contrast in clothing between Cirilo and Eпитacio highlights the different discourses they represent.

Cirilo speaks almost entirely in Spanish throughout the play. One reason is perhaps to underscore that one can speak Spanish well and respect Nahua practices at the

same time. Another reason is that it serves as a diegetic commentary for members of the audience who do not understand Nahuatl. The main plot of the play is easy to follow with only Cirilo's part. The fact that Cirilo speaks Spanish practically throughout the entire play makes the play intelligible for mixed audiences that speak Spanish and Nahuatl (which was probably most often the case). Cirilo's use of Spanish also depicts a more complex situation than a reversal of a binary of Spanish/Nahuatl in which Nahuatl ousts Spanish. Cirilo's fluent use of both Spanish and Nahuatl underscores that trying to eliminate the Nahuatl language is foolish, since a person can speak both these languages without Nahuatl constituting the cognitive handicap it is commonly represented.

Emboldened by Cirilo's words, the family members openly criticize Epitecio. After Cirilo leaves to visit neighbors, Juantsi states:

Nejlia an mech uiui ita ne koyotlakatl, axtlatlanita; namej in tsijkolojtinemise
kej totolimej. Pubre no nieto, kineki mech tlalis: kej lencenciao uan kej pubresura,
san tlen kuetsona; yon axkimati ken mech chiuas, siquiera borlas uan borlas. (240)

Truly that coyote man [Epitecio] wants to make you all look like fools, he does not respect us; now we will bend over like turkeys. My poor grandson, he wants to make us like a lawyer and like a professor, he's just dumb; he doesn't know what he does, only mocking and more mocking.

Cirilo's support of the family helps shift their attitude to one of resistance to Epitecio's pressure. Instead of a *profesor*, Juantsi calls him a *pubresura*, which resembles the word *pobre* (poor). At the end of this scene, Kosej takes off his boots in defiance of Epitecio's

strict orders (240). Epitacio's mute uncle Tachoj puts them on and dances out on the street to parody his nephew.

By forcing a parallel between language and the depiction of clothing, what Epitacio practices is far from bilingualism (which Epitacio and his brother Nicolás comically pronounce as *uilingui*, resembling the word *unilingüe* or unilingual). Epitacio fails to represent even monolingualism as he serves as a puppet for some other discourse—he is in fact *nolingual*. Significantly, his uncle Tachoj has the same name (short for Epitacio in Nahuatl). Throughout the play, his uncle runs around only able to yell, “Aeej...Mamaaajj...aej.” In championing *coyotl* discourse, Epitacio finds himself alienated from everyone including himself.

In scene six of the first act, when he sees Epitacio in the distance, Tachoj quickly sneaks back in the house and removes the boots. Epitacio's first words upon entering: “(entra intempestivamente) Qué te dije, carnal, tenían que estar tragando cerveza en la casa” (“[he enters angrily] What did I tell you, brother, they had to be drinking beer at home”; 240). This comment exemplifies a double standard that scorns Indigenous communities for alcohol consumption. Representative of this *coyotl* discourse, Epitacio disregards his own excessive drinking. His views of Nahuas as submerged in superstition and alcoholism resemble what literary critic James H. Cox calls a “colonial red herring,” an “alibi” that draws attention away from non-Native wrongdoings (41).

Epitacio displays a complete lack of respect when he re-enters the home. He eats bread from off the altar, which the family had offered in memory of his baby sister who, as stated earlier by Cirilo, has passed away. He mockingly states, “Pan de moñequitos pa

los moertos de hambre” (“Little dolls’ bread for those dead of hunger”; 241). This is a bad omen for things to come, as the traditional story referred to earlier teaches that harm comes to those who fail to honor *Xantolo*.

Epitacio confronts his parents who have changed out of the urban clothes. He rebukes them: “Pa eso lu traje, pa eso lo cumpré, pa que si cambeyen y tiren esa ropa de ignorantes” (“that’s why I brought it [the clothing], that’s why I bought it, so that you change and throw out those other clothes of ignorant people”; 241). Epitacio associates the clothing here directly with possession of knowledge by suggesting that ignorance will be displaced by outward appearance. When his grandfather intervenes, Epitacio retorts:

Osté te callas, viejo. Tó ya no tienes remedio, to, agüelo, ya no soplas; ya timo chingaro on; pero estos cabronis son mis jefes y no vuy a permitir que sigan de indios atrasados, si tienin que mejurar, tienin que dejar el pinchi calzón y la nagua, vestir como los de razón, punerse zepatos y hablar en castiano (241, sic)
Shut up, old man. You are a lost cause, you, grandpa, are dead; you are already screwed over; but these *cabrones* are my parents and I will not allow them to continue as backward Indians, if they have to progress, they have to leave behind those damn pants and skirt, to dress like those of reason, to put on shoes and speak Spanish

Epitacio’s father Kosej protests, “Pero no puedes, no hablas en castiano, amo nij yekoa . . . no puedes, no puedes. Te pinajti, nij pia vergüenzo” (“But I can’t, I don’t speak Spanish, I do not use it . . . I can’t, I can’t. It’s shameful, I’m ashamed”; 241). Maya plays on the exchanges in Nahuatl and Spanish here. Kosej means to say, “No puedo, no hablo

castellano” (“No I can’t, I don’t speak Spanish”) when she states “No puedes, no hablas en castiano” (“No you can’t, you don’t speak Spanish”; 241). In Nahuatl, the subject in part is indicated at the beginning of a verb and an *s* (or *z* depending on the alphabet) at the end indicates future tense. With these turns on language, Kosej literally tells Eпитacio “you can’t, you don’t speak Spanish” and takes jest at Eпитacio’s incompetency.

Eпитacio’s mother Nichaj criticizes the ill-fitting language and ill-fitting clothes: “Ax neli, ax neli. Ax nech paktia festido, no puedes andas con zepato” (‘No way, no way. I don’t like this dress, I can’t walk in shoes’; 241, sic). Eпитacio’s wrath at their refusal to wear the clothing is absurd because he complained about how uncomfortable he feels in his own clothing in the previous scene.

Eпитacio tells them, angered by his grandfather for having called him his “poor grandson”:

Qué tlajtlakoli ni qué tlajtlakoli. Yu suy maestro y me tienin que respetar. Tienin que cambiar; se tienin que vestir como los de razón y dejar de andar como los indios. Si quierin que los respete y les diga papá . . . (Cirilo ha entrado) Y Quierin ustedis decirme hijo, antuns si tienin que puner la ropa que les cumpré . . . ya le digo se tienin que civilizar, tienin que ser como los de razón, óiganme bien, tienin que dejar de ser unos ignorantes, onos indios, si quierin que yo siga siendo su hijo (241).

Don’t talk to me about *tlajtlakoli*. I am a teacher and you have to respect me. You have to change; you have dress like those of reason and stop walking around like Indians. If you want me to respect you and call you father . . . (Cirilo enters) and

if you want to call me son, then you will have to put on the clothing that I bought you . . . Once and for all you have to become civilized, you have to be like those of reason, listen well to what I have to say, you have to stop being a bunch of ignorant people, a bunch of Indians, if you want me to keep being your son.

Tlajtlakoli means both sin and suffering in a poor state. Epiteacio rejects his grandfather's suggestion and threatens to disown his family if they do not change. He demands respect while at the same time showing the uttermost disrespect for others. Epiteacio demands that they become "civilized," a word still used today to express that Indigenous peoples need to abandon superstitions, speak one language (Spanish), participate in a market economy, and dress "normal." He ironically tells them that they have to cease being ignorant in a Spanish riddled with errors.

Epiteacio and Cirilo Come Face to Face in the First Act's Final Scene

Scene seven, the last of the first act, represents the play's climax in which Epiteacio and Cirilo come face to face. Cirilo confronts Epiteacio: "Es mejor que no los forces a que se disfracen como tú quieras" ("It's best that you don't force them to put on costumes like you want them to" (241). By his statement, against forcing them to *disfrazarse* (disguise/put on costumes), Cirilo implies that Epiteacio is the one wearing a mask. He goes on to tell him that his attitude is "una falta de respeto muy grande" ("a big lack of respect"; 242).

Epiteacio defends himself: "De manera que sacarlos del atraso en que se encuentran, es una falta grande de respeto?" ("Saying you're going to save them from their backwardness is very disrespectful?"; 242). He continues justifying his attitude: "El

de ser indios, el no conocer ni una letra, el no saber hablar el castiano, el vestir así como anda el agüelo o como los de esta rancheriyá, ¿no es una vergüenza andar así y haber nacido de ellos?” (“Being Indian, not knowing a single letter, not knowing how to speak Spanish, dressing like our grandfather or those of this ranch, isn’t it embarrassing to walk around like that and to have been born of them?”; 242). Respect for Epitacio constitutes respecting the knowledges of the coyotes.

Cirilo tells Epitacio, “Eso que tú quieres hacer es una tontería, una locura; o eres un tonto o de plano estás trastornado al humillar y maltratar a nuestros padres de esta forma” (“What you want to do is stupid, madness; either you’re dumb or you’re just plain obsessed with humiliating and mistreating our parents this way”; 242). As mentioned previously, Epitacio is like Don Quijote after reading so many novels. He symbolically saddles up decked in the outfit that he has read so much about. There is much focus on his being learned and having read much, and these studies blind him to reality. He thinks that he represents the blessings of justice and reason, and his former community must accept him as the superior bestower of these blessings. Epitacio has a Sancho Panza-like companion in his brother Nicolás (humorously called Culás [similar to the word for *anus* in Spanish] in the play since the *o* and *u* are interchangeable in Nahuatl). Nicolás accompanies him and attempts to support him in the “heroic” exploit of forcing his parents to speak Spanish and wear *coyotlacatl* clothing.

Convinced of the validity of his mission, Epitacio tells Cirilo, “Yo no soy on tuntu, soy maestro pa docar a los intios, pa sacarlos del atraso en que stán, **abrirles los ojos** y que ya no sigan en la ignorancia y en el banatismo, estoy aquí pa qui se civilicin.

Y sabes que si alguien respeta y sabi algo, ese soy yo” (“I am not dumb, I am a teacher here to teach the Indians, to save them from their backwardness, **to open their eyes** so that they do not stay in ignorance and superstition, I am here so that they become civilized. And you know that if someone respects and knows something, that person is me”; 242, emphasis added). As noted earlier, Epitacio considers knowledge a field in which there is no reciprocity, but rather a hierarchy in which respect constitutes a struggle to achieve the upper rungs of a social ladder. He says that he seeks to open their eyes. This again alludes back to *ixtli*, the face and eyes that bring the personal knowledge that provides effective solutions—but here Epitacio attempts to “open their eyes” to a very different approach. He tells Cirilo that it is a shame, “que **siento** on suldao, seyes igual de ignorante” (“that **being** [I feel] a soldier, you are just as ignorant”; 242). Again, Maya plays with Epitacio’s mispronunciations. *Siento* (I feel) instead of *siendo* (being) underscores that Epitacio is in fact the violent one, suggesting that he feels like *on suldao* (a *cabrón* soldier). The second verb indicates something similar, as *seyes* instead of *seas* brings attention to the first part of the verb *se*, or *sé* (I know), and thus can be read as “sé igual de ignorante” (I know as much as an ignorant person). He wishes that his parents would simply die to rid himself of this stain of *indio* parents on his past (242). Cirilo slaps Epitacio in the face at this remark in an attempt to make him aware of his destructive attitude.

Epitacio turns furious and replies, “Me pegastes en la cara, carnal; pero esti chingaso un si va a quedar así; Aquí va ti rajar la magre” (“You hit me in the face, brother; but this *chingaso* [violation/rape] is not going to end like that; I am going to

rajar la magre [literally, “tear open your mother” with connotations of rape]”; 242). In Epitacio’s framework, being slapped in the face is tantamount to being violated and assault against the hypermasculinity he attempts to portray along with his “educational” project. While a common reaction to a slap in the face almost anywhere would invite a violent reaction, within the context of the play it is more so an intent to wake up Epitacio out of government-sponsored indoctrination that has led him to disown his own parents. In turn, Epitacio embodies a *machismo* that was instilled on Indigenous communities—or at least amplified by Spaniards’ *ego conquiro*—from the beginning of the colonial era.⁵² As literary critic Héctor Domínguez Ruvalcaba identifies, the norms in Mexican machista society “authorizes the community to exclude, condemn, discriminate against, and coerce those whom the patriarchy defines as its others” (6). Such discourse dictates that the only response to Cirilo’s slap—an aggression associated with fights between women—is retaliation with greater force, and a performance of his hypermasculinity with the phallic symbol of a long knife. Epitacio pulls out his knife to cut his brother’s face: “Nu mi ua placar, li ua rajar la cara paqui nu mi güelva a chingar. (Le tira un golpe al tiempo que Nichaj se interpone)” (“I am not going to calm down, I am going to tear open his face so that he doesn’t try to screw me again. [He tries to hit Cirilo when Nichaj intervenes.]”; 242). Epitacio’s attempt to wound Cirilo’s face symbolizes the imposition of a different hierarchical system of knowledge on him and machista violence in which the archetypal figures are the virile *conquistador* or the effeminate *indio*. In wanting to cut Cirilo’s face, Epitacio attempts to reduce the subject, Cirilo, to an object, like cutting a tree in which he will inscribe the discourse he represents—a discourse that does not allow for dissent—

and his own masculine superiority as the inscriber and aggressor. It is far from the objective approach purported. Cirilo dodges this assault, and Epitacio in missing cuts his mother's hand by accident (which he ironically had threatened to do with "rajar la magre," literally to "cut open his mother"). Through his actions, Epitacio attempts to prohibit speech (slashing Cirilo's face) and action (cutting his mother's hand).

After injuring his mother, Epitacio immediately demands, "El culantrero que nu si meta" ("Don't let the shaman intervene"; 242). He does not want his shaman uncle Akostij to try to heal her with community remedies. This injunction reflects Gamio's criticism of Indigenous community-based approaches to ailments and the knowledge production within the community. The first act ends with an appeal to the community system of justice, and the family calls for the judge and *topile* (community messenger) to place Epitacio on community trial. In the following section I now turn to an analysis of the brief second act and its implications for the Nahua conceptualization of respect.

Tlatlepaniliztli: Respect for Elders in the Second Act

The second act represents a swift resolution of the conflict between Cirilo and Epitacio. The child Órcilo appears in the first scene of this act, which might seem like an interruption in the plot. Although he appears only briefly at the beginning, middle, and end of the play, Órcilo is a symbolically significant figure as an omen of future challenges with more people such as Epitacio. At the beginning of the second act, the grandfather Juantsi complains about him running around and the problems with youth in general (243). As evident in his interactions with the shaman Akostij and his daughter's responsibility to care for him, Órcilo is related to Akostij and should probably follow in

the shaman's steps. Nonetheless, this new generation rejects the elders' knowledge. Akostij, speaking of Órcilo, states, "Ni tlatskakonetl, **axtlatlanpanita**, san mauiltia ika ni uejuetlakatl" ("This naughty boy, **he does not respect**, he only plays with the elderly man [Juantsi]"; 243, emphasis added). Órcilo does not respect his elders and instead mocks them. Such is indicative of a society in which the elderly are perceived as backward and young Nahuas view themselves as "modern." Rather than honored for their knowledges gained from many experiences, elders are relegated to marginal spaces.

As I said in chapter one, *tlatlanpanitta* itself carries at its root *itta* (to see) and connotes seeing someone else as a carrier and producer of valuable knowledges, one with the personal experience of an *ixtlamatini*. Respect is mentioned explicitly at least twenty times in *Ixtlamatinij*. As Epitacio has a very different notion of what constitutes respect. This respect is set apart from that of the community, often reflected linguistically in the contrast between the Spanish *respetar* and *respetaroa* (*respetar* with Nahuatl verb ending) with *tlatlanpanittaliztli* (respect). It also relates to *tlaixpan* ("that which is in front" or altar) with its emphasis on honoring one's ancestors and *looking* to them for guidance—as in front within a dynamic present and not behind as a distant memory. Such a respect allows for an effective "interculturality" in the sense of an evenhanded exchange among different epistemological approaches.

The lack of respect on the part of youth appears in Hernández's *Xochikoskatl*, which I mention here because of its close similarity to *Ixtlamatinij* and how it helps elucidate Maya's play. Hernández, as seen in the previous chapter, describes a youth who leaves the community to study and returns, like Epitacio, with the intent to force his

parents to speak only Spanish.⁵³ Epitacio takes his disrespect toward elders to an extreme, especially in the moment when he tells his grandfather, “Osté te callas, viejo” (“You shut up, old man!”; 241). After cutting his mother, Epitacio is taken to prison and there experiences an anagnorisis in which he realizes the violent nature of his language and actions. In the second act, he embraces Nahua ritual as essential to his psychological well-being and life force/*yollotl*. Epitacio realizes that the teachings of the real *ixtlamatinij* (the learned ones) with valid knowledges are found in his community and that the science of the “gente de razón” (people of reason) had fooled him. We initially find out about this change only second hand though through the community *topile* (messenger). In the second scene that only consists of a brief exchange of Epitacio’s family with the *topile*, this messenger reports: “Nu, el mayestro Pitacio no se nuja con su apá, ya está conforme, **dici que tienin razón**, él les faltó porque estaba borraco, no tarda en llegar, nomás firma unos papeles y paga la multa y enseguida que se vini pa cá” (“No, the teacher Epitacio is not angry with his father, he is in agreement, **he says you are right**, he offended you because he was drunk, he will be back soon, he just needs to sign some paperwork and pay a fine and right away he will come here”; 243–244, emphasis added). This exchange leaves the audience expectant as to how much Epitacio has really changed, especially within such a brief time. It could very well be that he blames his drunkenness for physically assaulting his own family members, especially his own mother, but that he intends to continue purporting the superiority of his educational training. Nonetheless, a key phrase in the *topile*’s report that suggests a deeper transformation is “dici que tienin razón” (he says you are right). This is significant

because of the play on the word *razón* (used to refer to both *reason* and *right* in the sense of “being right”). *Tienen razón* signifies that the Indigenous members of the community are the ones who were both in the right in the sense of being correct and possessing wisdom. Epitacio effectively flips the epithet *los de razón* (“those of reason”) on its head.

In scene three of the second act, the family prepares to receive Epitacio again in the home, along with the judge of the community and the *topile*. Some family members are suspicious of Epitacio’s alleged change of mind, perhaps suspicious that it is merely a ruse to be able to leave the community jail. Akostij, still upset by Epitacio’s insults, complains, “Semejante mosisiniya kej se chichi, na kilt nech ilhuiya ni culantrero, axtetlepanita, san nech iluiya ni culantrero. Ma aulas ni kixkacapatsas” (“That guy gets angry like a dog, and he calls me a *culantrero*, he does not respect, he only calls me *culantrero*. Let him come here and I’ll slap him”; 244, sic). He threatens to slap Epitacio like Cirilo did, again symbolic of attempting to wake him out of his senseless attacks on the community and family. Juantsi calms him down and says, “xijkaua; amo xicolini nompaa kuesoli; necholkokojkia tlen panok” (“let it go; do not rekindle that sorrow; what happened already hurt our hearts”; 244). Juantsi welcomes the community governing structure with a *juez* (judge) and the *topile* to step in and help resolve this conflict.

It is significant that Akostij describes Epitacio as *mosisiniya* (he gets furious).⁵⁴ There is a well-known story in Huastecan communities, as well known as the man who does not recognize *Xantolo*, of the *tzitzimitl* (“furious grandmother/woman”) who kills and cooks her own grandson in a tamale.⁵⁵ Epitacio metaphorically tried to kill his own parents and do away with ceremonial practices involving corn and tamales. It is

significant that the only thing he ate in the first act was the piece of bread laid out on the altar for his deceased sister.⁵⁶ Eпитacio only ate bread to the exclusion of corn. He tried to break ceremony and the connection with family. Akostij's comments that Eпитacio *mosisiniya* (gets furious) take on greater meaning in relation to Eпитacio's offenses against *Xantolo* observances in the first act.

In scene four of the second act, Juantsi speaks with Cirilo and tells him: "Kuali mo yolo, kuali motlalnamkilis" ("Your heart is good, your knowledge is good"; 244). He has a life and philosophy respectful toward the community. Cirilo asks Juantsi why they are letting Eпитacio get off so easy, and he responds that Cirilo should let it go, "pampa iuintiyaya; tij kalakili se maitl" ("because he [Eпитacio] was drunk; and you laid a hand on him"; 244). Alcohol is blamed for the actions. Juantsi goes on to state, "Se tlaunketl, san tlemach kineki ki chiuas" ("A drunkard, he just does whatever"; 244). Rather than just a dismissal of Eпитacio's drunken state, blaming alcohol can be read as attributing his actions on a deeper level to colonialism and its introduction of alcoholism into Indigenous communities.⁵⁷

To this point we have only heard second-hand accounts of Eпитacio's transformation as well as doubts regarding his sincerity. The rest of act four keeps the audience in suspense, as again we hear about Eпитacio's change of heart through one of his brothers. Cirilo declares to the family: "Vamos a continuar celebrando a las ánimas, aunque ya pasó el mero día" ("Let's keep honoring the souls, even though the big day has passed"; 244). After having visited Eпитacio in jail, he informs the family, "Eпитacio quiere que le mandes un algodón como el mío, porque no quiere entrar a esta casa sin

traerlo puesto” (“Epitacio wants you to send him a *coton* like mine, because he does not want to enter this house without it on”; 244). Even after having paid the fine and signed the papers, Epitacio refuses to return home without the traditional Nahua garments as a gesture of his sincere acceptance of his family’s practices as well as an admittance to errors that go well beyond his drunken rage. The family searches for clothes for Epitacio, as if for a new set of clothing on the altar for a deceased relative. Kosej questions this, incredulous at what Cirilo has told him about Epitacio: “Hijo, para tlej mo vistes cotón kej ti intios, yaja axki paktia, kijtoa ti uiuimej san tlej fiero to tlakej” (“Son, why would he want to dress with a *coton* like us Indians, he doesn’t like it, he says that we are stupid that our clothes are just plain ugly”; 244, emphasis added). Akostij seconds these suspicions in his comments to Kosej, “Semejante luco nompa tlakatl, nompa kilt mayestro, nama mokotontisneki kej ni ti ignorantes, uiui mayestro, san te borlaroa” (“That guy is just crazy, that so-called teacher, now he wants to dress like us ignorant people, dumb teacher, all he does is make fun of others”; 245, emphasis added). Akostij is still bitter about what Epitacio has said and wonders if perhaps this insistence on wearing the *coton* is a veiled attempt to escape punishment and poke jest again at his family’s practices. He turns the term *huihui* (idiot) back on Epitacio. As such, he sets Epitacio apart from the truly wise elders of the community and criticizes him for believing himself superior for his foreign studies.

Grandfather Juantsi hopes that this conflict may soon be resolved: “No koneuaj, no ixuiuj, san tlen kuesoli panojka toanimajua in ixpa, tlajtlakoli tlen ki chiuja no ixui, to Teotsi ma tech tlapojpolui” (“My children, my grandchildren, only sadness has already

appeared for our deceased relatives at the altar, it's sad what my grandson does, may our Father forgive us"; 245). The confrontation with Epiteacio has interrupted the communion with relatives and brought suffering. Akostij then says, "Mani cerajtlati intlaj axteipa motejteuise **tlaixpa**" ("Let me light candles if they [Epiteacio and Cirilo] won't fight later on the **altar**"; 245, emphasis added). The altar (*tlaixpan*) is brought back to the centrality of the scene and points the view of the characters toward their deceased relatives—as *in front* of them and not relegated to the past. Kosej tells Akostij not to worry, that "Ayokneli, moyolseuijkeyya" ("It won't happen again, they have calmed their **hearts**"; 245, emphasis added). The heart is also brought back to the scene and provides an affectivity that can help heal the wounds that run deeper than just the evening of conflict between Epiteacio and Cirilo.

Before Epiteacio finally arrives, Cirilo tells everyone at the end of scene four, "Quiero que todos olvidemos lo que aquí sucedió el jueves pasado" ("I want us to forget everything that happened last Thursday"; 245). It is significant when one calculates the dates that would have coincided for *Xantolo* the year Maya wrote the play (Huejutla de Reyes, Hidalgo, 6 February 1987). In the 1986 calendar year, October 31 was a Friday and then the principal festivities go on for two more days. From Cirilo saying that the main days have passed and that the fight with Epiteacio took place the previous Thursday, the day before the start of the observation of *Xantolo*, one can infer that the date is most likely Monday, November 3. This is very significant because it alludes to Christ's burial for three days and resurrection. Epiteacio returns a "resurrected" Nahua who now embraces his practices. The dates themselves coincide with that of scriptural accounts

that Christ was buried three days and then rose on Sunday. These allusions are not surprising, as Maya was intensely religious and self-identified as a devout Catholic.

This self-identification needs more explanation, especially since this loyalty to Catholicism could be read as Eurocentric and contradictory of any possible decolonial project. Within most Nahua communities, the majority by far consider themselves to be Catholic—although not necessarily in a sense officially sanctioned by church administration.⁵⁸ Essentialist Indigenous discourses that call for a complete rejection of Catholic practices or any European incursion are completely foreign to these communities, and most often are met with firm rejection. At the beginning of the colonial era, many Nahua pretended to accept Catholicism and substituted symbols with their own practices.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, over time this syncretism came to be accepted as the norm in a fusion in which there was no longer a distinction made between Indigenous and Catholic practices. This is evident in *Ixtlamatinij* with its unique ceremonies mixed with allusions to Christ. As opposed to constituting a submission to Eurocentric religious beliefs, it instead represents quite the opposite—Nahua exercising their agency, appropriating, and transforming “Catholicism” for their own needs and making it their own.⁶⁰

In the end, Eпитacio will not enter the home without his change of traditional clothes. He has been in a prison for three days, like Christ’s tomb, and then comes out. Contrasted with his previous black boots, Eпитacio comes dressed in the bright white *coton*.⁶¹ Eпитacio, previously foolish and blind to his errors, now sees clearly in the second act the importance of his community’s values. In the fifth and final scene of *Ixtlamatinij* (The Wise Ones), the audience finally hears Eпитacio’s own account of his

transformation. He returns home penitent on his knees and pleads, “Les he faltado al respeto . . . Soy un tuntu . . . les he faltado al respeto” (“I have offended you . . . I am a dummy . . . I have disrespected you”; 246). He repeats twice that he has disrespected them and refers to himself a *tuntu* (*tonto* or *huihui* in Nahuatl). He tells his brother Cirilo, “No . . . carnal ya no . . . carnal ya no . . . Hermano, eso es, hermano, y mucho más mejor . . . No, ikni, xikita tlen nij chiua . . .” (“No . . . *carnal* no . . . *carnal* no more . . . *hermano*, that’s right, *hermano*, and much better . . . *no, ikni*, see what I am doing”; 246). Epitacio’s language transitions from informal Spanish *carnal* (bro) to formal *hermano* (brother) and then to a higher register with the Nahuatl *noicniuh* (my brother). It marks respect not only for his brother but Nahua practices in general. He tells Cirilo to observe what he is doing and asks for his forgiveness. He marks this respect with his final words in the play:

Mamá, papá, abuelo, hermanos, tíos. Perdón, perdón por todo; pero qué digo, perdón no, xinechtlapojpoluikaj, nimouiuichijki no selti, ni mokuapolojki ika ni kaxtiltekatlalnamikili, xi nech tlapojpoluikaj ueka ya ni mokuapolo. (246).

Mom, Dad, Grandfather, brothers, uncles. I’m sorry, I’m sorry for everything; but I tell you, I’m sorry no, *xinechtlapohpoluikaj*, *nimouiuichijki no selti, ni mokuapolojki ika ni kaxtiltekatlalnamikili, xinechtlapojpoluikaj ueka ya ni mokuapolo* [forgive me, I made a fool of myself, I got confused with the philosophies of the Spaniards, forgive me because I got confused].

Again, he corrects himself to plead for their forgiveness in Nahuatl after having started to speak in Spanish. His final words are all in Nahuatl. This brings him back into the circle

of his family and marks his respect for Nahua practices.⁶² Eпитacio’s final words switch the erasure from erasing the face (the literal meaning of “ixpolojtiauijya”) seen in the introduction to play to being forgiven or seeking forgiveness, *tlapohpolhuia*, which also has the verb meaning *to erase* at its root.

The reference in Eпитacio’s final words to *caxtiltecatlalnamquilli* (knowledges of the Spaniards) contrasts with *tomacehualtlalnamiquliz* (our Nahua knowledges) from the introduction. In Spanish, Maya translates these knowledges as *ciencia* (which signifies both knowledge and “science”). Such learning connected to the word *ciencia* is supposedly objective, but, as clearly seen in Eпитacio in proclaiming the superiority of *coyotl* science, such objectivity is only myth. These concluding lines bring the play full circle to the importance of exercising a science centered on personal experience and respect. There is nothing wrong with completing one’s studies at the university, but one should not let this go to her or his head/face and discredit local knowledge production. Alternative epistemes and ethics found within Nahua rituals serve as a different science that can subvert state-run pedagogies of dominant Western discourse and generate a more sophisticated and nuanced account of Nahua agency.

Nonetheless, a repentant Eпитacio is not the end of *Ixtlamatinij*. After the final moments of the play in which Eпитacio speaks in Nahuatl, Órcilo unsteadies the altar as he reaches to steal an orange. This shaken offering symbolizes that each year there will be challenges, like the cycle of life and death in the corn crop. The play suggests that, with each generation, there is a growing threat that ceremonies will be lost along with the Nahua worldviews that accompany them. People increasingly look out only for

themselves—like Órcilo taking fruit off the altar for himself—and distance themselves from the rituals that help forge and strengthen communal bonds. Eпитacio’s mute uncle Tachoj goes to the center of the stage and speaks the final “words” of the play: “(Va al centro del escenario y señala a todos) . . . maaaaajjj . . . aeej . . . (Órcilo arranca una naranja del arco haciendo mover el altar) (“[He goes to the center of the stage and points at everyone] . . . maaaaajjj . . . aeej . . . [Órcilo pulls an orange from the arc (of the offering) making the altar move]”; 246). Tachoj then points at everyone, thus implicating the audience members. Órcilo shows a lack of respect in his actions, and Tachoj’s interpellation seems to ask, “Are you respecting these practices? Are you acting like Eпитacio? Like Órcilo?” This breaking of the fourth wall at the play’s conclusion leads audience members to question their own behaviors. While the play represents a happy resolution to the conflict between Eпитacio and his family members, unfortunately such easy resolutions do not play out in real life. While there are no simple answers, *Ixtlamatinij* no doubt succeeds in leading audiences to question and reflect on their own actions, and, even more importantly, dialogue about these issues after the performance.⁶³

Concluding Remarks on *Ixtlamatinij*

As with *Xochikoskatl*, the analysis of *Ixtlamatinij* in this chapter represents an incursion back into this early literature and seeks to foster dialogue about Indigenous knowledge production. Far from art for art’s sake, Maya seeks with *Ixtlamatinij* to criticize a broken educational system.⁶⁴ As I have shown, *Ixtlamatinij* points to the origins of present-day colonialism within Nahua communities. Maya instead proposes a

different language in the play than that of the invader. Literary production in the Nahuatl language shifts the accustomed lens through which “literature” passes.

Ixtlamatinij highlights the deep implications of Nahua pedagogy, ritual, language, and clothing as connected to a complex worldview and network of kinships that have continually been under attack. Through the character Epitacio, the work points to a recognition of the importance of these practices as a key strategy to displacing the perennial discrimination against Nahua populations. Rather than a diatribe against alcohol consumption, attributing Epitacio’s ignoble actions to drunkenness points more so to the importance of a space for dialogue regarding the various issues depicted in *Ixtlamatinij* that afflict the community. His inebriated state is reflective of his inability or unwillingness to engage with the fellow members of the community in serious dialogue on even terms. This is why emphasis within *Ixtlamatinij* on resolution of the conflict through the communal government is so crucial, as it seeks to foment dialogue among those involved with the *topile* and *juez* as intermediaries. It is important to read this within the context of armed conflicts with the government over land rights in the Huasteca at the time *Ixtlamatinij* was written and produced. The municipal, state, and federal government entities had shown an inability to invite a discussion with Nahuas on equal terms and lacked the personal engagement with the communities, which it turned escalated the conflict and resulted in the assassinations of Nahua protestors and activists.

This relates to the reason why respect is a recurrent theme that serves as a crux to the play, because it is a crucial element to open a conversation that recognizes Nahuas as subjects and not the objects of government projects. What one finds completely absent

from *Ixtlamatinij* is any discourse of victimization, so common to numerous *indigenista* narratives that pre-date it. Not a single *mestizo* or foreigner appears in the play, a trope all too common to *indigenista* literature that depicts a combative dichotomy in which a victimized Indigenous population is oppressed by outsiders and in need of a benevolent foreigner to rescue them. While these outside aggressors do not appear in the play, a discourse of Indigenous inferiority is present in *Epitacio*. The internal forms of domination present in the play break with stereotypical representations of Indigenous sameness, and instead reveal a complexity in which Nahuas can be the oppressors of fellow Nahuas. Even when *Epitacio* alters his ways, the work points to the diversity within a community where members have left to join the army or complete their studies in the city.

Ixtlamatinij brings the tension between the Nahua face (face as a metaphor for ways of obtaining wisdom) and the *mestizo* face (as a symbol of nation-state assimilationist discourse) to the stage. Maya highlights alternative pedagogies and methodologies in the production of knowledge. Nahuas prioritize personal experience in the development of strategies and solutions for life challenges, whereas the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) attempted to impose a top-down pedagogy in which the teacher served as the conduit charged with filling the empty student vessels with nationalism, science, and the “national” language. Closely observed in this section, the perspectives connected with the face in *Ixtlamatinij* serve as a profound critique of coloniality and a means to underscore the value of Nahua intellectual production as I have argued.

This chapter's focus on the importance of the face highlights the strength of literature written in Indigenous languages and how personal encounters within these languages can help begin to shift minds (or faces) toward alternative perspectives. Attention to the rituality of language, clothing, and ceremony of not just Nahuas but also dominant Western practices questions the dyadic relation that attempts to set apart Indigenous peoples as Other to the supposed norm of the *coyotl*. Critical attention is also brought to the ritual nature of a play itself, of theatre, in its representation of scenes from reality leading audience members to question the arbitrariness and superficiality of their own everyday practices.

One of the key aspects of Maya's play is the role of theatre itself in attempting to lead audiences of question their own ways. The play succeeds in doing this because it reminds people of members of their communities, especially regarding different responses to migrations to and from urban settings. Some return ready to attack the community (Epitacio) while others return with a greater respect (Cirilo). *Ixtlamatinij* depicts a view of cultural practices as an answer to social conflict in the Huasteca and believes that reformation of the educational system would aid greatly in rectifying much of the discrimination and injustices extant throughout Mexico. Epitacio's violent attack against his brother and mother serve as an example to the audience that will one hopes prevent such attacks from occurring off the stage.

As Donald Frischmann and Carlos Montemayor describe in their anthology *Words of the True Peoples*, *Ixtlamatinij* is especially rich with bilingual and code-switching wordplay. Nonetheless, they do not offer close analyses of the play, with the

exception of a few footnotes that point out these plays on language. As I have shown, much can be gleaned from the innovative shiftings among Spanish loan words, mixings of the two language, and vulgarities in *Ixtlamatinij*. Numerous other works from Maya need to be studied seriously and not merely included in anthologies. *Ixtlamatinij* in particular constitutes an extremely original work that breaks with audiences' expectations about "Nahua literature." The mixing of language challenges expectations for Indigenous authenticity, and there is a virtual absence of references to Pre-Columbian practices—absolutely no Nezahualcoyotl in its script. Such highlights the contemporary presence of Nahuas, away from their official relegation to the past.

An aspect that is need of greater exploration is how the play was staged, and analysis of video recordings of the performances. I was unable to obtain a copy, but Maya mentioned in my interviews with him that he recorded performances of his plays (his prolific cultural production was both a blessing and a curse, because unfortunately paintings, books, tapes, and manuscripts lay throughout the house in a disorganized state). Another aspect related to this closer examination of the play's staging would be a rigorous study of how the play was received by different audiences. All I have been able to find out about reception of the work has been more from Maya himself or anecdotally from people in Huejutla. A more rigorous study of audience would help identify aspects of *Ixtlamatinij* were most effective at influencing audiences, how the play tended to be interpreted, and also strategies for building up of an audience for Nahua literary production—something that is much needed to the present.

This chapter's analysis highlights the importance of Maya's work and the need to encourage the production and publication of theater in Nahuatl.⁶⁵ Although *Ixtlamatinij* was not published until 2006, arguably these open-air performances were viewed by more than any other contemporary Nahua work and had the most visible impact upon communities. They are accessible to audiences, particularly a Nahua public, and help break with the depictions of "literature" as an elitist venue disconnected from a wider public. A far cry from stereotypical representations of Indigenous peoples, *Ixtlamatinij* brings a critical eye to the practices in the community, and does so through the lens of Nahuas themselves in the Nahuatl language.

This text helps in understanding the historical events surrounding the 1980s in the Huasteca and the increasing demands—either through peaceful or violent means—for recognition of Indigenous rights. *Ixtlamatinij* represents one proposal to help alleviate these conflicts and create a space of respect for Indigenous knowledges. It represents a shift from the supposedly objective analysis that has relegated First Peoples to an atavistic past. Within the next chapter I explore the work of a younger generation of Nahua authors who also write against the problematic depictions of Indigenous peoples, and emphasize the need through their texts, tied to projects in mediums from *Facebook* to television and radio, to express open protest against injustices and *letrado* collusion with government interests.

¹ Personal interview, 6 June 2010.

² I am hesitant to use "first generation" to refer to these authors, because this seems to suggest that no one preceded them in the twentieth century. This is surely not the case and elides important figures such as Luz Jiménez. With this caveat in mind, I use "first generation" because that is how present-day authors articulate this, viewing the 1980s as a key moment in which contemporary Nahua literature surged.

³ McDonough and Frischmann both translate the name of the play as "The Learned Ones" in English. Maya uses the title *Ixtlamatinij* for both the Nahuatl and Spanish versions of the play. I choose to translate this as

“Wise Ones” to underscore the conflict between supposedly learned teachers, who study outside of the community and think they are wise, and the community elders. “Learned Ones” suggests more the former than the latter.

⁴ *Chontaltlacatl* is composed of *chontalli* (foreigner/illness) and *tlacatl* (man). In classical Nahuatl and other contemporary variants, *chontalli* means “foreigner.” In the Huasteca, *chontaltic* (to be in the condition of *chontalli*) refers to a sickness that weakens chickens and makes them turn pale white. *Chontaltlacatl* denotes city slickers who visit the community, because they are perceived as pale white and too weak to work in the fields.

⁵ The IDIEZ Nahuatl dictionary defines *tlachiya* as “1. Macehualli, tecuani zo tlapiyalli quena teitta zo tlaitta. 2. Pilconetzin oneuhquiyoc huan quitlapoa iixtiyol” (“1. Person, animal, or livestock can see people and things. 2. A child is born and opens his eyes.”).

⁶ When I first began to study Nahuatl in Oapan, Guerrero, in 2008, I “helped” plant corn seeds in the fields. Planting a straight cornrow by hand was more difficult than I had anticipated. Probably a little worried he would end up with a serpentine mess, the father of the family approached me and explained that planting corn was like writing on the page. The lines needed to be straight (emphasized even more with the fact that the same word, *pāmitl*, is used for furrow and lines on the page). This metaphor goes both ways, as reading lines on the page should imply the same close observation that attention to the crop demands. This type of reading resembles what Muscogee Creek-Cherokee literary critic Craig S. Womack describes in *Red on Red*, that “through imagination and storytelling, people in oral cultures re-experience history” (26). These textual experiences (with “text” not restricted to graphemes on the page) have important political and social implications for the present.

⁷ Notably, this was not the first publication containing contemporary Nahua literature. In 1950, R.H. Barlow began to publish selections in the short-lived Nahuatl newspaper, *Mexihcatl itonalama*. For a more in depth discussion of this paper, see Francis Kartunnen, *Between Worlds*, 207-210.

⁸ In personal interviews, numerous authors mentioned how particularly those from Milpa Alta would criticize other variants. Alberto Becerril Cipriano, who speaks a variant in which *t* is substituted for the *tl*, noted that those in Central Mexico referred to his form of speech as “baby Nahuatl.” Personal interview, 10 July 2010.

⁹ For an example of this dynamic, see Yanet Aguilar Sosa, “El informante nahua de León Portilla.”

¹⁰ I have personally interviewed Ildefonso Maya, Juan Hernández, Alberto Becerril Cipriano, Crispín Amador Ramírez, Isaías Bello Pérez, Pedro Martínez Escamilla, and Natalio Hernández.

¹¹ As mentioned previously, CONACULTA is a government-funded organization that funds cultural projects and events in Mexico.

¹² This is particularly the case of Nahuas in the state of Guerrero. The recent kidnappings of students from Ayotzinapa in 2014 was not a singular event, and there is a decades-long history of government repression, community protests, and underground armed movements such as the Ejército Popular Revolucionario. See Carlos Figueroa-Ibarra and Lorena Martínez-Zavala, “The Ejército Popular Revolucionario: Occupying the Cracks in Mexico’s Hegemonic State.”

¹³ *Loco* is a loan word used in Nahuatl. In a personal interview, a Nahua author of the older generation referred to these younger authors as “demasiado locos” (too crazy). In this section, I avoid naming specific authors for sensitive topics like this one to protect younger authors from recrimination for participation in violent protests, as well as to avoid offending Nahua authors with what other writers have commented.

¹⁴ In a personal interview, 15 August 2012, Nahua anthropologist Arturo Gómez stated that contemporary Nahua authors take much of what they write from ceremonies and stories from the wise elders within their communities. He went so far as to suggest that Nahua authors plagiarize these performances by taking credit for them in their works. See Arturo Gómez, *Literatura tradicional de los indígenas de la Huasteca Veracruzana*.

¹⁵ In personal interviews, Natalio Hernández, Juan Hernández, Mardonio Carballo, Ethel Xochitiotzin Pérez, Isabel Martínez Nopaltecatl, Gustavo Zapoteco Sideño, and Jacinto Meza made reference to such a division.

¹⁶ Personal interview, 15 July 2012.

¹⁷ In Lomas del Dorado, Natalio Hernández's home community, the population of Nahuatl speakers has gone from more than ninety percent to less than half in less than twenty years. The percentage of children who use the language has dwindled to about one in ten. This is in spite of official government rhetoric proclaiming the importance of Indigenous languages—rhetoric that represents a stark contrast with how government training of teachers and implementation of educational programs plays out on the ground.

¹⁸ In *Red on Red*, Craig S. Womack also observes that this obsession with “the pristine” forms part of anthropology's agenda, “anthrospeak,” which serves as a self-fulfilling prophecy of Native American and Indigenous disappearance—as cultures that do not adapt disappear (42). The field of anthropology had a direct impact on Mexican educational programs. For a greater discussion of this influence, see Natividad Gutiérrez, *Nationalist Myths and Ethnic Identities: Indigenous Intellectuals and the Mexican State*.

¹⁹ Personal interviews, 6 June-8 June 2010. Also see Kelly McDonough, *The Learned Ones*, 160-66.

²⁰ In a personal interview on 6 June 2010 in Huejutla, Nahua author and radio host Refugio Miranda San Román expressed this concern and that Maya tended to repeat the same stories in a single conversation.

²¹ Personal interview, 6 June 2010.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ The vulgarity *cabrón* comes from Spanish and refers to someone who attempts to gain advantage at the cost of others. In my analysis of the play *Ixtlamatinij*, I explore the significance of the vulgar loan words used extensively in Nahuatl in the section on language. I choose not to translate this word because its unique meaning is largely lost in translation.

²⁴ In Huastecan Nahuatl, *xantolo* is also termed *ilhuatl*. The principal days of these festivities in honor of the deceased are October 31-November 2. The festivities do not officially cease until the beginning of December.

²⁵ These conflictive meanings of *ixtlamitiliztli* are apparent in the University of Zacatecas Nahuatl Institute's definition for *ixtlamitiquetl*: “1. Macehualli tlen quimati huan quicuamachilia miac tlamantli [persona educada]; 2. Macehualli tlen quimati zo quicuamachilia miac tlamantli, tlallamiqui huan axcanah momachtitoc.” (“1. A person who knows and understands many things [defined in Spanish as *persona educada*, an educated person]; 2. A person who knows and understands many things, he is wise but has not studied through formal education” (*Nahuatlahtolxitlahuquetl*, 27 March 2014, insert mine).

²⁶ Natalio Hernández mentioned the importance of this work in a personal interview, 11 August 2012. By 1987, the publishing house Siglo Veintiuno had produced thirty-three editions of this text in Mexico and distributed it widely among SEP teachers. See Freire, *Pedagogía del oprimido*.

²⁷ In this case the *ix* in *tiixtlamatij* does not refer to the personal knowledge insisted upon in Nahuatl, but rather bookish knowledge acquired from an education system that excludes Nahua knowledge production.

²⁸ The prefix *ix-* in *ixpohua* (to read) helps avoid confusion with *pohua* (to count), but, even without the prefix *ix(tli)*, *pohua* can also still mean “to read.”

²⁹ “We Nahuas” because Maya uses the first person.

³⁰ This obliviousness to surroundings resembles the Coyote in a story that Cherokee philosopher Brian Yazzie Burkhart shares in “What Coyote and Thales Can Teach Us: An Outline of American Indian Epistemology.” The Coyote thinks only of himself, and he literally floods the world up to his head with these self-centered thoughts. Burkhart explains that this story highlights a “principle of relatedness” in which “we must be careful what we do, what we want, and what we think and speak, in general. We must never forget the things around us and how we are related to those things” (16).

³¹ In numerous Indigenous languages in the Americas, Castilian or Spanish language is referred to as *castilla* or *caxtilla*. As Amado Alonso indicates in *Castellano, español, idioma nacional: Historia espiritual de tres nombres* (1943), the use of *castilla* to refer to the Spanish language is viewed as evidence of the “inertia of Indian populations” (130). The “Indians of both Americas” confused the conquistadors' references to the Kingdom of Castilla with the language, which should be called *castellano* (130). I would argue instead that the use of *castilla* to refer to both the land and language of the *conquistadores* provincializes Spanish to a specific region (thus a dialect and not the purported “national language” of the Americas) and underscores the link between language imposition and land conquest.

³² Personal interview, 7 June 2010. In contemporary Nahuatl *mehicanoh* is pronounced, as also seen in Hernández's poem “Na ni indio,” with an aspiration like a Spanish *j* rather than the fricative Nahuatl *x*.

Maya pronounced *me(x/h)icanoh* with the fricative *x* (similar to *sh* in English) to emphasize Nahuatl's importance in Mexico, giving the country its name, originally pronounced with the fricative. Rather than vie for essentialism in which Nahuatl would take the place of Spanish, Maya shifts such univocal national discourse to a plurality of voices in which univocality is impossible. For Maya, *mexicahtlacatl* emphasizes the importance of Nahuas in the country of the same name as full-fledged knowledge producers, and also underscores their force and agency due its association of *mexica* with warriors.

³³ If one were to attempt to translate *coloniality* into Nahuatl, one might rely on stereotypes regarding Indigenous languages and think that the language is deficient in vocabulary. This is an illogical standard of perceived linguistic purity to which dominant languages, full of loanwords just like any language, are not held. While *computadora* in Spanish as a loanword from English does not raise eyebrows, hearing *computadora* in Nahuatl leads many listeners to confirm their preconceived notion that the language (or they would say *dialect*) lacks vocabulary and, since it is pre-modern, especially technological and scientific terminology. Arguably, the word *colonial* itself marks a hegemonic view in which the ruling group is agentive in absorbing subjugated territories.

³⁴ See the official website for these celebrations: http://www.bicentenario.gob.mx/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=423&Itemid=70. Although expressing openness to different views on these revolutionary movements, the emergence of one nation, one *patria*, from these conflicts of the colonialism of the past foreign influences is not questioned. Such descriptions tend to result in blindness to present-day internal colonialism, what Nahuas would refer to as *coyotl* (coyote) or *caxtiltlallamiquiliztli* (literally “Spanish knowledges”). Ildefonso Maya’s link Spanish colonialism with present-day colonial practices goes in the face of official anti-imperialist government discourse within Mexico and its representation of Independence and the Mexican Revolution. Recent celebrations of the *bicentenario* and *centenario* of Mexican Independence and the Mexican Revolution are a case in point. These events are depicted as breaks from colonialism. In contrast, Nahuas consider that in many instances conditions have worsened after these events. The Mexican Revolution is commonly referred to in oral tradition of the Huasteca as the *temahmahuiliztli*, “the scare,” an allusion to how community members hid to avoid forced conscription by different factions. From personal interviews conducted throughout the municipality of Ixhuatlán de Madero, Veracruz in 2013.

³⁵ In *History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault defines *biopower* as discursive foci on biology, sexuality, and reproduction that “designate what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of the transformation of human life” (143). In “Governmentality,” he expands on this notion and highlights its incursion in the daily lives of citizens: “population comes to appear above all else as the ultimate end of government. In contrast to sovereignty, government has as its purpose not the act of government itself, but the welfare of the population, the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health, and so on; and the means the government uses to attain these ends are themselves all, in some sense, immanent to the population” (216-217). See Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, vol. III.

³⁶ Versényi describes one of these performances in his article “Translation as an Epistemological Paradigm for Theatre in the Americas,” 442-47.

³⁷ Analyzed in chapter one, *tlaixpan* highlights that the past is in front of you, the literal meaning of altar in Nahuatl—a view especially palpable during *Xantolo*. The *ix(tli)* (face) of *tlaixpan* (altar) insists upon personal knowledge, of seeing things up close.

³⁸ This is a hybrid combination of Nahuatl *cua* from *cuahuil* [wood] and Spanish *negro* [black].

³⁹ The greater significance of this clothing and details of the dance will be explored more in the section on dress.

⁴⁰ As mentioned earlier, the characters refer to Spanish as *castia*, which alludes to Spanish conquest and coloniality.

⁴¹ *Pinahua* appears repeatedly throughout *Ixtlamatinij*, fourteen times in all, particularly the in second and third scenes of the first act. I personally heard this word almost daily while conducting research (2012-2013) across multiple Nahua regions and variants, in particular when addressing the topics of Nahuatl and Nahua practices. If someone did not want to speak, the explanation from others was always just one word: *pinahua* (s/he is ashamed). *Pinahua* comes head to head with *tlatlepanitta* (to respect) in the play, much as

with the conflictive meanings of *ixtlamatini*. Reflective of Maya's use of the word, Natalio Hernández in the poem "Na ni indio" translates *pinahua* (to make feel ashamed) as *discriminar* (to discriminate) in Spanish instead of simply *avergonzar* (to shame), reflective of these deeper connotations of *pinahua* linked to a centuries-long system of discrimination and colonialism (*Xochikoskatl*, 27-28). In relation to *pinahua*, the significance of *tlatlepanitta* will be explored at the end of this chapter, in relation to the second act.

⁴² Anthropologist Claudio Lomnitz-Adler explores the nuances of the word *cabrón* and states that it is often used for politicians and functions with metaphors of exploitation (*Exits from the Labyrinth* 125). It is interesting to read this in relation to other uses of the word.

⁴³ Lomnitz-Adler contextualizes *cabrón* as follows: "People often thought of politicians as lusty (*caliente*, or hot), exploitative, mean machos (*cabrones*). Any disinterested person stupid enough to follow them was a *pendejo* (a stupid fool) who would get 'screwed' (*jodido*, *chingado*). In other words, sexual intercourse serves as a metaphor of exploitation in much the same way as it helps people think about the properties of foods and diseases" (125). Lomnitz-Adler goes on to state that, in these metaphorical turns, "the real chigones ('virile bigshots') function in a discourse in which 'virility is the main metaphor of superiority, and (as in the case of the urbanized peasants) sexual intercourse is the metaphor of power relations'" (140). As has been stated previously, the Huasteca itself was depicted as a vast, unexplored region ready for penetration (51). The Mexican government viewed Indigenous populations as underutilizing the land, and state propaganda encouraged settlers to enter the region and increase its productivity. Lomnitz-Adler confirms the context that Maya depicts in *Ixtlamatinij* in which landowners of the dominant *coyote* class believed that they themselves were a different kind of being, "de razón" (of reason), superior to the *indios* (171).

⁴⁴ Maya commented to me that he did not think he would make it back home alive after this episode. He insulted the President at the height of tensions in the Huasteca over campesino uprisings. Maya called López Portillo this because no one offered him food or drink. This lack of consideration reinforced the dominant social hierarchy. It is not surprising that *cabrón* appears repeatedly throughout the play as a criticism of state officials' attitudes.

⁴⁵ Maya was adamantly opposed to alcohol, and in our interviews, he mentioned constantly that it was brought by the Spaniards to subjugate the Indigenous populations. Personal interview, 6 June 2010.

⁴⁶ In a personal interview, Maya explained to me that the *cua* in *cuanegro* refers not to head (*cuā-* with a long *a*) with racial implications, as many have thought because of the figure of an African slave in some versions of the dance, but rather wood (*cuahuil*) with the short *a*. *Negro* references the dancers' black boots that sound loudly on wooden floorboards (hence *cuanegro*, "wood-black," to describe the *coyotl* boots on hard floor). Personal interview, 6 June 2010.

⁴⁷ In official descriptions, a Spaniard and a black slave compete and represent a colonial past. The Consejo para la Cultura in Hidalgo describes the dance as follows: "El soldado de tez clara representa al pañolo o español, el de tez morena al esclavo negro y la dama al mestizo. La danza representa la lucha entre los dos soldados para conquistar a la dama" ("The soldier with white skin represents the *pañolar* or Spaniard, the one with dark skin represents the black slave, and the woman represents the mestizo. The dance represents the fight between two soldiers to conquer the lady") (Consejo para la Cultura, Hidalgo). See http://cecultah.hidalgo.gob.mx/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1880&Itemid=104.

⁴⁸ While in other variants of Spanish, such as in Central America, *patas* is a common way to refer to feet, within much of Mexico *patas* is used in a humorous or else offensive sense. The Diccionario del Español de México highlights its meaning as referring to an animal's paws or feet. See El Colegio de México, Diccionario del Español de México.

⁴⁹ Urban visitors to Nahua communities often make such comments, and I personally heard this criticism repeatedly while conducting research in the Huasteca. McDonough addresses this common disparagement of these supposed excesses in her analysis, and how such remarks blame "Indian poverty on the excesses of their religious ceremonies, as opposed to a series of other social, political, and economic factors" (174). Ironically, from a Nahua view, the mestizos are the ones who show excess. *Coyotlacua*, as seen in the previous chapter, denotes one who "eats like a coyote." The *coyotl* (coyote) consumes the juicier meat and wastes the rest. Nahuas, in contrast, are able to put on large gatherings because they are communal events

to which everyone contributes, communal resources are used to the fullest, and every bit of food is consumed.

⁵⁰ Out at work in the fields, one of these relatives appears to him as a wandering spirit and asks why he has forsaken them. Frightened by this apparition, the man rushes home. He does not arrive in time and dies on the path. In the Huasteca, if someone started getting lax in her or his *Xantolo* observance, this story was a surefire way to awaken her or him back to remembrance. Narrative heard repeatedly while conducting research in the Huasteca, 2012-2013.

⁵¹ During *Xantolo*, households place a new change of clothing at the altar for their journeying deceased relatives. Another ceremony in which it is common to put on a new change of clothes is a marriage. Epitacio is also married to the coyote discourse and preaches it has the only way of being.

⁵² This is not to deny that pre-Hispanic patriarchal values perhaps also instilled *machismo*. Many Indigenous feminists argue against the depiction of Pre-Columbian cultures as extant of sexism, as this has had a tendency to idealize Indigenous practices without critiquing the gender inequalities sometimes apparent within them. Citing Aymara feminists, Zapotec sociologist Alejandra Aquino argues that “the development of a community feminism is essential for recognizing that unjust relations between men and women also existed before the colonial period, and they point out that what happens with colonization is that there is a ‘patriarchal junction’ between pre-colonial patriarchy and the West that is tragic for women” (15). As literary critic Michael Hardin identifies, the main tenets of *machismo* include: 1. A display of physical power and disdain for any supposedly feminine trait; 2. Competition and domination over other men; 3. Drunkenness that emboldens them to act aggressively (2). For greater discussion of this topic, see Michael Hardin, “Altering Masculinities: The Spanish Conquest and the Evolution of the Latin American *Machismo*.”

⁵³ His mother tries to speak with him but says “Quiele comer?” instead of “¿Quiere comer?” (“Do you want to eat?”). This portion of Hernández’s poem “Nomaseualikniuaj tlen monelkoyochijkej” (“My Indigenous Brothers Who Completely Made Themselves Coyotes” serves as a preamble to the script of *Ixtlaminij*: NikiJamiki kenijki ipantik / se telpotlakatl nochinanki eua, / kemaj moualkuapato yajtoya momachtito / kemaj tlamachtitekilt kisenkauato. / Moualkuapato ayok nauati / kiijtojki ayok kin kakilia itatauj / ayok momati san kuatitla itstos; / itatauj nojua tlayejyekoyayaj kikamausej / ika san se ome koyotlajtoli kinojnotsayayaj / ‘Quiele comel’ inana kiijliyaya; / ijki ikinok moniktilijtekji inana / ijki ikinok momiktilijteuas itata; / ayokemaj yeyeksij kinojnotski inana / ayokemaj yeyeksij iuelis kinojnotsas itata. (67). English translation: “I remember how he left / a young man was born in my community / when he returned after having left to study / when he left to become a teacher. / He returned from there and no longer spoke Nahuatl / he claimed that he no longer understood his parents / that he was no longer used to the forest; / his parents still tried to speak / with a few words in Spanish they spoke to him / ‘Quiele comel’ his mother would tell him; / then his mother passed away / his father will pass away / his mother no longer spoke beautifully / his father will no longer speak beautifully to him.”

⁵⁴ *Mozinia* is also mentioned in the introduction in its description of the effects of the *coyotl* on Nahua communities: “Timo koyonekij uan ti peuaj timo sisiniya” (“We want to be like coyotes and we begin to get angry”) (232, sic).

⁵⁵ Heard repeatedly while conducting research in the Huasteca, 2012-2013. In this story, *Chicomexochitl*’s (seven-flower / corn) grandmother despises him and seeks every possible way to take his life, even grinding him down to powder and serving him as a tamale to his own mother. The constant references to corn and cooking tamales evidence these allusions to *Chicomexochitl* and the *tzitzimitl*. *Chicomexochitl* and his multiple deaths at the hands of his grandmother and subsequent resurrections are symbolic of the crop cycle in which corn “dies” (is consumed) but then is reborn again. In the community too, there are generational cycles in which Nahua knowledge production and practices are threatened, but they resurge again in this dynamism. In communities today, the *tzitzimitl* is described as an angry grandmother who descends like a bird and eats children. In colonial times, the *tzitzimitl* became a symbol of the Devil and his minions (Klein 21), and so by extension it was not difficult to associate oppressive *conquistadores* who persecuted them and abolished their practices.

⁵⁶ Bread in the Huasteca is referred to as *pantzin* from the loan word *pan*, but some also refer to it as *caxtilpantzin* or *coyopantzin* (literally “Castilian bread”).

⁵⁷ As stated earlier, Maya throughout his works and in personal interviews blamed alcoholism as a product of Spanish colonialism to coerce Nahuas into doing manual labor. Personal interview, 8 June 2010.

⁵⁸ In the Huastecan community near Maya's hometown where I lived for a year, there was a conflict between the assigned Catholic priest in the area. This priest did not speak Nahuatl and strongly disapproved of the syncretic practices of the community such as *Chicomexochitl* (Seven Flower). It had been common for people to perform ceremonies in the *xochicalli* (flowered house) that would progress to the Catholic chapel. The priest stepped in and forbade the performance of these ceremonies in the chapel. The mother of the family I lived with acted in a manner similar to other members of the community. Rather than come out in open opposition to the priest, she simply said that she would stop going to the chapel until a new Catholic priest who knew better would be assigned to the area. This in fact happened during my stay in the community, when a Nahua priest was assigned to the area who spoke the language and respected the different ceremonies such as *Chicomexochitl*. A general sentiment I heard from people was that real Catholicism was found in the community and not in the cities. In a sense, they considered themselves "más papistas que el papa" (more papal than the pope). Such remarks, rather than represent a colonial submission to Catholicism, rather constitutes an appropriation of these religious practices and tailoring them to their own needs and perspectives.

⁵⁹ Studies abound that touch upon this subject, among them Louise Burkhart, *Slippery Earth*.

⁶⁰ For a more in-depth discussion of this syncretism, see Alan Sandstrom, *Corn Is Our Blood*.

⁶¹ This can also be viewed as another allusion to Christ, who arrived dressed in white after the resurrection. Although it is *Xantolo*, there are also allusions to practices during the Holy Week. For example, there are references to dressing up as *mecos* (which takes place during the carnival around Holy Week). Significantly, in Maya's living room hung a stunning, nearly life-size painting of a crucified Christ. The sign above Christ that would normally read INRI had an inscription written in Maya's own hieroglyphic Nahuatl. Christ's body was filled with eyes, and each eye depicted a sin of mankind. Christ covered in eyes is a fitting image of the observance and personal experience (*ix[tlil]*: "face" or "eye" emphasized in *Ixtlamatinij* ("Knowers with the face or eyes").

⁶² Also, *tlapohpolhuia* (to forgive) literally means to erase away, and it is the same verb used earlier in the introduction when Maya speaks of the erasure of Nahua knowledges: "pampa kaxtiltekamej tech tlami ixpolojtiauijya" ("because the Spaniard have ended up erasing us"; 232).

⁶³ At least according to Maya, this play solicited strong reactions from the audience and helped encourage dialogues regarding discrimination against Nahuas. This is in part why he considered it one of his best works. Personal interview, 7 June 2010. It would be particularly promising to do a study of the audiences for these performances and see how much of an effect they had.

⁶⁴ Maya, tongue in cheek, dedicates *Ixtlamatinij* to "los maestros bilingües de Educación Indígena, que laboran en las comunidades indias en donde invierten su tiempo para enseñar a los niños a hablar el español y a los adultos en general" ("the bilingual teachers of Indigenous Education, who labor in Indian communities and spend their time teaching children and adults in general to speak Spanish") (232). The dedication of the play itself to the very teachers who champion this system resembles Miguel Cervantes' prologue to the first volume of *Don Quijote* in which he feigns praise for the prologue writers whom he satirizes.

⁶⁵ There are other theatrical works that serve didactic purposes within the communities. For example, in the Sierra de Zongolica, there are plays performed that criticize the chauvinism present within Nahua communities. While conducting research in the Sierra de Zongolica in 2012 and 2013, I met the group who put on these plays at the Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural (UVI) of this region.

Chapter 3. *El rescoldo del tlicuil* / Embers of the Fire: Visceral Resistance and Generational Tension among Contemporary Nahua Authors

“Qué cabrón eres,”¹ a young Nahua author complained to a veteran Nahua writer at an international poetry reading in Mexico City.² As the younger writer recounts, his older counterpart had failed to prep him for the event. Other experienced Indigenous writers even went so far as to invite him to participate in “an early morning get-together” without explaining the purpose of it. “Just be there on time,” they told him. The novice writer arrived in street clothes, only to discover that the “get-together” was a press conference. Furious, he approached the first-generation Nahua author and openly criticized him. The younger author now retells this encounter as a prime example of older authors’ reticence to help the younger generation. Encounters such as this one have helped kindle younger writers’ accusation that the older generation has formed a closed elite—that they have become the *coyomeh* (coyotes) that they themselves criticizes—who seek to maintain their positions on top while obstructing the advancement of newer artists and simultaneously ignoring the plights in their communities.

The younger generation of Nahua authors in many respects has had to self-constitute itself with limited support. I consider authors born after 1969 to be representative of this generation, among them: Gustavo Zapoteco Sideño, Ethel Xochitiotzin Perez, Martín Tonalmeyotl (Martín Jacinto Meza), Mardonio Carballo, Fabiola Carrillo Tieco, Yankuik Metzli (Isabel Nopaltecatl), Sixto Cabrera, and Judith (“Juditzin”) Santopietro. These authors were at most in their teens when Indigenous literary publications surged in the 1980s and early 1990s. The divide between generations

is especially evident in the lack of collaboration between authors of the older generation with the younger. Newer authors tend to take greater advantage of different media such as Facebook, especially considering their limited access to publishing houses. Social media constitutes a way to publish freely online and bypass the perceived elite who head these editorials.³

As an introduction to these tensions, this chapter explores the apparent generational differences between Natalio Hernández's trilingual book of poetry *Semanca Huitzilin / Colibrí de la armonía / Hummingbird of Harmony* (2005) and Gustavo Zapoteco Sideño's *Cantos en el cañaveral / Cuicatl pan tlalliouatlmej* (Songs Among the Sugarcane Fields) (2004). Hernández emphasizes in his poetry, though by no means categorically, the value of Nahuatl cultural identity and history, whereas in Zapoteco's text Nahuatl identity is secondary, though still vitally important, to denouncing social and economic inequality in the sugarcane fields of Morelos. I argue that Zapoteco and Hernández, while differing significantly in their style and focus, complement one another in employing metaphors closely tied to the Nahuatl language of the heart, flowers, and Mesoamerican deities in order to challenge and rewrite the official history and neoliberal "progressive" rhetoric of Mexican national discourse.

Hernández and Zapoteco are representative of the migrants who are central within contemporary Indigenous literary and political movements. These migrants find themselves mediating between the founding experiences in their communities and their jolting encounter with urban settings, and in this milieu they articulate alternative knowledges that question the absolute time and space constructed by modernity. As seen

in previous chapters, all published Nahua authors have had similar experiences in having to leave their home communities, and this study analyzes how these writers dialogue with national discourse and its conjoining discourse of an exclusive “Modernity.”⁴ While there is a significant heterogeneity in the style and thematic of Hernández’s and Zapoteco’s works, both of them challenge discriminatory practices that construct Nahuas as exotic Others trapped within a pre-historic past.

This study begins with the section “With Both *Noixtiyol* / Eyes: Theoretical Framework for this Chapter,” in which I expand on Nahua theoretical perspectives of *ixtlamatiliztli* (knowledge with the face), *tlaixpan* (that which is in front), and *yoltlallamiquiliztli* (knowledge from the heart) from the previous chapters. These perspectives aid in exploring Hernández’s and Zapoteco’s texts more in depth. The following section, “Songs of Injustice or Harmony,” offers an overview of the context in which the tension between the two generations of Nahua authors arose. This section also offers brief biographies of Zapoteco and the latter part of Hernández’s career. In the section that follows, I explore the overall structure of *Cuicatl pan tlalliouatlmej* and *Semanca huitzilin*. The section “Harmonious Hummingbird: Affective Intelligence and Interculturality” offers the first part of my analysis of *Semanca huitzilin*. This section explores the contrast in perspectives between Hernández and Zapoteco, and how Hernández employs similar metaphors as Zapoteco but with an emphasis on a harmonious relationship between cultures. The section “I Look for My Body: The Sentient Space of the *Tonal*” considers the importance of the body in *Semanca huitzilin* and how Hernández champions an ethic in which the subject is affectively connected

with natural surroundings. “*Chicomóztoc: An Alternative Time*” analyzes how *Semanca huitzilin* represents an alternative temporal perspective centered in the concept of *tlaixpan*.

The section that follows, “Visceral Metaphors: Under the Eye of Coloniality,” focuses on poems from the beginning of Zapoteco’s *Cuicatl* and the lack of affective intelligence within colonized perspectives. In “*Rescoldo del tlicuil / Embers of the Fire: Politics of Memory*,” I analyze the center portion of the book and the forceful denunciations of colonial discursivities that relegate Indigenous peoples to manual labor and superstition. The section ““Angustia, eres tú’: Cantos in Colonialism” completes my analysis with a detailed reading of the final poem in *Cuicatl*, entitled “Angustia” (“Anguish”). I explore how Zapoteco skillfully criticizes colonial practices through “Angustia.” The final section, “Scattered Language: Displacing Homogenous Natalio Narratives,” concludes this chapter pointing to the wider implications of these generational tensions between Hernández and Zapoteco and the value of South-South dialogues, evidenced in this chapter’s reading two Nahua authors against one another.

Songs of Injustice or Harmony: Differing Strategies toward Nahua Empowerment

Gustavo Zapoteco Sideño was born in Topiltepec, Guerrero in 1969. Topiltepec forms part of the municipality of Zitlala, an area with a long history of social unrest and demands for solutions to the extreme poverty suffered by many.⁵ In the 1990s, Zapoteco participated in violent protests in Guerrero to demand Indigenous rights and autonomy. At this time he was studying tourism at the University of Acapulco, but did not complete his degree in order to aid his family economically. During this time in Guerrero,

Zapoteco participated actively in resistance movements.⁶ Armed uprisings in Guerrero coupled Marxist-Leninist revolution with demands for ethnic recognition.⁷ The Ejército Popular Revolucionario (EPR) announced its existence on 28 June 1996, one year after the assassination of seventeen farmers and injuring of twenty-one by Guerrero state police in Aguas Blancas.

In personal interviews, Zapoteco describes that it was during his university studies that he began to consider writing poetry after becoming familiar with Miguel León Portilla's translations of *Cantares mexicanos*.⁸ Similar to Hernández, Zapoteco describes himself as self-taught and that the most valuable things he has learned were from personal experience. After reading León Portilla's books, he felt a mix of both anger and a drive to write poetry himself in his own language—anger, because of the appropriation of his cultural heritage by non-Nahuas. He has sought through his works to displace the perspective toward Nahuas as not having such cultural tradition in the present and, even more importantly, how such views have helped fuel the economic and social marginalization of contemporary Indigenous communities.

At the end of the 1990s, his family migrated to Tlaltizapán, Morelos in search of better economic opportunities as well as for his family's safety after having received death threats.⁹ As he worked alongside people from other Indigenous nations in the arduous work of the sugarcane fields, Zapoteco began to articulate a Pan-Indigenous resistance to such conditions. While his brother Noé continues to work in the sugarcane fields, Zapoteco left this work to begin his literary career. In 2002, the Instituto Nacional Indigenista Delegation in Morelos—with promises from Zapoteco that it would help

bring recognition to the region—funded and published his first book, *Cuicatl in yolotl / Cantos del corazón* (Songs of the Heart). Shortly after in 2004 the Instituto de Cultura de Morelos released his second book *Cuicatl pan tlalliouatlmej*, a product of having worked himself in the sugarcane fields and seen the conditions there. Again with funding from the Instituto de Cultura de Morelos, Zapoteco published his third book *Xóchitl ihuan cuicatl in Morelos* (2007).

When I met Zapoteco for the first time in 2010, he had recently been chosen as the Coordinador de Asuntos Indígenas de Tlaltizapán (Coordinator of Indigenous Issues within Tlaltizapán). He would hold this position until 2013 when the PRI-led municipal administration for which he worked lost in elections. In our interviews he repeatedly expressed concern that he would “convertirse en uno de ellos” (‘become one of them’).¹⁰ By “one of them” he meant a corrupt politician, which for many, especially those in his own Indigenous migrant community, would be redundant. He decided to go into politics—within the very party he had vehemently protested against in the 1990s—in an attempt to be in a position of power to change things from the inside and assure that resources went to the aid of the Indigenous communities who generated that capital. He describes that he decided to become a writer for the same reason—to enter the elitist circle of writers and create a space from within for popular Nahuatl voices and plights. In spite of his best intentions, he worried that both the political and literary systems of power would end up corrupting him with money and recognition as opposed to him changing them. As he explained, Mexican governmental entities have a long history, particularly since the 1970s, of coopting social movements by offering scholarships and

positions to their leaders.

It is due to this fear that Zapoteco rejects the term *intelectual*, because the term is associated with educational and political entities that place themselves on a plane of knowledge production superior to the Indigenous migrant workers with whom he lived and labored. Kelly McDonough recounts from her personal interviews with Zapoteco that he prefers the terms *tlacuilo* (“writer” or “painter”) and *xochitlacuilo* (“flowered writer” or “flowered painter”), as they emphasize his role as a producer of knowledge centered on Nahua perspectives and their additional meaning of “painter” avoids privileging writing in only the sense of words on a page.¹¹ Zapoteco states that “creo que no me considero un intelectual, sino más bien una persona que trata de reflexionar, analizar, investigar, documentarme en relación a algún tema” (“I don’t think that I would consider myself to be an *intelectual*. Instead, I see myself as a person who tries to reflect, analyze, research, and document certain topics”; qtd. in McDonough 7). During our interviews in 2010, Zapoteco pulled out a collection of pre-Columbian artifacts that his family and he had discovered while working in the fields of Morelos. He swore me to secrecy not to reveal this occult museum within his own home.¹² Zapoteco also has a large collection of ceremonial Nahua masks that could rival the Museum of Masks in Zacatecas or the collection at the Benson Library at the University of Texas at Austin. He explained that seeing masks and Pre-Columbian pieces in foreign museums and archives angered him, in a similar way to his reaction to reading León Portilla’s renderings of Nahua poetry. Zapoteco’s rejection of the term *intelectual* is tied to these adverse feelings toward the

appropriation of Nahua knowledge production, as often those who considered intellectuals are the very agents of that theft as he deems it.

1 October 2008 was a watershed moment in Zapoteco's literary career. He was invited to participate in the biannual international poetry festival *Las lenguas de América*, which took place on this date. For a large audience at UNAM's Sala Nezahualcoyotl, this festival brings artists from all over the world who read selections from their poetry alongside Indigenous authors from throughout the American continent. Participation in this event consecrated Zapoteco as a respected artist.¹³ He speaks of his entrance into the literary scene based less on literary merit and more on his ability to navigate the political machinery and recommendations from *las vacas sagradas* (sacred cows) necessary to receive support for publications and invitations to readings. He cites Carlos Montemayor and a supporter who requested Deep Throat-like anonymity as having been crucial for his participation in the festival. Montemayor was especially drawn to Zapoteco's work because of his interest in revolutionary movements within Guerrero and Chiapas.

Within his works, Zapoteco highlights the importance of Nahua ceremony, but not at the cost of the continuation of economic inequalities. A constant reference within his work—especially within *Cuicatl*—are the some two thousand Indigenous sugarcane workers with whom he lives in the *albergue número uno* (temporary government housing).¹⁴ Hernández sees cultural recognition through peaceful means as a route to eliminating economic inequalities. As such, although expressing sympathy and solidarity with armed movements such as the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), he has not personally participated in them but rather served as a mediator to foment dialogue

between these movements and government representatives. According to Hernández, recognition of Nahuas as knowledge producers will reduce discrimination and injustices against Indigenous peoples.¹⁵ In contrast, Zapoteco attests that, while recognition Nahua cultural practices and knowledge production can shift public perceptions of Indigenous peoples, no major changes in social and inequalities will come to fruition without massive protests and even violent opposition to nation-state colonial practices.

While Zapoteco was experiencing conflictive years in the 1990s in Guerrero and subsequent economic struggles in Morelos, Natalio Hernández worked closely with government cultural organizations to open up venues for Indigenous literary production. It is particularly during this period that younger authors began to view Hernández as distanced from demands for better economic and social conditions. During this same period in the 1990s when the House of Indigenous Writers (ELIAC) was created and the first generation of Indigenous authors pushed for a constitutional reform that would recognize Indigenous linguistic and cultural rights, violent encounters were taking place between government forces and the foresaid movements in Guerrero.¹⁶

Particularly salient in Hernández's focus on acceptance and celebration of different cultural traditions is the role of language as a bridge among these distinct practices. One of his most well-known pieces, to which he often refers, is a speech he gave in Spanish and Nahuatl to the Decimoprimer Congreso de las Academia de Lengua Española (Eleventh Congress of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language) in the city of Puebla in November 1998. It was published the following year in *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl*.¹⁷ Entitled “Noihqui toaxca caxtilan tlahtoli / El español también es nuestro”

(Spanish Is Also Ours), this speech lays claim to Spanish as an Indigenous language too, since Nahuas and other First Peoples have transformed Spanish and made it their own. Such a viewpoint is groundbreaking in challenging the Mexican political system that uses maternal language as a determining factor in deciding whether a person is Indigenous. In addition to underscoring Nahua influence in the Spanish language, Hernández also emphasizes the importance of a harmonious relationship among different ethnicities in final words: “porque ambas [la lengua española y la lengua náhuatl] fluyan a un tiempo, de manera digna y armoniosa como la flor y el canto: in xochitl in cuicatl” (‘so that both languages [Spanish and Nahuatl] flow together, in a dignified and harmonious manner like flower and song: *in xochitl in cuicatl*’; 286). From the mid-1990s to the present, Hernández has tirelessly written on the necessity of this harmonious relationship—*Semanca huitzilin* among them with its trilingual edition in Nahuatl, Spanish, and English—and has proposed different educational projects to this end.

The books of poetry analyzed in this chapter, Zapoteco’s *Cuicatl pan tlalliouatlmej* and Hernández’s *Semanca huitzilin*, are representative of the fissure between different generations of Nahua authors, as the titles themselves suggest: the dissonance between “song” and oppressive work in the sugarcane fields in *Songs Among the Sugarcane Fields* and the praise of intercultural harmony in *Hummingbird of Harmony*.

With Both *Noixtiyol* / Eyes: Theoretical Framework for this Chapter

In this chapter, I expand on the Nahua perspective of *ixtlamatiliztli* (knowledge with the face) and how it constitutes a view “with both eyes,” an optic aware of class

oppression coupled with ethnic and colonial oppression.¹⁸ It is a perspective in which “emotions” are not viewed as separate from “reason,” nor one’s subject position objectively independent of knowledge production. This depth perceiving perspective resists the monocular “eye of reason” of modernity/colonialism¹⁹ that constructs Indigenous subjects as victims of social retardation and irrational traditions.

Tlaixpan (that which is in front) relates to *ixtlamatiliztli* (knowledge with the face) in that it points to knowledges of the Indigenous subject’s founding experience that collide with Western modernity. With these alternative imaginaries, subaltern subjects see reality differently and in conflict with developmentalist discourses that paint the past as just that—having passed behind the modern subject.²⁰ Similar to how *yoltlallamiquiliztli* (knowledge with the heart) denotes a conjugation of rationality with emotions, *tlaixpan* conjugates the past with a present and future. It is an approach in which the past constitutes a resource for the present (33). The concepts of *ixtlamatiliztli* and *tlaixpan* aid me in identifying how Hernández and Zapoteco employ visceral metaphors to rearticulate elements of the state narrative and imagine a heterogeneous nation-state in which Indigenous subjects actively construct historical remembrance and defend their social rights.

In *Cuicatl pan tlalliouatlmej*, Zapoteco employs these approaches in violent protest against colonial practices,²¹ while Hernández utilizes them to propose replacing colonial discursivity through intercultural dialogue. As he relates, when many Nahuas are told that they need to “preserve” their language, they respond, “Mi lengua no me da de comer” (My language does not put food on the table).²² According to Zapoteco,

government institutions readily support programs that seek to preserve the language and protect traditional practices because this does not change—and in many instances can distract from—the fundamental social and economic inequalities in the country. In turn, for Hernández, *yoltlallamiquiliztli* and *ixtlamatiliztli* should lead away from violent protest to advocate for mutual understanding and an affective intelligence that would displace colonial practices and discrimination. For both Zapoteco and Hernández, the “past”—Nahua practices within their communities and those described in colonial sources—serve as powerful sources toward their aims in a dynamic present/future. These Nahua perspectives appear within their texts and inform my analysis of their works.

Literature Review and the Overall Structure of *Cuicatl pan tlalliouatlmej* and *Semanca huitzilin*

CONACULTA published 2,000 copies of Hernández’s *Semanca huitzilin* (Hummingbird of Harmony) and, along with the Instituto de Cultura de Morelos, funded the publication for 1,000 copies of Zapoteco’s *Cuicatl pan tlalliouatlmej* (Songs from the Sugarcane Fields).²³ To my knowledge, no one has published an analysis of Zapoteco’s texts. Not many inside or outside of academia have read either Hernández or Zapoteco, and even fewer read the versions in Nahuatl. To date there is one published analysis of *Semanca huitzilin*. In “Colonialidad y decolonialidad en la literatura indígena mexicana. El pensamiento fronterizo en Natalio Hernández,” literary critic Luz María Lepe Lira reads this text in relation to an extended overview of Walter Mignolo’s concept of *border thinking* and expositions on coloniality and decoloniality. She focuses on three elements considered crucial in decolonial projects: border gnosis, Other thinking, and an Other language (56). Hernández, she argues, exemplifies border thinking in his crossing

between dualities such as intuitivism and rationality, as well as Western figures and Pre-Columbian symbols. His search for an interior strength in animals and nature constitutes Other thinking, and not only his literal use of Nahuatl but also his translation of “two different worlds” into multiple languages represents an Other language. Lepe Lira’s analysis is valuable in its attention to Hernández’s text and reflection on the wider implications of it. Nonetheless, the readings of the poems are brief and do not account for the versions in Nahuatl. Within this chapter I seek to offer much-needed close analysis of Hernández’s *Semanca huitzilin* and Zapoteco’s *Cuicatl*.

Cuicatl pan tlalliouatlmej contains nineteen poems written in free verse.²⁴ Most of the poems are in Nahuatl followed by a version in Spanish. Four of them are only in Spanish: “¿porqué yo?” (“Why Me?”); “Llanto de la montaña” (“Cries from the Mountain”); “Tlatizapan”; and “Angustia” (“Anguish”). These poems in particular represent a scathing critique of discriminatory practices and as poems of protest in particular are in Spanish because their principle audience is, according to the poetic voice, “whites and *mestizos*.” After the first three poems there is a section with photos of workers in the sugarcane fields. These images were shot by Gustavo Zapoteco Sideño’s brother Noé with his own camera while laboring in the fields. The book progresses from more veiled criticism of colonial practices to the violent upheaval represented in the final poem “Angustia” (Anguish).

He mixes poems that on the surface are nationalistic praise and focus on “mere” cultural practices while others explicitly condemn social injustices. In doing so, he is able to be published and at the same time avoid, according to his self-described positioning,

being coopted by the state as an *indio permitido*²⁵ like first-generation Nahua authors. As introduced earlier, this is a common accusation made by the newer generation of Nahua writers, who, to borrow a dichotomy used among Maya writers in Guatemala, accuse the older generation of being too *culturales* while positioning themselves as *populares*.²⁶ For this younger generation, the markers of Nahua identity must be coupled with protests against injustices.

Natalio Hernández himself contends that older writers are pigeonholed. In his collection of poems *Semanca huitzilin*, he does not focus explicitly on social protest and the anguish imposed by colonialism, but this does not mean that his poetry lacks social commitment. His earlier books of poetry, in particular *Xochikoskatl* (1985), resemble Zapoteco's *Cuicatl pan tlalliouatlmej* in both structure and theme. Nevertheless, especially in the last decade, there has been a significant shift in Hernández's poetic style in which he focuses on achieving an interculturality and harmony among different cultures. He explains that he ceased to write openly about suffering because it had tended to reinforce the stereotypical victimization of Indigenous peoples in governmental and academic discourse.²⁷

Colibrí reflects Hernández's emphasis on "intercultural dialogue" in which nation-state construction is not seen from above or below, but rather as something in which all members of the nation-state take part as equally important actors. Intercultural dialogue bridges the separation of "modernity" from Indigenous peoples and their relegation to a distant past. This intercultural project displaces modernity's bywords of "development" and "progress" that have marginalized Indigenous viewpoints as

anachronic and primitive, and imagines an intercultural space in which Indigenous subjects participate in the distribution and structuring of knowledge. “Interculturality” is a key term in imagining this text, and represents a literary expression of what Hernández had begun to emphasize in his essays and discourses since the 1990s. The text is divided into five sections, symbolic of the title of one of its poems, “El sexto sol” (The Sixth Sun), as the text progresses to welcoming in a “new sun” or era in which Indigenous knowledge production will interact with other epistemes on an even playing field. References to harmony and song appear repeatedly throughout the poems, and many carry titles that begin with “Cuicatl” o “Canto a” (“Song to”). The title of the book itself makes reference to the importance of song with the translation of *semanca* into Spanish as *armonía* (harmony).²⁸ This serves as a metaphor to the overall purpose of the book to proclaim the importance of interculturality. The trilingual format of the book highlights this attempt to place Nahuatl on an even playing field with hegemonic languages. While Zapoteco has poems only in Spanish to emphasize a tone of protest against a specific audience and mark a disjuncture, Natalio Hernández has poems in Nahuatl, Spanish, and English to emphasize a harmony among languages. He also has a poem entitled “Yancuic xochicuicatl” (New Flowered Songs) only in Nahuatl with no Spanish translation, but only with an English translation to symbolize this play among different languages. These shifts among different languages—much like Hernández’s speech in which he claims Spanish as Nahua property also—challenge essentialisms that paint Nahuatl as an isolated, pristine language that would only be corrupted and displaced by outside influences such as Western languages and practices.

In my analysis of *Colibrí*, I focus on the poems “Semanca huitzilin,” “Notonal,” “In coyotl,” “Canto de Nanahuatzin,” “Canto nuevo a Moctezuma Xocoyotzin,” “Itlamiya cuicatl,” and “Lloro por ti Argentina.” *Colibrí* is written in free verse and, like Zapoteco’s *Cuicatl pan tlalliouatlmej*, they carry a rhythm highly influenced by ceremonial Nahuatl. The first section, entitled “Semanca huitzilin” (Harmonious Hummingbird), introduces Hernández’s welcoming of a harmony among cultures, symbolized in the flight of the hummingbird. “Yancuic xochicuicatl” (New Flowered Songs), the second section, sings to prominent symbols and figures of his hometown and Pre-Columbian and post-conquest era, such as Chicomexochitl, Cuauhtémoc, and Juan Diego. These allusions to figures from across different time periods represent Hernández’s view of the past as key in renovating the present, suggested in the title of this section, “New Flowered Songs.” The title of the third section, “Monólogo frente a la mujer dormida,” alludes to the story of Iztaccihuatl and Popocatepetl.²⁹ Like Popocatepetl, Hernández too observes the women around him and his overall surroundings. “In cahuitl” (Time), the fourth section, explores how one’s own time on the earth quickly passes. The fifth section, “Itlamiya cuicatl” (The Song’s End), focuses on death as regeneration, and how the coming together of different languages and races represents a Sixth Sun of a new intercultural era. Each section contains between eleven and fifteen poems, and poems vary in length from a single quartet to two pages in length and verses vary in length from one syllable to twenty syllable lines. As opposed to suggesting disjointedness, this variation is meant to represent the harmonious relationship between different languages and contexts. The final poem of the collection, “Epílogo”

(Epilogue), is especially indicative of this, as Hernández combines English, Spanish, and Nahuatl into one poem to proclaim that the Hummingbird of Harmony has arrived welcoming in a new period of mutual respect among different cultures.

The stark contrast between *Semanca huitzilin* and *Cuicatl* are immediately evident with the images in the book. The cover of *Cuicatl* has the image of a child laborer returning from an arduous day of work,³⁰ while *Colibrí* has a color painting of a hummingbird sucking nectar from a flower. These two contrastive and yet similarly aimed approaches combine to skillfully employ Nahua perspectives toward the defense of Indigenous rights. Reading them in conjunction and in contrast with one another reveals diverse Nahua viewpoints and at the same time highlights differing strategies toward the empowerment of present-day Nahuas in their knowledge production.

Harmonious Hummingbird: Affective Intelligence and Interculturality

Though differing from the explicit, often violent protest in *Cuicatl*, Hernández's *Colibrí* employs the same metaphors of the heart, flowers, and Mesoamerican deities to displace the "single eye" of modernity. In this text, Hernández advocates an intercultural dialogue between languages and cultural practices, and this approach, which for some smacks of utopianism, has provoked accusations that this is an ad hoc interculturality and anesthetizes the harsh reality described in texts such as *Cuicatl*.³¹ In contrast with Zapoteco's poems, in which he states that he would like to speak only of flowers but cannot due to social injustices, Hernández speaks of wanting only to contemplate the "flor y canto" (flower and song) and not the "darkness of night" symbolic of suffering (*Colibrí*, 55). As stated earlier in this chapter, in personal conversations and public

discourse, Hernández repeatedly highlights how focusing on Indigenous anguish or on an insurrectionary “Indian” has reinforced the stereotypical representation of Indigenous subjects as either victim or violent mob.

Evident in the title of the book itself and his explanation within *Semanca huitzilin*'s introduction, Hernández seeks a harmonious relationship between cultures by viewing intuitiveness and emotions as integral to reasoning. He refers to how Huitzilopochtli, “hummingbird of the left,” represented dreams and intuitiveness for the Nahuas, and how this coincides with the identification in contemporary science of the brain's left side as the principal location for dreams (11-13).³² Hernández plays on this meaning and explains how he thought about writing a book entitled *Huitzilnemactli*, “hummingbird of the right,” to emphasize rationality. He quickly discarded this idea though because “la racionalidad de nuestro tiempo nos está llevando al precipicio” (13). He instead argues that it is necessary to “integrar la parte intuitiva y emocional, con la parte racional de nuestra naturaleza humana” (13). From this springs the idea of a “hummingbird of harmony” in which both the left and right brains are integrated into one. He clearly argues for an affective intelligence as the basis for intercultural dialogue, and such an approach, as Martha Nussbaum describes, proposes plausible opportunities for ethical change through a recognition and cultivation of the “social bases of imaginative and emotional health” within a political community (15-16). With affective intelligence, the visceral metaphor of the heart combines with the flower images and Mesoamerican deities to give an alternative genesis and framework to modernity. Hernández hopes that these songs will find a place in the *yolotl* or “heart” of the readers

and will “flower” within them (13).

The first poem entitled “Semanca Huitzilin” (translated as “Colibrí de la armonía”) describes this hummingbird of harmony as having a big heart and a vision focused on dreams:

Semanca Huitzilin

Semanca Huitzilin

Semanca Huitzilin

Hueyi iyolo
mahuistic iehlapal
semanca ihcuac patlani
hueca ixpolihui itlachialis.

Melahuac, melahuac
niyolpaqui,
melahuac, melahuac
nimoyolchicahua.

Axcantzi nihmati
moyolitia
amaninitzin nihmati
moxochiotia:

In Semanca Huitzilin

In Semanca Huitzilin

In Semanca Huitzilin

Colibrí de la Armonía

Colibrí de la Armonía

Colibrí de la Armonía

De corazón grande
alas maravillosas,
armonía en su vuelo
mirada que se pierde
en el infinito.

En verdad, en verdad
alegra el corazón.
En verdad, en verdad
fortalece el espíritu.

Ahora mismo lo sé,
cobra vida.
Ahora mismo lo sé,
empieza a florecer:

El Colibrí de la Armonía

El Colibrí de la Armonía

El Colibrí de la Armonía

Hummingbird of Harmony

Hummingbird of Harmony

Hummingbird of Harmony

Of great heart
wonderful wings,
harmony in its flight
its gaze disappears
into infinity.

It truly, truly
makes the heart happy
It truly, truly
fortifies the spirit.

Right now I know,
it begins to live.
Right now I know,
it begins to bloom:

Hummingbird of Harmony
Hummingbird of Harmony
Hummingbird of Harmony

Semanca, with the number one at its root, connotes oneness or perfection. Yet, rather than allude to any homogenizing project, this oneness is identified as seeing emotions as an integral part of reasoning. This viewpoint differs from the all-imposing view of modernity and, though not suggesting encounters free of conflict, highlights the importance of not positioning oneself hegemonically as the center of knowledge production. Rather, a key part of this affective intelligence is, as the term “affect” denotes, having a “with-ness of the movement of the world,” being impacted by one’s surroundings and reacting viscerally (Manning xxi). Reacting accordingly, the poetic voice exclaims: *niyolpaqui* and *nimoyolchicahua* (“I laugh with my heart” and “I strengthen myself with my heart”; 26). In doing so, the hummingbird *moyolitia*, “is brought to life/heart,” and blooms like a flower (26). The last two references to the heart are lost in translation into Spanish as “fortalece el espíritu” and “cobra vida” (27). The metaphor of the heart appears numerous times in many poems and might seem overly repetitive without recognizing the deeper meaning of this vital organ in Nahua culture.

“Being brought back to life/heart” alludes to the hummingbird emerging from its six-month winter hibernation. This, in turn, symbolizes how the affective intelligence that this bird represents and that has been marginalized for centuries is now able to awake. Appropriately visualizing this metaphor of the hummingbird, “*Semanca huitzilin*” is a calligram in the shape of a bird’s wing. The short verses in it and throughout most of *Colibrí* seek to imitate the flapping of these wings and their dynamic movement.

Translated into Spanish by Hernández and into English by Donald Frischmann, these translations suggest an even relationship among the three languages, which is significant considering that Nahuatl is still often seen as an “inferior dialect.” Arguably the texts shift among more than three languages with Hernández’s mixing of different Nahuatl variants from throughout Mexico.³³ *Semanca* (unity) and *amanintzin* (at this very moment) are words that Hernández picked up while directing education in the state of Puebla in the 1970s. This combination of multiple variants points to the diversity and complexity within the Nahuatl language itself. Though differing significantly from Zapoteco’s *Cuicatl* with its violent resistance, *Colibri* is similar in challenging the discourse of modernity that equates certain languages and knowledges with “progress” and more developed at the cost of others.

I Look for My Body: The Sentient Space of the *Tonal*

In the poem “Notonal” (“Mi tonal”) the poetic voice searches for his body, and as he does so the chiasmic structure of this poem equates the dream state with waking up:

Amanintzin
 ninemi ilhuicac
 nihtemoa notonal:
 nimotemoa.

En este instante
 viajo por el infinito
 ando en busca de mi *tonal*:
 me busco a mí mismo.

Nihtemoa notlacayo.

Busco mi cuerpo

Saniman ntlachia
 nimo cochiscotona,
 ihcon nicasi notonal
 ipan tlaltipactli. (38)

Despierto enseguida,
 interrumpo mi sueño:
 así encuentro mi *tonal*
 aquí en la tierra. (39)

At this very moment
 I travel through the heavens
 I am looking for my *tonal*:
 I search for myself.

I search for my body.

Immediately I wake up
I interrupt my sleep,
that is how I discover my *tonal*
upon the earth.

In the first four lines Hernández describes how he travels through dreams in search of his *tonal*, which is then followed by the line set apart, “Busco mi cuerpo” (‘I search for my body’; 39). The final four lines describe how he then interrupts his dream and thus finds his *tonal* on the earth. The *tonal* is the inner energy of the body, and at a deeper level it is related to the sun, *tonatiuh*, who (not “that”) gives off this energy. This, in turn, is intimately connected to the hummingbird, who also symbolizes the sun. This poem masterfully represents the conjoining of intuitiveness and reasoning via metaphors. The poem itself is also a calligram subtly depicting the left and right lobes of the brain, representing the area of dreams on the left and an awakened state of reasoning on the right. The line “Busco mi cuerpo” serves to join these two parts and highlights the formation of a sensuous subject who embodies affective intelligence.

The poem “In coyotl” (“The Coyote”) follows a structure similar to that of “Notonal” and gives greater insight into the meaning of *tonal* for the *nahual*. The term *nahual* generally refers to a person’s ability to transform herself or himself into an animal, either for maleficent purposes as a sorcerer or in defense of those in need.³⁴ “In coyotl” represents the later:

In coyotl:
yolcatl tlamatini,
nahuali
mocuepani.

El coyote:
animal sabio
Nahual
animal que se transforma.

Tecuani tlen mosahua
motolinia
motonalcuepa.

Ser que ayuna
se abstiene
transmuta su vida.

Nehuatl nihtemoa
in coyotl itonal
nehuatl nihnequi
nimocoyocuepas. (88)

Ando en busca
del *tonal* del coyote
deseo transformarme
en coyote. (89)

The coyote:
wise animal,
nahual
animal that transforms itself.

Wild animal that fasts
travails
transforms its *tonal*.

I search for
the *tonal* of the coyote
I desire to transform myself
like a coyote.

The poetic voice describes the coyote as a “yolcatl tlamatini,” which is translated into Spanish as “animal sabio” (wise animal) (89). *Tlamatini* literally means “one who knows things,” but it has a deeper meaning related to the wise elders of Nahua intellectual tradition and contemporary communities as I have explained in the first chapter. The coyote is a transmuted *nahual* who fasts, a clear allusion to Nezahualcōyotl, whose name means “coyote who fasts.” While there are heated arguments as to whether Nezahualcōyotl authored any poetry or instead represents merely a construction to feed nationalist symbolism, these debates are irrelevant, as Eric Hobsbawm theorizes in *The Invention of Tradition*, once people embrace these perhaps fictional narratives as reality.³⁵ The underlying argument for this lauding of Nezahualcōyotl is that Nahuas have

a valid intellectual tradition and philosophy, which this figure has come to represent. Thus, these ideas should be taken seriously in contemporary social, political, and economical debates. The coyote represents this intellectual tradition and the poetic voice goes in search “del tonal del coyote / deseo transformarme / en coyote” (‘of the coyote’s tonal / I desire to transform myself / into a coyote’; 89). In this sense Hernández provincializes the European intellectual tradition and opens a space for alternative worldviews.³⁶

The final line, “Nimocoyocuepas,” means literally “I want to transform myself like a coyote,” and would be rather jolting for a Nahuatl speaker, most likely eliciting laughter, confusion, or perhaps even accusations of betrayal. *Coyotl* popularly refers to people from the city and at a deeper level anyone who does not respect Indigenous thought systems and practices. Thus, this poem resignifies what *coyotl* represents. This appropriation of the animal is ironically similar to the appropriation of the term *indio* in Hernández’s poem “Na ni indio” in *Xochikoskatl* (1985), in which *indio* is positively recast in opposition to the *coyotl* who oppresses, as I previously explained in the first chapter. Once a symbol of intelligence and ingenuity—evident in names like Nezahualcoyotl—the coyote is taken back by Hernández and reattributed these previous meanings. This appropriation of *coyotl* asserts a place for previously marginalized cultural practices and intellectual traditions in the construction of the nation-state and knowledge production, thus displacing the hegemonic Western epistemes from their supposed position at the center of valid knowledge production.

Consequently, the animal as *nahual* and its intimate connection with the tonal

represent a visceral resistance to previous marginalization. The *nahual* is an animal that has a deep connection with the *tonal*, or inner energy of a person, and if one protects this *nahual* then the animal protects the person.³⁷ From this concept of the *nahual* and the *tonal* arises an ethic that includes a deep respect for nature and that recognizes the body as affectively connected to its surroundings.

Chicomóztoc: An Alternative Time

In addition to this alternative sentient space, *Colibrí* represents an alternative time. “Canto de Nanahuatzin” describes the god Nanahuatzin on the verge of sacrificially leaping into the fire that would transform into the fifth sun. She states that “Ya puedo saltar, / la luz penetra / en Chicomóztoc, / lugar de las siete cuevas” (I can now leap, / light penetrates / Chicomóztoc, / place of the seven caves; 60). Chicomóztoc, “place of the seven caves,” is the mythical place from which the different Nahuatl peoples originated. The story of the creation of the sun refers to a cycle of different suns, and we currently live under the fifth.

“Canto de Nanahuatzin” (Song of Nanahuatzin) goes on to state that “un sol / ya nos alumbró” (‘a new sun / now illuminates us’; 115), thus appealing to a different genesis with the cycles of suns. This contrasts sharply with President Vicente Fox’s use of the same metaphor in a speech to an Indigenous community in Oaxaca. Fox stated utilized it in 2000 as he introduced an Indigenous woman, Xóchitl Gálvez, who would become the commissioner for the Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas (CDI), and who, according to Fox, came from “one of the poorest communities in the country” (“Abramos hoy”). Framed within the context of economic development,

Fox reacts in a paternalistic way and victimizes Indigenous peoples in Mexico: “Never again a Mexico that discriminates or abuses, or that abandons, or that forgets its Indigenous communities. We are seeing a new dawn for Mexico. We are seeing a new dawn for Indigenous communities” (“Abramos hoy”).³⁸ Such a narrative framework leaves relatively untouched the unequal power relations between those with the supposed power to include and those who must passively accept this inclusion.³⁹ In its stead Hernández offers an alternative time and space in which Indigenous subjects construct the nation-state, have access to political power, and offer alternatives to narratives of progress.

A cyclical solar sequence and Chicomóztoc suggest an alternative genesis, which subsequently ties to the contemporary divine figure Chicomexóchitl “seven flowers” in the poem “Ofrenda a Chicomexóchitl” (Offering for Chicomexochitl), which I will now analyze. This poem describes a ceremony performed in Veracruz that shows gratitude to this deity who represents the seven basic staple foods in Nahuatl communities. This ceremony represents the foundational symbol of a community fasting, sacrificing, showing patience, and working. The symbol of this creation, the *tlaquimiloli*, is a bundled offering left in the *tepeyolotl* or heart of the mountain. The poetic voice describes how the sacred music played at the ceremony stays in the memory with the community and “en el andar cotidiano de la gente” (‘people’s daily actions’; 64). Again the sacred number seven, coincidentally symbolically similar to its function in Christianity, represents a genesis but also an alternative creation intimately connected with a collective ethic leading one to have a deep respect for nature and contrasting with the perspective of

modernity.

A new genesis is also represented in the poem “Canto nuevo a Moctezuma Xocoyotzin” (New Song to Moctezuma Xocoyotzin). The poetic voice speaks to the tlahtoani Moctezuma, telling him to abandon sadness and no longer afflict himself. This is indicative again of Hernández’s rejection of Indigenous victimization, of which Moctezuma is the symbol par excellence in national narratives. This poetic voice tells him that his children still remain “en la nación mexicana” (115). Yet it is interesting that “Mexican nation” can refer to Nahua communities instead of the Mexican nation-state. In this manner Hernández indirectly refers to a pluri-nationality within Mexico, in a context in which speaking openly of different nations within the state is commonly rejected by the Mexican political system. Hence, the poetic voice displaces the idea of a homogenous nation, as the peripheral Nahua is thus claimed to be more Mexican than the prototypical mestizo subject.

This different space and time is also represented in the poem near the end of *Semanca*, entitled “Itlamiya cuicatl” (Song’s End). This poem describes people as different colors of corn, alluding to the creation of men from corn reminiscent of the *Popol wuj*. The poem indicates that “el rojo, el blanco, / el amarillo, el negro / se han mezclado” and formed “rayos multicolores” beneath the sun, thus signaling the arrival of the sixth sun (167). While some reader might interpret it as an anesthetized multiculturalism, this metaphor takes on deep significance when one takes into account the sun’s relation to the heart, flowers, Mesoamerican deities, and the tonal. This does not involve a celebration of (market) diversity, as in neoliberal multiculturalism, but rather

the treatment of Nahua knowledges as valid and hence displacing modernity as the center of knowledge production.

Such criticism of modernity is made explicit in the poem “Llora por ti Argentina” (“Cry for Me Argentina”; a reference to the song in “Evita,” entitled “No llores por mí, Argentina”). Here Hernández tells Argentina to cry for itself because of its false progress, “un sueño de la modernidad” (‘a dream of modernity’) and for the policies of the nation-state that in the nineteenth century killed off most Indigenous communities in the country (120). This is narrated from his small house in the countryside, “sentado en mi icpali” (‘sitting in my traditional Nahua chair’), where he is presumably seeing chaotic images during the 2001 crisis in Argentina on television. Analogous to Zapoteco’s poems, Hernández here creates a dichotomy between rural life and the city, in which the city represents modernity, thereby reflecting the social conflict as a struggle between Western modernity’s linear time and an Indigenous dynamic, cyclical time that foregrounds the past as a future in the concept of *tlaixpan* (that which is in front). From a Nahua perspective, development and progress are not constituted by a distancing from the past but rather considers Western conceptions of time as psychologically harmful. The dream of this modernity in Argentina “empieza a desmoronarse / para dejarnos desnudos / para matarnos de hambre / para destruir nuestra raíz / para borrar nuestros rostro / y enterrar nuestra historia” (“begins to collapse / to leave us naked / to kill us of hunger / to destroy our roots / to erase our faces / and to bury our history”; *Colibrí*, 120). It attempts to destroy local knowledges and “apropiarse de sus símbolos” (“try to appropriate their [Indigenous] symbols”; 120). Such a view has especially been destructive in Argentina,

since it is often racialized as the “white country” in Latin America without Indigenous populations. In spite of First Nation movements within Argentina to counteract such views, this destructive discourse equates this “racial cleansing” with economic and social progress. Hernández hopes that the social pain caused by such a perspective may lead to the “Sun of dignity,” an allusion to the creation of a new sun which would leave behind ages of colonialism.

Visceral Metaphors: Under the Eye of Colonialism in Zapoteco’s *Cuicatl*

I now turn to Zapoteco’s *Cuicatl* and use the concepts of *yoltlallamiqiliztli* (knowledge with the heart) and “affective intelligence” to analyze the first poems. *Yoltlallamiqiliztli* constitutes a viscerality that can be understood as intimately related to affective intelligence, in which emotions are treated as an integral part of a person’s thought processes. The concept of “affective intelligence” has its roots in debates surrounding the term “emotional intelligence” used by Daniel Goleman in his best-selling book *Emotional Intelligence* (1995). This emotional intelligence is namely, as Gerald Matthews describes, the “competence to identify and express emotions, understand emotions, assimilate emotions in thought, and regulate both positive and negative emotions in oneself and others” (xv). Emotional intelligence differs from affective intelligence in that its focus is on emotional self-awareness and managing emotions to obtain personal goals. In contrast, affective intelligence, as George E. Marcus posits, is to “conceptualize affect and reason not as oppositional but as complimentary, as two functional mental faculties in a delicate, interactive, highly functional dynamic balance” (2). Solutions to political, economic, and social challenges must be created with

the “active engagement and interaction of both mental faculties” (2). Evident in Hernández’s texts as well, this affective intelligence constitutes a focal point of resistance in numerous Indigenous movements to state assimilationist projects.

This category of intelligence is codified within the Nahuatl language and common tropes within it. Metaphors of affective intelligence can be seen as examples of what Sanjinés refers to as catachresis,⁴⁰ namely words which the subaltern subject uses to describe what the dominant society cannot grasp and for which the dominant language lacks a term. *Yolotl* and *xochitl* lose deeper meanings when simply translated as “heart” and “flower.” Through these metaphors Indigenous migrants such as Hernández articulate the tension between modernity and Indigenous knowledges, which have cultivate a healthier psyche with its close conjugation of cognition with affect. Within *Cuicatl*, the poems “In acaualexochitl / Flor de acahual” (Acahual Flower), “In tlatimatiteotl / Un fraile” (A Monk), “Maguito,” and “Cuicatl in yolomasehualtin / Canto del corazón indio” (Song of the Indigenous Heart) are key to understanding this tension.

Cuicatl begins with the poem “In acaualexochitl / Flor de acahual,” of five stanzas in length, in which the poetic voice personifies the *acahual* flower and tells her not to cry because of being from the rural area. The *acahual* should be proud, the poem states, to participate in the Indigenous religious practices along with the flowers *cacaloxochitl* and *cempoalxochitl*. These flowers are contrasted with European ones in the city. The latter remained in the city, as stated in the fourth stanza,

inic nemipan hueycalli ihuan teocalli
yeitzaco xochueli iita in milan,
xochueli huiyaque on xihuitl,
xohueli matisque, (20)

para estar en la casa grande o iglesia
encerradas sin poder mirar al campo,
sin poder oler la hierba,
sin poder sentir, (21)

to be in the large house or church
enclosed without the ability to see the fields,
without the ability to smell those plants
without the ability to feel/know,

As in “Angustia” (Anguish), which will be analyzed later, an emphasis is placed on the urban inhabitant’s inability to feel—“sin poder sentir” (“without the ability to feel”). This spatial dichotomy between the city and the rural highlights the urban as the representation of modernity, constructing an enclosed, insensible perspective that excludes Indigenous practices. As the waters from which spring forth resistance in “Angustia,” the rural flowers represent ancestral memory that emerges from water and forms a key symbol of Indigenous thought systems, song, language, ceremony, nature, and divinity and thus is intimately connected with the metaphors of the heart and Mesoamerican deities.

The second poem, “In tlacatimatiteotl / Un fraile,” of seven stanzas in length, contrasts starkly with the *acahual* flower in the previous poem and represents the “eye of reason” of modernity in a monk. Like the city flowers in large houses or churches, the monk sits in cold silence in the most inaccessible area of the convent and looks outside through a small arabesque window in the second stanza:

Canon nemimosehuica
hueli ijta
por ye arabesca ijcalakitlahuilti
ne inmilan,
on cuahtlan on cuahocotl
ihuan cuauhteo
tlapacho por in ixtacayau
tlin motelo,

Desde donde está sentado
puede ver
a través de esa
arabesca ventana
hacia fuera,
ese bosque de ocotes y hóyameles
cubiertos por la blanca neblina
que lucha,

ica on tlauhiltitonantzintli.

con los rayos de sol.

From where he goes on sitting
he can see
through that arabesque window
the fields,
that forest of ocote
and sacred firs
covered by a white mist
that fights,
with the sunrays.

This window adorned with metal leaves and flowers contrasts with the natural *acahual* and other rural flowers. Only “escasos rayos de luz” ‘scarce rays of light’ are able to make it through the window and “[al fraile] lo iluminan / allí donde esta sentado [sic] / con la cabeza baja” (‘illuminate [the monk] / there where he is sitting / with his head lowered’; 23). This viewpoint resembles Western modernity’s reliance on the mind’s eye, a perspectivism that carries with it a blind spot to both economic oppression as well as ethnic oppression. The mind’s eye fails to feel and register the social oppression. Like the interlocutor in the poem “Angustia,” the monk even believes to be aiding Indigenous peoples in ecclesiastical attacks on their perspectives and practices.

Scarce illumination in “El fraile” suggests the period of Enlightenment or *Iluminismo*, in which the monocular perspective centered on “reason” became hegemonic. The poem links this period with the Renaissance and the ecumenical mission of the Catholic Church.⁴¹ These movements claimed a classical tradition and superior intellect to justify the colonization that constituted early modernity, and this coloniality conceives things as static, which is represented by the light that enters the monk’s room and is made artificial and “stamped” on the walls. This poem’s position at the beginning

of the book firmly situates modern oppressive practices in the sugarcane fields of Morelos within coloniality.

In the fourth stanza, Zapoteco writes that the monk is hunched over with his head

tlapacho por in tlaquentli	cubierta por el habito [sic]
tlin xoc ijta yexayac	que no deja ver ese rostro
xocquimati mekipiya on xayakaxtilan	no se sabe
o tlacomasehualtin (22)	si tiene la cara española o mestiza (23)

covered with the habit
that conceals that face
it is not known
if he has a Spanish or *mestizo* face

The poetic voice shows little concern as to whether the monk's face is Spanish or *mestizo*, as the resulting discrimination is the same. In regards to the discourse of *mestizaje*, Mexican national thought equates nationhood and *mestizaje*.⁴² A discourse that became pervasive after the Mexican Revolution with Manuel Gamio's *Forjando patria*, this *mestizaje* emerges as the signifier for a homogenous "national race," language, and convergence of different cultures into one (Gamio 28). Through *mestizaje* and the Mexican Revolution pervades a coloniality that relegates Indigenous subjects and their practices to vestiges of a vanquished past. *Mestizaje* does not differ much from discourses of whiteness, as in both perceived whiteness is "naturally" associated with superior "rationality" and knowledge, and the concentration of capital in the hands of those perceived as "white" has functioned in conjunction with and perpetuated this racism. Ironically, though *mestizaje* idealizes the mixing of Indigenous and European "races" to forge a new subject neither "light" nor "dark," thus ending all racism, those on the "top" of this mestizo spectrum are nearly always perceived as "white" (hence the pleading man

in “Angustia” is white).⁴³

The poetic voice overturns this *mestizaje*, and describes the writing of the monk

as:

tlacuilo pan huehuecamoxtli
ica xkixkopina tlin
xoc kijtacuajle,
¿tlin tlacuilo?
¿aquín mati?
iselti iyolotl kimati
ihuan on nochipatepantli
tlin itlapachohua. (24)

escribe algo,
sobre ese viejo libro
con signos que no
se distinguen bien
¿qué escribirá? ¿quién sabe?
solo su corazón lo sabe
y las eternas paredes
que lo cobijan. (25)

on that old book
with characters that are not
easily distinguished
What could he be writing? Who knows?
only his heart knows
and the eternal walls
that shelter him

As the Europeans marginalized writing practices foreign to their own systems of inscription, here the poetic voice disregards the monk’s writings as illustrative of an oppressive discourse that is represented spatially by the cramped room in which the monk works. This monk is depicted as practically having no body as his face lies concealed under his cloak. The only part of his body described as present is his hand, which writes “slowly, very slowly” with the monk’s static view of the world (25). Even his heart is not present, lost in the poorly distinguished characters on the page. Opposed to the flower that represents an affective intelligence in which the body is seen as an integral part of one’s reasoning, this figure is disembodied and wrapped up in his mind’s eye. Zapoteco makes clear the need to resist assimilation to this bodiless and psychologically harmful discourse that the monk preaches as universal.

Rescoldo del tlicuil / Embers of the Fire: Politics of Memory

Firmly framed within this context of modernity / colonialism, the eight poems at the center of *Cuicatl* explicitly denounce the living conditions of Indigenous migrant workers in Morelos. These poems are preceded on pages 32-47 by eight images from the sugarcane fields paired, and each image is paired with short quotes from the poems. Zapoteco worked together in these fields with his brother Noé, an aspiring photographer, who shot the photographs while employed in this grueling labor. The originals were printed out in large format and have been exhibited in Mexico City and different municipalities of Morelos. The photo of a young boy, entitled “Niño Nahua—Tiempo de Zafra en el albergue— Tlaltizapan, Mor.,” also serves as the image for the front cover of *Cuicatl*. Covered in ash and in the back of a truck bringing him from the fields, this seven-year old boy looks up at the camera half smiling. His situation reduces him to a person whose name—Mago o Maguito—is lost in his work title “el niño cortador” (the boy who cuts).



Fig. 1. Noé Zapoteco, Nahua Child, photograph from Gustavo Zapoteco Sideño, *Cuicatl pan tlalliouatlmej* (Mexico City: JM Impresiones, 2004; print; 35).

The sixth poem from *Cuicatl*, entitled “Maguito,” describes his plight. All this boy knows is that he is “un cortador” and his hands are already filled with callouses. His situation is reflective of how economic subalternity is intimately tied to a colonial system of racism and discrimination that has outlived the era of colonialism. A colonized logic associates “races” with certain “social roles and geohistorical places” (Quijano 3). In the colonial era, Indigenous subjects as well as other subalterns were “naturally” associated with manual labor and for the most part prohibited from participating in knowledge production or “higher” professions. This division of labor was transmuted into the social classification of the world’s population under global capitalism as access to capital was concentrated in the hands of the dominant white sector. Government discourse couches this discrimination in economic and classist terms, reiterating the need of Indigenous communities to “develop” and turn a blind eye to any real change in the racist political and social structures that exclude them from knowledge production and decision-making.

Automatically associated with manual labor, Mago “yehua xintlacamati on tlazolti [...] / xintlacamactli pieyasque maiknihuan” / “no sabe de cariño [...] / el solo sabe de cortar caña [sic] / de apurarse para hacer bultos” (‘does not know affection [...] / he only knows about cutting sugarcane’; 59). Like the black figure described as a bulto or “bulge” and surrounded by fire in the final poem “Angustia” (Anguish), analyzed in the last section of this chapter, this boy covered in black ash is essentially relegated to a life of servitude.⁴⁴ Under a system that disassociates the worker from what he produces, the boy is figuratively reduced to a pile of burnt cane and treated like a machine. Maguito is reduced to working and obtaining money “para que le compren. su ropita nueva; / para

que coman sus hermanitos, / cree que eso es la vida” (59). As such, the boy’s view of life is reflective of the discourse of modernity for which economic progress and development mean everything.

In these protest poems, the first person poetic voice articulates a decolonizing proposal significantly different from those set by developmentalist discourses. This proposal seeks that long overdue social demands be met, and the language and local knowledges be respected and accepted.⁴⁵ The poem “Cuicatl in yolomasehualtin,” translated as “Canto del corazón indio” (Song of the Indian heart), represents such a transformation and contains the alternative knowledges connected with the heart, flower, and Mesoamerican deities that are conspicuously absent in preceding testimonial poems. This poem asks how Indigenous subjects have survived throughout the centuries under discriminatory systems and ideologies that would kill them “si salimos a la luz” (‘if were come out in the open’; 67). The poetic voice then asserts,

tenemi in tlilpitzintzin on tlicuil
on oquipitz huejcaexnexcha,
tenemi monemitimej,
tenemi monemitimej,
ikuj tenemichanti,
inic huelimejmonemitis,
inic nemilis,
ilnamiquemej ixcuajqui in tonalli
in tonalli on tonalpilli (66)

somos el rescoldo del tlicuil
el suspiro de la esperanza,
seguimos vivos,
estamos vivos,
así debimos seguir
para sobrevivir,
para vivir,
ideas trae el tiempo
el tiempo de tiempos (67)

we are embers of the fire
the breath of hope,
we are still alive,
we are alive,
and that is how we had to continue
to survive,
to live,
time brings ideas

the time of times

The “*rescoldo del tlicuil*” (embers of the fire) alludes to the sugarcane workers covered in ash and imagines them as embers under this blackness protecting knowledges and practices that have been discriminated against since the colonial period. I have translated *tlicuil* as fire, which I will explain more in detail within the next paragraph because of its profound meaning. These migrants represent subjects marginalized to the periphery of Western modernity who enter a new space that changes their appearance, but who also have their founding experiences—what Sanjinés terms “embers of the past” or “support of the past”— that lead them to interpret their surroundings in conflict with the Western modernity’s monologism (Sanjinés, *Rescoldos*, 1). In this poem, the poetic voice makes reference to alternative knowledges as key to their survival and resistance against discrimination.

It is significant that this poetic voice uses the word *tlicuil* in the version in Spanish of the poem as opposed to the Spanish *fogata*, an indication of catachresis.⁴⁶ The term *tlicuil* in Nahuatl elicits metaphors of ash and ember that allude to the act of writing. This word is also used in some regions to refer to writing instruments such as markers. These connections with textual production symbolize empowerment and the ability to name, thus giving the Indigenous subject the agency to rearticulate national discourse. The act of writing—especially in Nahuatl—is significant in itself, as the subaltern is stereotypically represented as being unable to do so and his language is considered too poor to communicate important ideas. Light from the *rescoldo* and the hand that writes with it contrasts with the diminished light and the monk’s disembodied hand in the earlier

poem “In tlacatimatiteotl” (A Monk).

In a similar vein, the lines that follow “suspiro de la esperanza” (the breath of hope) are a play on the word *nemi* in the Nahuatl version: “**tenemi monemitimej / tenemi monemitimej / ikuj tenemichanti, / inic huelimejmonemitis, / inic nemilis / ilnamiqumej ixcuajqui in tonalli**” (66, emphasis mine). Partially evident in the translation into Spanish, the root *nemi* has numerous connotations in Nahuatl and can signify walking, continuing, living, feeling, being and thinking. The embodiment of *nemiliztli* resembles what Erin Manning calls a moving, sentient body that makes the state uncomfortable as it seeks to maintain people in static categories. Manning speaks of a “politics of touch” in which “affect plays a central role” (xxi).⁴⁷ Bodies deconstruct nation-state discourses and due to this make States uneasy. This sentient body is what Manning terms an “agrammatical invention” that, through “atypical expressions,” is able to move outside the strict confines of the state (xxii). As such, the concepts of the sensuous Indigenous heart, flowers, deities, and other concepts expressed/translated from Nahuatl serve as agrammatical political statements that challenge a state discourse that, even in the guise of multiculturalism, still proclaims a single official history, a hegemonic language (Spanish), and a homogenous identity (the mestizo subject). Consequently, “Indigenous heart” in the poem is intrinsically connected with this dynamic concept of *nemiliztli* and represents knowledges and practices that serve to resist—even violently—the modern colonial discourse that assimilates, obscures, and marginalizes them.

Zapoteco’s *Cuicatl* represents a scathing critique of a paternalistic Mexican State that patronizes Indigenous subjects⁴⁸ with vague promises of “progress” and inclusion.

The thirteenth poem, “Tlaltizapan,” exemplifies the overall intention and tone of the work. Zapoteco outwardly praises the municipality of Tlaltizapán, Morelos⁴⁹ for:

historia que tienes en tus templos
de tiempos coloniales,
marca endeble de tu
privilegiada posición
pues escuela espiritual tuviste
así dice tu colonial convento,
o en tu casa revolucionaria
que aún conservas
con gran recelo (89)

history you have in your temples
of colonial times,
an indelible mark of your
privileged position
because you had a spiritual school
so says your colonial convent,
or in your revolutionary house
that you still conserve
with great care

A seemingly patriotic tone in this poem with reference to an indelibly “privileged position” conceals a satire of the colonialism that persists to the present and in the Tlaltizapan government that helped fund the work. Behind the promises of progress and development of the State persists a colonial system of discrimination that invalidates Indigenous knowledges and equates them with backwardness. The colonial convent and temples in “Tlaltizapan” spatially represent this coloniality and its corresponding “spiritual” education that have persisted through the Mexican Revolution to the present. Enjambments such as “tu / privilegiada posición” (your / privileged position) and irony in the use of the word *recelo* (“with great care” or “pride” but also “with suspicion or distrust”) hint at an artificial national/state unity.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, this message lies hidden under hyperbolic praise of the surrounding landscape and altruism of Morelos.⁵¹

“Angustia, eres tú” / “You Are Anguish”: *Cantos* in Colonialism

Cuicatl closes with the poem “Angustia” (Anguish). Although the last of the book’s nineteen poems, this poem helps significantly in framing *Cuicatl* in its entirety with its protest against the oppressive conditions of Indigenous peoples. The poem

consists of seven stanzas varying much in length from six to twenty-six verses. The lines are in free verse and vary from four to eighteen syllables. The first stanza states:

Era como si ese día,
El mundo se iba a acabar,
la furia del cielo,
estaba en todo su esplendor.
estaba negro de coraje,
gritaba fuego,
gritaba dolor,
como si se uniera
a la vida aquí en la tierra,
a la tristeza humana.
Al dolor del cuerpo,
al dolor del alma,
negro pues estaba.
En una tempestad.
Los acantilados
eran golpeados
por la furia de las olas
que como bofetadas,
se estampaban sobre ellos,
y en los pequeños riscos.
como culebras se esfumaban
Hacia abajo. (108)

It was if that day,
The world were about to end,
the fury of the sky,
was in all its splendor.
was black with anger,
shouted fire,
shouted pain,
as if it were going to join
with life here on earth,
with human sadness.
With the pain of the body,
the pain of the soul,
completely black.
In a tempest.
The cliffs
were beaten
by the fury of the waves
that like buffetings,
crashed upon them,
and on the small crags.
like serpents they vanished
Down below.

The varying length and structure reflects the frenetic movement of the waves described in the poem. The poem reflects a common element in Nahua literature with the paring of numerous images: splendor and black with anger, fire and pain, and pain of the body and pain of the soul. These parings highlight the strength of the Indigenous subject, in contrastive with the reductive efforts of the “white man” to classify her or him under the label “angustia,” repeated as if it were a paring in itself.

Zapoteco begins “Angustia” en media res describing a “bulto negro” (black bulge) on the edge of a sea cliff surrounded by terrible weather and waves that “yell fire and pain” (108). I cite the second stanza:

En la saliente de un risco
 Rodeado de agua,
 de pronto vi
 Algo que en ella estaba
 Que no podía distinguir
 Por la brisa marina
 Parecía como un fantasma negro
 Con los ropajes volando,
 por el fuerte aire,
 todo era negro,
 Nada se podía ver,
 Estaba al borde del precipicio.
 Cuando de pronto oí,
 A los lejos una voz.
 Que gritaba
 Angustia, angustia, angustia
 Gritaba un varón a lo lejos
 Corría, corría, corría al borde del
 acantilado,
 En busca de angustia.
 ¿Era ella angustia?
 Pronto apareció entre los riscos
 y se paró de miedo,
 a lo lejos vio, esa sombra negra
 y con voz suave dijo:
 Angustia, Angustia ¿Eres tú?
 ¿Eres angustia? (108-109)

On the protruding crag
 surrounded by water,
 suddenly I saw
 Something there
 that was indistinguishable
 Because of the breeze of the sea
 It looked like a black ghost
 With its clothes flying,
 because of the strong air,
 everything was black,
 Nothing could be seen,
 It was on the cliff's edge.
 When suddenly I heard,
 a voice from afar.
 That yelled
 Anguish, anguish, anguish
 A man yelled from afar
 He ran, ran, ran to the edge of the
 cliff,
 In search of anguish.
 Was *it* anguish?
 Suddenly there he appeared among the crags
 and stood in fear,
 at a distance he saw, that black shadow
 and with a soft voice said:
 Anguish, Anguish, Is that you?
 Are you anguish?

A man “en busca de angustia” (‘in search of anguish’) arrives running and shouts to the black figure, “Angustia, ¿Eres tu? [sic]” (‘Anguish, Is that you?’; 109). This man draws closer to the “sombra negra” (black shadow) and frenziedly asks the same question, to which the figure only turns and glances back in the third stanza:

Rayos y relámpagos
 iluminaban aquella escena,
 como sacaba de días de miedo,
 llegó como a unos veinte pasos
 y de nuevo le dijo:
 Angustia, angustia
 ¿Eres tú?, ¡Mírame! ¿Qué vas a hacer?
 De pronto una brisa la cubrió de nuevo,

Lightning and thunder
 illuminated that scene,
 taken from days of fear,
 the man came within a few steps
 and again said:
 Anguish, anguish
 Is it you? Look at me! What are you going to do?
 Suddenly a breeze covered him again,

Y al disiparse voltea
y miró aquel hombre que yacía parado,
tenía la cara blanca
blanca como la nieve
y los ojos a pesar de ser azules,
parecían tétricos,
por la oscuridad que había,

And, while vanishing, it turned
and looked at that man that lay standing,
he had a white face
white as snow
and his eyes in spite of being blue,
seemed dismal,
because of the darkness,

This pleading man has a white face, “blanca como la nieve” (as white as snow), and blue eyes that appear “tétricos” (dismal) in the surrounding darkness (109-10). He repeats the question “¿Eres angustia?” yet a third time and then asks what the black figure is going to do. Suddenly in the sixth stanza this figure leaps into the sea and disappears under the waves:

Aún no terminaba la última frase
cuando aquella sombra
se lanzó a ese mar embravecido
y desapareció en el encrespado de las olas
[...] (110)

He hadn't yet finished the last sentence
when that shadow
threw itself into the raging sea
and disappeared under the curling waves
[...]

The white man yells out, “No, no, no, angustia no, / ¿Por qué? ¿Por qué lo hiciste?” (“No, no, no, anguish no, / Why? Why did you do it?”; 110). The sky then begins to “cry” down rain, which turns to ice and falls upon the whole earth, tearing apart upon “the rock” the body of the man who “no sentía / el cuerpo ya no estaba vivo / ya no vivía” (“did not feel / the body was no longer alive / no longer was it living”; 111). *Cuicatl* concludes with this sacrificial death.

“Angustia” depicts the depositing of emotions in Indigenous peoples, which ties into their depiction as victims. The title of the poem, “Anguish,” itself suggests this colonial framework, in which “whites” represent reason and Indigenous peoples are the irrational depositories of affect in need of aid. The violent narrative in this poem

masterfully depicts the effects of coloniality upon Indigenous subjects. The black figure represents Indigenous migrants who have had to work in the sugarcane fields, where the ash from burnt cane blackens their bodies. To a larger extent, though, this “bulge” serves as a metaphor for all marginalized by the discourse of modernity and its corollary coloniality. The white man of the poem seeks desperately to interpolate the black figure as anguish because he represents the “colonial difference” that Sanjinés defines as the “production of situations of colonial submission founded on odious racial differences that, reproduced constantly in everyday encounters, the subaltern must endure most of the time” (*Rescoldos*, 32).⁵² The discourse of modernity uses the everyday markers of phenotype, technology, attire, accent, language, and occupation to fashion a “deleveling,” rather than encourage “development,” in which the subaltern is subject to modern agents due to darker skin (the black figure), supposed ignorance of technological innovations, the use of different clothing, corruption of the dominant language, speaking an Other language, and dedication to manual labor (such as field labor). Modernity/coloniality uses Indigenous subjects as its Other from which to measure “progress,” and thus it ambivalently claims to redeem him while simultaneously perpetuating the mark of the Other from which to gauge superiority.

Evidently the white man shows great concern for this bulge, and perhaps even feels that he is attempting to rescue the nameless shadow.⁵³ This is reflective of the fact that European intellectual tradition, regardless of how “revolutionary” it claims to be, does not fully understand and feel colonialism, nor the viewpoints of those who they have Othered—perspectives that offer to correct the marginalization of local knowledges and

subaltern observations. Zapoteco evidences this blind eye to the sufferings of colonialism with the depiction of the sacrifice of the white man. This blind eye to colonialism can equally be applied to the Mexican Revolution. Through these revolutions pervade discriminatory practices that perpetually position Indigenous subjects and their knowledges as the wretched of the earth according to modernity's linear historical time. Modernity follows the "logic of the 'gaze' rather than the 'glance,' thus producing a visual that [is] eternalized, reduced to a single 'point of view,' and disembodied" (Sanjinés, *Mestizaje*, 28). Rather than question who has the power to construct supposed universals, assert authority over inclusion, and define the territory of modernity, the white man in the poem represents a discourse that keeps Indigenous subjects outside of decision making and assumes that they must assimilate to his absolute point of view. Under this perspective, the Indigenous subject a priori must be anguish and must need aid from the white man. The poem subsequently rejects this gaze that reduces the Indigenous subject to a nameless bulge with no agency.

The question, "Angustia, ¿Eres tú?" resembles Becquer's well-known "Poesía eres tú" from "Rima XXI," in which the poetic voice objectifies a woman as poetry:

¿Qué es poesía?, dices mientras clavas
 en mi pupila tu pupila azul.
 ¡Qué es poesía! ¿Y tú me lo preguntas?
 Poesía eres tú. (33)

In "Angustia" the man—in whom all "pain of soul and body" has been deposited and who has been reduced to "phantom," "shadow," namelessness, and the embodiment of anguish itself—refuses to stay poetically posed for the modern colonizer's objectifying gaze and in defiance throws himself into the raging sea.

These waters represent the aggressive side of viscosity within *yoltlallamiquiliztli* (knowledge with the heart) that prevents one from anesthetizing reality under multiculturalisms and enters into a confrontation with the violence inflicted by colonialism. The waters allude to the rain god Tláloc, but at a deeper level they symbolize the knowledges passed down from the Indigenous subject's ancestors in addition to those gained from experiencing this oppression. As is the case in *Colibrí*, the importance of allusions and references to Mesoamerican deities does not show necessarily a belief in them, but rather they represent a deep connectedness with nature, remembrance of ancestors and their knowledges, and in turn an empowerment and agency inspired in this intellectual tradition. It is with this empowerment that the poetic voice challenges state narratives. All the poems in *Cuicatl* are in the first person, and function like a poetic testimony that rises up in denouncing unjust conditions and demands that Indigenous subjects be recognized as possessors of valid knowledges, advocating even physical violence if necessary to achieve this. Thus, this testimony enters into a politics of memory that questions government reports of "progress" in the sugarcane fields.⁵⁴ The Indigenous subject jumps into a well of knowledges/memory from which he is able to resist the rationalist Western discourse that denies validity to his experience and voice.

Indigenous subjects form part of an uprising with the waves of this resistance that then translates into the deadly rain turned to ice. No longer victim or represented by the dominant class, the subaltern arises as an agent with the ability to transform her or his surroundings and become hegemonic. This rain sacrifices the white man, a metaphorical

embodiment of discrimination and colonialism, upon “the rock” or altar, from which come “surcos de sangre / que corrían / sobre ese bello cuerpo desnudo” (‘furrows of blood / that run / over that beautiful nude body’; 111). The concept of *tlaixpan* (literally “that which is in front” to denote *altar*) is tied to this image, as this deceased body represents the past centuries of colonial oppression and an assertion of Indigenous agency in the present. The black bulge’s fall into the sea and the symbolic death of his white interlocutor allow for the renewal necessary for Nahua knowledges to surge forth like the maize crop (or sugarcane)—which ceremonies at the *tlaixpan* (altar) petitions—after the fields have been renewed through agricultural burning. The furrow is both an allusion to the oppression in the furrowed sugarcane fields and a common metaphor in Nahuatl to refer to the lines in writing. Through writing and speaking the testimonial poetic voice is empowered and asserts an agency denied it by the hegemonic sector of society. The red of the sacrificed body and the black body also suggest writing, as *tilli tlapalli* “red ink and black ink” constituted a metaphor for Mexica texts (León Portilla, *La tinta negra y roja*, 2). The emphasis on a white body can be seen as symbolizing a sheet of paper ready for Indigenous knowledge production after this rising up against the colonial aggressor.

The poetic voice in “Angustia” does not emphasize that the white man’s body is absent of feeling because he is dead, rather the repetition “él no sentía / el cuerpo ya no estaba vivo / ya no vivía” (‘he did not feel / the body was no longer alive / it no longer lived’) suggests that this body always lacked feeling to such an extent that he even had to seek out anguish deposited in an Other. This critique of the absence of feeling in the “rationalist” discourse of modernity is common in Indigenous literatures, and it displaces

the positioning of them within pre-history and irrationality.

Such a critique conceptualizes an alternative space in which a sensuous body is essential. In contrast with the numb body of the white man, the poetic voice employs the metaphors of flowers, the heart, and Mesoamerican deities to imagine a space in which emotions connected to cultural practices are seen as an integral part of one's reasoning. This scene masterfully brings together the perspectives of *yoltlallamiqiliztli* with its insistence of reasoning conjugated with emotions, *ixtlamatiliztli* with its foregrounding of Indigenous personal experience as crucial in understanding and feeling the colonial gaze, and *tlaixpan* in its symbolic sacrifice of colonial discourse upon the poem's altar and subsequent emergence of Nahua knowledges.

Scattered Language: Displacing Homogenous National Narratives

While Zapoteco and Hernández differ significantly in their literary styles, they both question Western modernity's horizon of expectations and imagine a space in which Indigenous knowledges and practices are recognized as valid for the present. To this end, Zapoteco advocates the use of physical violence if necessary and, in other poems not analyzed in this chapter, makes clear allusions to the Zapatista rebellion. This is also suggested in the poems analyzed in which the references to faces covered in black allude to Zapatistas with their iconic ski masks. By contrast, Hernández focuses on an intercultural dialogue that displaces the centeredness of the modernity discourse and creates a dialogue on even ground between different knowledges (the Indigenous and the Western). In both texts the metaphors of the heart, flowers, and deities play a key role in the visceral resistance to the discourse of modernity and imagine a different space and

time in which affective intelligence is a key component.

In *Cuicatl* Zapoteco translates and transforms the term “colonial” in Nahuatl as *tonalcaxtilian*, literally the Castilian day. This also can be translated as the *tonal*, or Castilian spirit. Clearly, “Castilian” here refers to the Spaniards and to the legacy of coloniality via the Castilian language, and its subsequent function as the homogenizing language for the national mestizo race. Nonetheless, the Indigenous migrants’ poetic voice in *Cuicatl* transgresses and collapses the strict linguistic borders that Mexican national discourse attempt to impose. Hernández and Zapoteco carry this out in the very political act of writing in Nahuatl and, as noted, questioning the homogenizing national discourse.

In this study I set out to analyze the generational tensions evident in Hernández’s *Semanca huitzilin* and Zapoteco’s *Cuicatl pan tlalliouatlmej*. While they exhibit differing strategies of how to fight colonial practices tied to linguistic discrimination, economic marginalization, and relegation of Nahua knowledges—principally in regards to the employment of violence and confrontation—Hernández and Zapoteco also share Nahua theoretical perspectives, metaphors rooted in the Nahua language, and symbols that underscore Nahua knowledge production in the present. Their differences underscore the great diversity within contemporary Nahua cultural production, and at the same time their similarities point to the common ground on which Nahua authors have also attempted to form alliances across different regions, language variants, and distinct generations. Although younger authors tell of the difficulties of working with the earlier generation of writers, they do nonetheless share common goals toward which they work together, albeit

somewhat reluctantly.

This study also highlights the need to explore this language and the innovative ideas and styles contained in contemporary Nahua literature. *Innovative* is not a word often applied to Indigenous knowledge production, and, in debunking the depiction of Indigenous subjects as always “behind on the times,” I have argued for Nahua creativity and ingenuity. Decolonization can only take place when those on the margins deconstruct colonialism. Hernández and Zapoteco imagine a space in which Indigenous subjects participate actively in the construction of the nation-state, transforming a political and social structure that, from its inception, was configured to dispossess them.

I was able to read *Cuicatl* and *Semanca huitzilin* more closely with the Nahua perspectives *ixtlamatiliztli* (knowledge with the face), *yoltlallamiquiliztli* (knowledge with the heart), and *tlaixpan* (that which is front). *Ixtlamatiliztli* aids in understanding the many metaphors centered on the face and the insistence on carefully observance—one that is able to recognize the present-day persistence of colonialism and its coupling of ethnic discrimination with economic inequalities. *Yoltlallamiquiliztli* validates the affective responses to these five-hundred years of oppression, and *tlaixpan* highlights the potential of Nahua knowledge production from that past to guide toward contemporary strategies in overturning colonial practices. Both Hernández and Zapoteco employ these perspectives, but the former focuses on reconciliation and recognition of Nahuas as important social and political actors, while Zapoteco emphasizes fierce protests and armed struggle if necessary.

This chapter points to the productive analysis that comes from a South-South dialogue between two Nahua intellectuals of different generations. Such dialogues are needed to propose valid solutions for present-day societies that move away from hegemonic knowledge production centered in “the North”/West. The work of these authors helps widen our understanding of present-day Indigenous movements and the place of literature within these efforts. Both Zapoteco Sideño and Hernández have committed agendas to the recognition and serious dialogue with Indigenous knowledge production and demands for land rights. Although they have distinct methods to achieve this, they both see literature as a way to help change present-day inequalities. Attention to this literary production helps in understanding these movements and at a deeper level offers distinct epistemological approaches.

Many more studies related to these texts and the generational tensions among authors are needed. A promising area of research would be to explore more in depth the ceremonial diction in this literature and the performance of the poems at readings. New aspects come to light when one takes into account tone of voice, cadence, and rhythm. When one hears Zapoteco or Hernández, there is a certain sound to the poetry that they achieve and can be recognized even by audiences who do not know Nahuatl. They both describe realizing this poetic flow within the poem as part of an intuitive process inspired by Nahua ceremonies. A phonetic study of what it is exactly that produces this sensation would help define a Nahua aesthetic and invite additional meanings that are lost in reading the poems only on the page.

Another encouraging area of research would be to explore the works of additional authors from the newer generation along with their use of mass media and social networks. Zapoteco for example is active on Facebook and has published videos of his readings on YouTube. Nahua artist Mardonio Carballo works with a wide array of mediums—with a nationally television program, an internet television program, a rock group, radio shorts, a multitude of postings on Facebook, among numerous other projects. Such a study would help break with the stereotypical depictions of Indigenous communities as isolated from “technology” and help underscore the diversity in the cultural production of the younger generation of Nahua artists.

In the following chapter, I address the works of contemporary Nahua women writers, who criticize both older and younger male authors for their problematic depictions of women as well as the exclusion of them from literary circles. These writers take up the same Nahua perspectives as their male counterparts, but then articulate them to underscore Nahua women’s agency in the present against re-presentations of women as merely carriers of tradition.

¹ As seen in the previous chapter, *cabrón* literally means “big goat” and connotes a male who seeks to maintain superiority through whatever means possible.

² I do not mention the names of the authors here out of confidentiality and also to highlight that the conflict described is not an isolated incidence. Many young writers describe similar experiences.

³ According to younger authors, limiting oneself to print media is constitutive of an elite itself and reflects these authors’ alienation from struggles within their Indigenous communities. Printed works most often do not reach these communities, while many have Facebook accounts. Representative of how important social media is for these authors, Mardonio Carballo has 6,261 followers on Facebook as of 5 October 2014 and nearly every day shares critical perspectives and his creative writing.

⁴ By “modernity” and “discourse of modernity” I mean a discourse that makes universal claims of superior advancement in economy, government, social practices, science, technology etc. As Walter Dignolo explains in *Local Histories, Global Designs*, the concept of modernity is inseparable from its “dark side” of coloniality, in which subaltern knowledges are invalidated against Eurocentric intellectual traditions (22). In discourse “modernity” is fallaciously constructed and defined as what it supposedly is not (not Indigenous, not African, not impoverished immigrants etc.), and Indigenous subjects are often treated as the poster children for this Other outside of “modernity.”

⁵ Topiltepec lies only seventy miles away from Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, where the Raúl Isidro Burgos Rural Teachers' College is located. The recent kidnapping of students who had left for Iguala to participate in protests on 26 September 2014 was by no means an isolated event, but rather such manifestations and subsequent governmental repression have been commonplace especially since the 1970s. See Carlos Figueroa-Ibarra and Lorena Martínez-Zavala, "The Ejército Popular Revolucionario: Occupying the Cracks in Mexico's Hegemonic State."

⁶ Although these movements have received relatively less attention than the EZLN, many of their members were Indigenous and the EPR officially expressed solidarity with Zapatistas in 1996. These movements had and continue to have significant influence on the region.

⁷ During the 1990s, anarchist and Marxist movements—principally the Popular Revolutionary Army, Ejército Popular Revolucionario (EPR)—emerged in the state of Guerrero. These movements expressed support for EZLN in Chiapas, but the violent means of these movements led the EZLN to distance itself from them. State persecution that continues to the present has led members to go underground. I do not give details regarding Zapoteco's participation due to this threat. Recently members of these movements have participated in the massive protests over the disappearance of forty-three students in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero. For a greater discussion of the EPR and revolutionary movements in Guerrero, see Carlos Figueroa-Ibarra and Lorena Martínez-Zavala, "The Ejército Popular Revolucionario: Occupying the Cracks in Mexico's Hegemonic State."

⁸ Personal interview, 21 June 2010.

⁹ Although this relocation was within Mexico, Zapoteco (as well as the migrant workers in Morelos) depict it as "migration" instead of simply moving from one state to another. Such descriptions of this experience highlight how for Indigenous peoples the idea of nation-state unity is a construct that does not reflect or include their hometowns. Personal interview, 21 June 2010.

¹⁰ Personal interview, 21 June 2010.

¹¹ See McDonough, *The Learned Ones*, 6-7. Standard spelling of these terms would be *tlahcuiloh* and *xochitlahcuiloh*, with the *h* representing aspirations.

¹² As can be expected since it appears in this chapter, Zapoteco has released me from this oath to secrecy. Now that he is a consecrated writer, he explains that the Mexican government will no longer attempt to confiscate these artifact from him.

¹³ Symbolic of this consecration, one joke that was told at the event was that there was a writer named Maya who was not Mayan (referring to Ildefonso Maya) and now a writer named Zapoteco who was not Zapoteco.

¹⁴ The four main ethnicities of these migrant workers are Tlapaneco, Nahuas de Guerrero and Puebla, Popoloca, and Mixteco. See Claudia Marino, "Festegan el Día Internacional de los Pueblos Indígenas en Tlaltizapán."

¹⁵ A case in point, Hernández explains that he favors the EZLN because they propose alternatives such as the system of *caracoles*. Before EZLN, according to Hernández, there were numerous Indigenous protests against colonialism but few practical proposals as to what could replace it. He reasserts his focus on the importance of dialogue and cultural practices, and dismisses violent protest as reinforcing stereotypes of Indigenous peoples as reckless and irrational.

¹⁶ At the same time the government was financially supporting the creation of ELIAC, government oppression of protest was brutal. On 28 June 1995, in Aguas Blancas, Guerrero, state police killed seventeen farmers and injured twenty-one who were in route to protest against the imprisonment of one of their leads and to demand better living conditions. This has come to be known as the Aguas Blancas massacre. The EPR officially announced its existence one year later on 28 June 1996 in remembrance of this massacre. For a more detailed analysis of the EPR, see Carlos Figueroa-Ibarra, "The Ejército Popular Revolucionario."

¹⁷ See "Noihqui toxca caxtilan tlahtoli / El español también es nuestro," in *Estudios de cultura náhuatl*, vol. 30.

¹⁸ This resembles Sanjinés's "bodily metaphor" of *viscerality* (*Mestizaje Upside-Down*, 5, 11). Sanjinés's approach to this issue with the concept of "both eyes" arises from criticism of Marxist movements within Latin America in the second half of the twentieth century. In the name of the working class, these

movements gave a blind eye to ethnicity—an “opiate of the masses”—and instead centered on social class and economic inequality as opposed to ethnic discrimination. This blind spot permitted the continuance of colonial practices within Marxist revolutionary movements. For more in-depth discussions of these critiques, see Charles Hale, “Between Che Guevara and the Pachamama”; Arturo Arias, “*Tzitz’i’n* for the *Poxnai*: Indigenous Women’s Discourses on Revolutionary Combat”; Emilio del Valle Escalante, *Maya Nationalisms and Postcolonial Challenges in Guatemala: Coloniality, Modernity, and Identity Politics*.

¹⁹ “Modernity” is a highly fraught term often conflated with “modernization.” By *modernity* here I refer to a Western project that champions an exclusive modernity based principally on the discrediting of its Other’s knowledges as inadequate and superstitious and the supposed superiority of Western technological and scientific advancements. Its buzzwords are “Progress” and “Development.” The term suggests that there are people somehow located “outside” the present—othered both physically and temporally instead of representing alternative proposals for differing modernities. For a greater discussion of this topic, see Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*.

²⁰ *Tlaixpan* resembles Sanjinés’s *embers of the past*, which emphasizes Indigenous founding experiences as coming “from a different perspective, in conflict with the forward-looking, rectilinear gaze of modernity” (*Embers of the Past*, 29). Nonetheless, *tlaixpan* breaks with the somewhat problematic connotations that “embers of the past” can carry, suggesting a framework in which this “Indigenous past” is a residual survivor of colonialism and not a dynamic knowledge production with a firm footing in the present. Sanjinés’s descriptions of these knowledges as “the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous” also carry these same polemic connotations.

²¹ Zapoteco’s approach resembles Aymara intellectual Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui’s critique of *colonialismo interno* (internal colonialism). She uses the Aymara concept of *Pachakuti*, literally “uprising or upsetting of the universe” (43). Similar to *tlaixpan*, *Pachakuti* implies a temporal perspective in which the past is intimately tied to a dynamic present and future. With the historical remembrance of centuries of colonial oppression, violent resistance is a justified reaction to end the continuance of colonial practices in the present. See Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *Violencias (re)encubiertas en Bolivia*.

²² Personal interview, 20 June 2010.

²³ As already seen in chapter one, few scholars have analyzed Hernández’s poetry. The inadequate attention these texts have received reflects a problem endemic to the examination of Indigenous writing. In contrast with such reductionism, this study analyzes these authors’ innovative literary techniques and the creative ways in which they deal with their social contexts.

²⁴ Although apparently in free verse, the poems carry a Nahuatl ceremonial rhythm that is especially evident when Zapoteco reads them out loud. In personal interviews, Zapoteco identifies Nahuatl ritual language as a crucial standard for him in deciding if a poem flows or not. Personal interview, 10 June 2010.

²⁵ Coined by Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *indio permitido* refers to, in the words of Charles Hale, the “identity category that results when neoliberal regimes actively recognize and open space for collective Indigenous, even agency” (Hale, “Cultural Agency,” 284). The use of the word *indio*, to which those in the dominant culture who work with these Indigenous subjects might object (preferring the less controversial term *indígena*), highlights that “this newfound respect may be only skin deep” (284). Though Zapoteco does not specifically use the term *indio permitido*, he describes the term as referring to Indigenous subjects who allow themselves to be coopted and purchased by the state to serve as the “cosmetic makeup” for government claims to interculturality and inclusion (Personal Interview, 20 June 2010).

²⁶ Emilio del Valle Escalante, following Santiago Bastos and Manuela Camus, defines the *culturales* group as those “intellectuals (the majority of whom are professionals) . . . that prioritize an ethnic adscription and the vindication of Indigenous cultural specificities” (4). They strongly advocate the use of Indigenous dress, language, philosophy, and religious practices. In turn the *populares*, instead of focusing on cultural demands, “denounce the effects of the violence—past and present—against rural and urban communities” (5). They advocate the use of violent resistance and rebellion if necessary.

²⁷ Stated in personal interview, 10 June 2010. Hernández is hesitant to do readings of some of his earlier poems such as “*Caminemos solos*.” Now he stresses the importance of interculturality and the need of walking together (“*caminemos juntos*”).

²⁸ In Nahuatl the word *semanca*, a word not used in the Huasteca, refers more to a bringing together of different things into one whole or unity. *Seamanca* or *cemanca* has at its root *cem* which denotes the number one (*ce*) and in conjunction with this meaning a completeness or wholeness. See “cem,” *Nahuaxitlahuquetl*.

²⁹ According to this legend, Popocatepetl fell in love with Iztaccihuatl, a member of Tlaxcaltecan nobility. The Tlaxcaltecs were at war with the Mexica, and Popocatepetl left to fight. Iztaccihuatl’s father promised to marry them if he returned back triumphant from battle. Upon receiving false news that Popocatepetl had died, Iztaccihuatl could not bear the grief and died of sadness. When he returned from war, Popocatepetl sat by Iztaccihuatl’s body until both were covered by snow. The two transformed into the volcanoes Iztaccihuatl and Popocatepetl, prominent parts in the landscape of what is now Mexico City.

³⁰ Significantly, the picture of the child laborer is within a circle on the front cover of *Cuicatl* with a square box around it. The cover of each of Zapoteco’s books contains allusions to the number four and the cardinal points, here alluded to with the square box. In Mesoamerican coordinates, there is a fifth cardinal point in addition to east, west, north, and south: the place of the subject. The cover of *Cuicatl* symbolizes placing the child laborer as well as the other laborers in the fields at the center of cardinal points, thus centers the subject position of workers most often obscured and marginalized. The cardinal directions also directly relate to ceremonies that Zapoteco performs in which each point represents a divine power. Principally, such ceremonies petition water. In the context of the poems, Zapoteco here offers song and flowers to denounce injustices.

³¹ While Zapoteco expresses this criticism in private conversation, the Nahua writer and reporter Mardonio Carballo did so publicly on a radio program in summer 2010 while interviewing Hernández.

³² This is presumably from the perspective of someone looking at another person, as the right-hand side of the brain is the side commonly believed to be the main location for dreams.

³³ Researchers such as anthropologist and linguist Jonathan Amith have argued that there are multiple languages—at least three—within what we consider “Nahuatl” due to low intelligibility between certain regions. See Jonathan Amith, *Ok nemi totlahtōl*.

³⁴ For more discussion regarding nahualism in Nahua communities, see Antonella Fagetti, “Ixtlamatki versus nahualli: Chamanismo, nahualism y brujería en la Sierra Negra de Puebla.”

³⁵ Hernández’s poetry is highly influenced by the texts of his close friend Miguel León Portilla, one of the leading scholars in popularizing Nezahualcōyotl, and the primary colonial documents that he analyzes. In his dissertation *Filosofía náhuatl* (1956), León Portilla emphasizes that Nahuas had philosophy, an idea that seemed to “some an insane suggestion” (“Kalman Silvert Award,” 4). León Portilla defines philosophy as a “human concern, fruit of admiration and doubt, that leads one to ask and inquire rationally regarding the origin, being and the destiny of the world and man” (*Filosofía náhuatl*, 4). Hernández differs with León Portilla though in correlating the practices found in these colonial Nahuatl documents with present-day practices.

³⁶ Dipesh Chakrabarty uses *provincialize* to describe the shift from “the loci of Europe” toward a decentered approach in which previously marginalized intellectual traditions are treated as equally valid. He argues that “provincializing” Europe does not entail a full rejection of European thought, but rather seeks how that thought can be “renewed from and for the margins” (16). The hegemonic Eurocentric intellectual tradition created a center of knowledge production in relation to which all other traditions were “provincial,” pre-political, pre-history, and pre-philosophy. The spatial metaphor of the provincialization of Europe displaces this intellectual tradition from its hegemonic position.

³⁷ This resistance is similar to that of Pancho Culebro in the novel *Pancho Culebro y los nagueles de Tierra Azul*, in which the nagueles / nahuales serve as protection against the destructive force and discourse of modernity.

³⁸ Original in Spanish: “Nunca más un México que discrimine o dé maltrato, o abandone, u olvide a sus comunidades indígenas. Estamos frente a un nuevo amanecer para México. Estamos frente a un nuevo amanecer para las comunidades indígenas.”

³⁹ Javier Sanjinés argues that such a framework “leaves unchanged the power relations between those who are in a position to include and those who are supposed to passively accept being included” (Sanjinés, *Mestizaje*, 10).

⁴⁰ To describe catachresis, Sanjinés gives the example of *lloqla*, used by the migrant to describe the city in one of José María Arguedas's novels. Another example is *pachakuti*, which expresses "el vuelco intempestivo de la realidad" (*Mestizaje*, 7). These are "situaciones psíquicas que no pueden concebirse en términos de la modernidad" (7). The Indigenous migrant in the position of exteriority / interiority, is able to view and name what seems oblivious to people in the interior. In other words, you cannot observe a "black hole" (a classic example of catachresis) if you are inside it.

⁴¹ For a more discussion regarding this linkage between Enlightenment and proselytism, and in turn with colonialism, see Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*.

⁴² In *Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race*, literary critic Marilyn Miller analyzes the notion of a "mestizo soul" in nation building and how this celebratory mix went relatively uncontested until the end of the twentieth century (3).

⁴³ In "Stratification by Skin Color in Contemporary Mexico," Andrés Villareal gives overwhelming statistical data confirming this privileging of whiteness. He concludes that "dark-brown individuals" have "50.9 percent lower odds than whites of being affluent" (19).

⁴⁴ The sugarcane workers earn about \$30-40 pesos (about \$3 dollars) for every ton of sugarcane piled together. The average worker endures grueling work to collect about two tons in one day (Zapoteco, Personal interview, 20 June 2010). Government reports on the sugarcane industry completely ignore these wages, and rather focus on increased production and prices. A ton of sugarcane in Morelos is worth about \$500 pesos (\$40 dollars) (SIAP, "Descripción de la cadena agroalimentaria," 9).

⁴⁵ Following Sanjinés's analysis of Indigenous movements, this proposal seeks "the arcane social demands that have not been satisfied throughout the centuries (the past as a source for the present) be fulfilled, that the vernacular language and originary values be respected and accepted by society" (44-45).

⁴⁶ In his own analysis of catachresis, Sanjinés gives as an example the word *lloqla*, used by a figure in one of Arguedas's novels to describe his perception of the city and his psychological state that cannot be conceived within "terms of modernity" (Sanjinés, Rescaldos, 7). These new representations are employed by the traditionally oppressed sectors of society to begin to "nombrar nuevamente la realidad, apropiándose y rearticulando las consabidas construcciones metafórico-simbólicas de la nacionalidad" (10)

⁴⁷ Affect, according to Manning, is what grips a person "first in the moment of relation" (xxi). It is "withness of the movement of the world," the visceral reaction to events (xxi). The closely related term "emotion" is "affect plus an awareness of that affect" (xxi).

⁴⁸ I use "Indigenous subjects" not to suggest homogeneity, but rather as a term that situates Nahuas within state and global politics, and subject stresses that they are not passive recipients of imposed policies. Within their communities, Nahuas rarely refer to themselves as Indigenous, but rather as Nahuas or else members of their local communities. They use indígena within geopolitical contexts in defending their social and economic rights.

⁴⁹ In this same vein, Zapoteco published, after *Cuicatl pan tlaliouatlmej* (2004), a book with the title dedicated to the state of Morelos, *Xochitl ihuan cuicatl in Morelos* (2007).

⁵⁰ Tlaltizapán was one of the strongholds of Emiliano Zapata's revolutionary forces and Zapata established his headquarters there. Zapoteco underscores the disjunction between the monuments put on display by the government and the change sought by Zapata's forces. This is especially evident taking into consideration Zapoteco's involvement in a movement in Guerrero that expressed support for the Zapatistas.

⁵¹ Zapoteco himself explains that he wrote in an affected style to obtain funding from government institutions for publication. CONACULTA, Programa de Apoyo a las Culturas Municipales y Comunitarias (PACMyC), and Instituto de Cultura de Morelos funded the publication. According to government records, Zapoteco received \$20,000 pesos for the project "Cuicatl tlen tlaliouatlmej (Cuentos en el cañaveral)" (DGCP 28). He commented on this affected style and getting published in a personal interview in Tlaltizapán on 20 June 2010. During this interview he also read the poem "Tlaltizapan" with a satirical tone to emphasize that it is in fact a critique of the municipal and national government.

⁵² Original in Spanish: "producción de situaciones de sometimiento colonial fundadas en odiosas diferencias raciales que, reproducidas constantemente en el trato cotidiano, el subalterno debe soportar la mayor parte del tiempo."

⁵³ This is especially a critique of *indigenismo*, a problematic approach in which “whites” and “mestizos” sought to solve the “Indian problem” by reaching down to the oppressed masses of Indigenous peoples and bringing them up out of ignorance into modernity.

⁵⁴ President Felipe Calderón visited sugarcane fields in Morelos in 2008 and focused solely on the need to continue producing more: “Así que para el sector de la caña está claro el dilema, como pienso para muchos sectores en el país: renovarse o morir y juntos nos renovaremos y saldremos adelante. Queremos generar las condiciones que permitan que el sector agropecuario pueda crecer, competir y ganar” (Quoted in Morquecho). Government reports also ignore the plight of the workers and focus on increased production. For an example, see SIAP, “Descripción de la cadena agroalimentaria de caña de azúcar.”

Chapter 4. “Grinding Words”: Ethel Xochitiotzin Pérez’s Subversion of Nahua Patriarchy in *Tlaoxtika in tlajtol*

Sé semilla
sé manantial
al pie de la Malintzi.
Tetepetla lugar donde nace tu rostro.
Hace siglos nuestros ancestros construyeron tu historia,
diseñaron ollas,
cada una lleva el color, el sabor y el aroma de esta tierra.
Cuando llegaron los españoles, fueron quebradas,
quedaron esparcidas en tu cuerpo.
-Ethel Xochitiotzin Pérez, “Donde nace el arcoiris,”
Tlaoxtika in tlajtol / Desgranando la palabra (2012)

El símbolo de la entrega es la Malinche, la amante de Cortés.
Es verdad que ella se da voluntariamente al conquistador, pero éste,
apenas deja de serle útil, la olvida . . . Y del mismo modo que el niño
no perdona a su madre que lo abandone para ir en busca de su padre,
el pueblo mexicano no perdona su traición a la Malinche.
-Octavio Paz, “Los hijos de la Malinche,”
El laberinto de la soledad (1950)

“Why are there no publications of Nahua women authors?” I asked a Nahua male author in Mexico City. The year was 2009, and this glaring absence contrasted with other Indigenous languages.¹ This writer thought about it a moment and replied, “Es que ellas no quieren escribir” (The thing is that they [Nahua women] don’t want to write). This “explanation” surprised me. Uninterested in writing? In my earlier studies of Nahuatl, I had seen academic and literary circles dominated almost exclusively by men to the near exclusion of Nahua women. It appeared to be more a question of systemic elision than a dearth of interest. I suspected that what this author said about the categorical absence of women writers was wrong—especially considering that there are more than three million Nahuas, and Nahuatl is the most widely spoken Indigenous language in Mexico.

Certainly, this male writer *was* mistaken in assuming there were no Nahuatl women writers. Authors from numerous regions definitely write and want to be heard.² Tlaxcaltecan poet Ethel Xochitiotzin Pérez is one of those authors who speak out against the marginalization of women's voices. In "Donde nace el arcoiris" (Where the Rainbow Is Born), her poetic persona exclaims the need to "be seed" and "be a spring of water" at the foot of the Malintzin. The volcano Malintzin is the most prominent feature of the Tlaxcaltecan landscape and was named after Doña Marina, popularly known as the "Malinche." Mexican national discourse depicts both the state of Tlaxcala and Doña Marina as traitors due to their alliance with the Spanish conquistadors.³ Mexican poet and essayist Octavio Paz puts forth his famous misogynist interpretation of these events in "Los hijos de la Malinche" (Sons of the Malinche), in which he describes the Malinche as delivering herself sexually over to Cortés. Nahuatl scholar Frances Karttunen counters, "Today in Mexican popular imagination [Malinche's] reputation has fallen to the blame the (sexual) survivor syndrome. Like many a woman who has so suffered, her own character has come into question, her survival become distasteful, her collusion with rapists reprehensible" ("Rethinking Malinche," 311). Through her poetry, Xochitiotzin uproots this problematic representation transferred to Nahuatl women in general—particularly Tlaxcaltecan women—and offers a remapping in which she highlights their agency within a Nahuatl landscape (emphasized through the deployment of Nahuatl toponyms such as Tetepetla).⁴ These women created ceramic pots, but the Spaniards broke them and the shards were scattered throughout the women's bodies—symbolic of rape rather than the supposed voluntary surrender to the conquistadors' advances. The

call to “be seed” and “be spring” at the foot of the Malintzin challenges nationalist depictions of Nahua women as traitors and invokes their ability to observe (in other words, *ixtlamatiliztli*, possessing that “knowledge with the face) and the creative potential to transform their communities plagued by a colonial heritage of male chauvinism.

In spite of Nahua women’s important literary production, academic and editorial spaces are often closed off to them or else only open to a certain degree—to the extent that their participation does not question traditional male patriarchy within literary and intellectual production. Karttunen notes that the Nahuatl studies program at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) was apparently a space that for the most part elided Nahua women (“Indigenous Writing,” 441). Beginning in the 1970s up to 1992, UNAM’s journal of *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl* (Studies of Nahuatl Culture) published selections from the literary production of sixteen writers, all men.⁵ In his essay on contemporary Nahua literature, Miguel León Portilla gives the names of thirty-five contemporary writers: over thirty men and only three women, and, at that, the way in which these women’s writings are presented is also problematic—treating them more as carriers of oral tradition than as outright authors (441).

Karttunen goes on to comment on this hostile environment in her article, “Indigenous Writing as a Vehicle of Postconquest Continuity and Change in Mesoamerica”: “It is disconcerting that the twentieth century, which opened with a publication by Isabel Ramírez Castañeda and into which Doña Luz brought forth her work, is concluding with Nahuatl literature practiced, as in the colonial period, largely by men” (441). Ramírez Castañeda and Julia Jiménez González (Doña Luz Jiménez)

published decades before the surge in contemporary Nahuatl publications post-1985.⁶ Karttunen criticizes the lack of recognition within academia for these women's participation as creators and intellectuals. Full acknowledgement of a literary trajectory centered on them offers a distinct history about Nahua knowledge production that remedies the presupposed absence of contemporary women authors and the fallacy that "they don't want to write."⁷

Exclusion of women writers is not limited to academic and urban contexts, but also constitutes an obstacle within Nahua communities. In traveling through numerous Nahua regions and visiting with male authors from 2010 to 2013, I was often struck by their sisters' strict confinement to domestic responsibilities. One sister told me that she was unintelligent because she had been forbidden to attend school like her brothers.⁸ She had wanted to study, but her father said there was no point because she would end up just keeping house anyway. In contrast, her brothers were encouraged to study and became exceptionally successful in academia and writing.

Relevant not only to Latin American and Indigenous Studies, but rather a wide array of fields, some key questions that guide my analysis are: How do depictions of Nahua women shift when they represent themselves? How do they differ from the traditional depictions of them by men? What strategies can be gleaned from their experiences that would be of value to struggles for women's rights across the globe? What do they teach us about gender discrimination as well as persecution of minority languages and cultural practices?

If one takes into account the negative experiences they have had in attempting to publish their works, it is in part true that Nahua women do not want to write—they do not want to labor under the norms of a male-dominated intelligentsia. Instead, they seek to rewrite and change this environment. These *ixtlamatinih*⁹ do so by incorporating innovative metaphors into their works that position women as agents of change instead of muses for male authors’ poetry. As do their male counterparts in the texts analyzed in the previous chapters, women writers offer theoretical perspectives rooted in the Nahuatl language. Nonetheless, they differ significantly in positing women as the source of articulation for such perspectives. In this chapter, I address in particular the work of Ethel Xochitiotzin Pérez, one author among many who seek to undermine male-dominated spaces. I argue that Xochitiotzin, through her book *Tlaoxtika in tlahtol* (Detaching Word Kernels),¹⁰ transforms common metaphors within Nahua poetry to position women as decision makers and *ixtlamatinih* within and outside their communities. In doing so, she subverts Nahua male authors’ traditional objectification of them and reiteration of male dominance.

This chapter attempts to go against the traditional framework that is not only applied to Xochitiotzin but Nahua women authors in general—an attitude of, “Qué bonito que escriban” (“Oh, it’s nice [literally “pretty”] that they write”), a sentiment which I heard repeatedly when telling male authors about them.¹¹ Reflective of the relegation of earlier women writer’s texts, such a condescending attitude contributes to the failure to recognize them as authors with literature as innovative as male writers’ texts. I seek to draw attention to the pioneering ways in which Nahua women authors challenge the

male-dominated status quo. The need for serious engagement with these authors' works is why I offer a close observation of Xochitiotzin's text, in addition to a brief overview of various authors.¹² While it is true Nahua authors' writing is generally skimmed for content, it is all the more true for women authors who do not receive sufficient support for publication let alone close analysis of their works. Nahua poet Judith Santopietro is one of the few who have published a full-length book, but I have chosen to focus on Xochitiotzin because she is especially representative of the resistance to Nahua women's writing both outside and within her community. In contrast with Xochitiotzin, Santopietro has in part been able to avoid some of the challenges in finding venues for publication as a Nahua woman writer, since many do not consider her to be Nahua because she did not grow up speaking the language. This is an issue that will be explored more in detail within an overview of Nahua women writers.

I begin with the section, "Theoretical Framework for Analysis of *Tlaoxtika in tlajtol*," which outlines the Nahua perspectives employed in my analysis of Xochitiotzin's text. The following section, "'Hit Them Upside the Head': Nahua Male Authors' Representations of Women," explores how texts from Nahua male authors objectify women as muses for their poetry as opposed to intellectual counterparts. This brief overview of depictions of women in this literature helps frame the context in which Nahua women writers produce their work and the traditional metaphors they subvert.

The following section, "An Introduction to Contemporary Nahua Women Authors," offers an overview of the context in which Nahua women authors such as Xochitiotzin currently write. I briefly explore selections of these writers' texts, and,

rather than put forth a conclusive anthology of these authors, I seek to offer a brief introduction before beginning the analysis of Xochitiotzin's *Tlaoxtika in tlajtol*. In the section, "Zohuatlahtolxochitl / Women's Worded Flower Collective: A Brief Biography of Ethel Xochitiotzin Pérez," I describe Xochitiotzin's background and her struggles to write. Familiarity with her context helps significantly in fully understanding and appreciating *Tlaoxtika in tlajtol*.

In the close observations of this text within the following sections, I analyze how the text offers a distinct view of her ancestors, the importance of maize-centered metaphors, and the articulation of her identity as a Nahua women. Within *Tlaoxtika in tlajtol*, Xochitiotzin writes against the "traditional" male-centered depictions of ancestors, maize, and women to offer an alternative space in which Nahua women's knowledge production and active participation in society are recognized. I conclude the chapter pointing toward the implications of *Tlaoxtika in tlajtol* within Nahua literary production and its implications for Indigenous political and social movements in general.

Theoretical Framework for Analysis of *Tlaoxtika in tlajtol* (Grinding Words)

The theoretical framework of this chapter centers on four key Nahua perspectives that appear in Xochitiotzin's *Tlaoxtika in tlajtol*: *tlachiyaliztli* (observance), *ixtlamatiliztli* (knowledge with the face), *tlaixpan* (that which is in front), and *yoltlallamiqiliztli* (knowledge with the heart). As seen in chapter one, *tlachiyaliztli* constitutes the need to observe carefully one's surroundings. *Ixtlamatiliztli* also implies the need to observe closely, of personal lived knowledges. In addition to framing my own approach to close analysis of texts in this study, *tlachiyaliztli* and *ixtlamatiliztli* are key in understanding

Xochitiotzin's poetry. In this section I make continual reference to Xochitiotzin because I use her particular employment of Nahua concepts in my analysis. In the section "Zohuatlahtolxochitl / Women's Worded Flower Collective: A Brief Biography of Ethel Xochitiotzin Pérez," I offer details regarding the broader context of her life and literary trajectory. Opposed to a depiction of women as mere recipients of tradition articulated by men, Xochitiotzin situates women as producers of knowledge. They possess the ability to carefully observe surroundings and propose solutions to societal challenges.¹³

Within Xochitiotzin's text, perspectives tied to *tlaixpan* and *huehuetl* (literally, "old") are also crucial and relate to *tlachiyaliztli* and *ixtlamatiliztli*. As seen in previous chapters, the "old" or the past is not situated "behind" the subject. Rather, the past constitutes what is known and lies in front of the subject as a guide.¹⁴ Lessons from the past serve not as anchors to tradition, but play a role in a dynamic present and future. Xochitiotzin observes and looks to deceased female relatives for guidance (these relative's pictures lie on the *tlaixpan* or altar). She then uses the strength from that past to project her own perspectives into the present and future.¹⁵ Her references to weaving and other forms of expression tap into a long tradition of creative production by women ancestors and breaks with a privileging of the written word.

Yoltlallamiquiliztli (knowledge with the heart) represents a fundamental metaphor linked to affective space in which emotions are conjugated with rational thought. This is particularly important when addressing Nahua women's texts, as they are traditionally depicted as excessively "emotional" and "weak."¹⁶ Xochitiotzin instead paints a space of strength in which Nahua women possess and shape the word through their texts. Every

poem in *Tlaoxtika in tlajtol* explicitly mentions *yollotl* or else alludes to it. Such repetition seems unnecessary if one does not recognize the wider implications of this metaphor. The heart is a locus of both cognition and feelings, an affective intelligence, and such a space allows no space for marginalization of women. By emphasizing the heart, she is not reiterating the hackneyed depiction of Nahua women as overloaded with affect, but rather the ability to exercise an affective intelligence that recognizes emotive and cognitive responses as intimately interwoven.

In this chapter I explore the way in which Xochitiotzin leads the reader to look at *tlahtol* or *tlahtolli* (literally, “word”). She points to the wider meanings of *tlahtol*, which can signify *sentence(s)*, *discourse(s)*, *literature(s)*, and *language(s)*. Xochitiotzin plays with these different meanings in her poetry. The different possibilities for *tlahtol* are especially significant when considering that she works within the gaps between Nahuatl and Spanish as she writes. In interviews, she tells of going back and forth between the two languages,¹⁷ and, when she speaks of “desgranando” (separating the kernels of) language(s), this reference can mean multiple languages, as inanimate objects in Nahuatl do not carry any plural marker. In these shifts among languages, Xochitiotzin breaks with essentialist re-presentations of Indigenous authors as limited to authentic displays of their “original” language. This is all the more significant when one takes into account the depiction of la Malinche in the national narrative of Mexico, as “the violated” who possessed the word (denoted in the voluta emerging from her mouth in colonial pictographs) by translating for Cortés. Rather than re-present women as vehicles of conquest, Xochitiotzin subverts such perspectives and constitutes women as decolonial

knowledge producers against the products of colonialism and Mexican nation-state's inheritance of colonial practices.

As we already noted in analyzing the work of Natalio Hernández in the first chapter, maize itself constitutes a key element tied to *tlachiyaliztli*, *tlaixpan*, *yoltlallamiquiliztli*, and *tlahtolli*. Corn, *tlayol* in Tlaxcala, metaphorically represents “the word” and literary creation. Maize is the main staple that gives strength to the heart and points toward close observance of the landscape with the necessary care for the crop. The continual death and regeneration of the crop guides a perspective in which the past continually surfaces in the present. Although traditionally a task performed by men, maize cultivation in Xochitiotzin's text is one in which she takes part metaphorically through writing. She positions herself as a farmer with command over literary production.

I place these perspectives from Xochitiotzin's *Tlaoxtika in tlajtol* in dialogue with Cherokee scholar and activist Andrea Smith's approach within what she terms Indigenous feminism. Xochitiotzin would not self-identify as *feminista* (or *intelectual* for that matter), for much the same reasons that Smith identifies regarding the term *feminist* in the United States. In “Indigenous Feminism without Apology,” Smith notes that many Native Americans consider *feminism* anathema to Native American scholarship, as a term limited to white settler-colonialist women's privileges (159). According to Smith, the disavowal of feminist scholarship within Indigenous Studies has encouraged a perpetual postponement of Native women's rights. She indicates that, when the topic of domestic violence arises, male Indigenous leaders often sidestep the issue protesting, “We can't worry about domestic violence; we must worry about survival issues first” (159). In the

name of solidarity within struggles for land rights and national sovereignty, these leaders attempt to stall critical perspectives within the community that question the status and treatment of women.¹⁸ In Smith's sense of the term, both she and Xochitiotzin are without doubt feminists. Xochitiotzin has also come up against similar opposition, and criticism of male chauvinism within Nahua communities is met with accusations of betrayal. Nonetheless, as does Smith, Xochitiotzin considers that it is important to bring about this dialogue now.

A conspicuous absence in Xochitiotzin's text is any reference to the Mexican nation-state. This is in stark contrast with the publications of male authors, in which references and allusions to the nation-state abound.¹⁹ Her omission of national discourse resembles what Smith describes as a sovereignty "predicated on interrelatedness and responsibility" (160-61). Smith expounds on this approach by quoting Nehiyaw (Cree) lawyer Sharon Venne: "Our spirituality and our responsibilities define our duties. We understand the concept of sovereignty as woven through a fabric that encompasses our spirituality and responsibility. This is a cyclical view of sovereignty, incorporating it into our traditional philosophy and view of our responsibilities" (161). The views that Xochitiotzin articulates in her text are reflective of this spirituality and responsibility. These perspectives offer alternatives to the male-dominated nation-state model, which inherently reifies a patriarchal order.²⁰

"Hit Them Upside the Head": Nahua Male Authors' Re-presentations of Women

In this section I explore the patriarchal and patronizing perspectives toward women that consistently surface in many male Nahuas' texts. Imagery abounds in which

virile men deposit their “seed” in women who are equated with the landscape. Huastecan Poet Juan Hernández for example in “Mujer de hierba” (Woman of Herbs), in which “golden spikes of maize” are symbolic of semen, writes that: “Las espigas doradas de maíz, / son cascadas de luz / en tu cuerpo de harina y miel / con su canto de pájaro-flor” (‘The golden spikes of maize, / are waterfalls of light / in your body of flour and honey / with its song of bird-flower’; 31). Even Gustavo Zapoteco Sideño’s writings fall into this perception of women as passive, as he speaks in the poem “Ayúdame” (Help Me) (2006) of the need to hit docile Nahua women over the head so that they wake up from their dreaming and fight against discrimination. An analysis of texts such as these helps in comprehending the views against which Nahua women write. Such literary production is saturated with metaphors that objectify women. I choose to closely analyze poems from Zapoteco and Natalio Hernández because they are the most explicit in their depictions of women as either passively oppressed or fused with the landscape. Rather than target any particular author and far from any attempt to dismiss their work, this overview of male authors’ representations of women instead seeks to contextualize the literary scene against which Nahua women artists write. The authors analyzed in the previous chapters have extremely important perspectives to offer, but, without a doubt, there are polemical aspects in their works when it comes to women’s agency.

These writers reflect a desire to speak for women, in a gesture that could be termed a male Indigenous *indigenismo*.²¹ This is especially evident in Zapoteco Sideño’s “Ayúdame” (“Help Me”) from *Xochitl ihuan cuicatl in Morelos / Flor y canto en Morelos* (Flower and Song in Morelos) (2006). If one takes into account Zapoteco’s

involvement in the Ejército Popular Revolucionario, his attitude resembles the Marxist revolutionary discourses of the 1970s and 1980s within the Americas that spoke of the need to “awaken the consciousness” of the working class, in particular Indigenous peoples, to economic oppression. Such a view treated Indigenous subjects as in something of a cognitive slumber out of which only outside intervention—much like the white or *mestizo* savior within *indigenista* literature—could incite them to assume an active role. Here Zapoteco takes the role of the enlightened outsider able to rescue women from their social malaise. The title of the poem itself, “Help Me,” is an invocation for aid to make women realize “su propia realidad” (“their own reality”), as if women lacked the capacity to realize this themselves (*Flor y canto en Morelos / Xochitl ihuan cuicatl in Morelos* 98). I cite a portion from this poem:

¿Cómo ayudarle a la dócil mujer?
 Bueno sería pegarle en la cabeza,
 para que despertase
 de ese sueño, de ese sueño
 que la tiene encerrada
 en la profundidad fantasiosa
 de un sueño rosa,
 que la hace ser feliz
 y no la deja ver su propia realidad. [. . .]

How to help the docile woman?
 It would be good to hit her upside the head
 so that she wakes up
 from that dream, from that dream
 that has her enclosed
 in the fantasizing depths
 of a pink dream,
 that makes her happy
 and does not allow her to see her own reality. [. . .]

Arco iris, arco iris, arco iris,
 ayúdame a callar ese llanto
 para que ese canto
 sea canto, canto de alegría
 que suene en la montaña,
 en el valle, en la cañada
 mujeres que vuelen en su canto
 de casa en casa
 como las mariposas
 de flor en flor
 y puedan cumplir su misión
 en esta tierra felices

Rainbow, rainbow, rainbow,
 help me shut up those cries
 so that song
 can be song, a song of gladness
 so that it sounds in the mountain,
 in the valley, in the sugarcane fields
 women who fly in its song
 from house to house
 like butterflies
 from flower to flower
 and can fulfill their mission
 happy on this earth

con los hombres del sol. (99-100)

with the men of the sun.

The woman is “docile” and unable to wake from the “dream” (repeated three times for emphasis) on her own. This description immediately depicts women as weak, unobservant, and jaded. Zapoteco Sideño proposes that it might be good to “pegarle en la cabeza, para que despertase” (“hit her upside the head, so that she wakes up”; 98). He then employs a series of metaphors that continue to position him as an authoritative voice to “save” these forlorn women. The dream in which they are lost is a “sueño rosa” (“pink dream”). The play on the word *Rosa* (also “rose”) alludes to a flower conceit, a common trope for women in Nahua poetry that re-presents them as fragile, pretty, and defenseless.

In the final stanza, Zapoteco Sideño invokes the rainbow to help him “callar ese llanto” (“shut up those cries [of women]”) so that a song of joy from them will fill the valleys. These women would then fly “como las mariposas / de flor en flor” (“like butterflies / from one flower to the next”). They would thus be able to “cumplir su misión / en esta tierra felices / con los hombres del sol” (“fulfill their mission / happy in this land / with men of the sun”; 100). These metaphors reinforce a hierarchy in which men (as “men of the sun”) preside over women, and women are butterflies relegated to frolicking among flowers. Significantly, flying “from flower to flower” is juxtaposed with women moving “from house to house,” confining them to strictly domestic spaces (100). As shall be seen in the analysis of Xochitiotzin’s poetry, the similarities in metaphors between her *Tlaoxtika in tlajtol* and Zapoteco Sideño’s “Ayúdame” are striking. Butterflies, flowers, sun, and rainbows are crucial tropes in her poetry, but she uses them as metaphors to empower women.

In *Semanca huitzilin* (2005), in the third section entitled “Monólogo frente a la mujer dormida” (Monologue in Before the Sleeping Woman), Natalio Hernández begins two poems that directly address women, “La mujer:” (Woman:) and “Monólogo frente a la mujer dormida.” The first is a short poem of seven lines, only in Spanish with an English translation by Donald Frischmann. Each verse is between seven and eleven syllables in length, and each line begins with a noun to define “woman”:

“La mujer:”

Territorio de la poesía
 Espacio donde se tejen los sueños
 Reproductora de la memoria
 Sembradora de palabras
 Generadora de linajes
 Simiente de los pueblos
 Madre de la naturaleza humana (78)

“Woman:”

Territory of poetry
 Place where dreams are woven
 Reproducer of memory
 Sower of words
 Generator of lineages
 Seed of peoples
 Mother of human nature (79)

These different nouns place women in a position of re-production, but without originality. They depict women as carriers of the word and of oral tradition in particular. According to this framework, they are receptacles, locales where dreams or poetry may be born, but not through their agency. Rather, through the male’s agency recognizes the richness they possess—as objects. Nahua women are not recognized as authors with their own ideas but rather more like informants. Equated with the physical surroundings, they are static in a “territory of poetry.” They are an inspiration for male writers to produce their works, muses for those who “weave dreams” into poetry. As “reproductora de la memoria,” they pass on memories and preserve tradition, but are not agents in that tradition. In that same sense, they are “sembradoras de la palabra” (sowers of the word) in teaching the language to children and giving birth to new generations (“madre de la naturaleza humana” /

‘mother of human nature’). Men are the ones though who turn this language into literature. In short, this poetry objectifies women. Why are there no poems entitled “El hombre” (“Man”)? In the following poem, “Monólogo frente a la mujer dormida,” the poetic voice parallels watching a sleeping woman with overlooking Mexico City’s landscape. One of the most prominent geological features of Mexico City is the dormant volcano Iztaccihuatl, known for its physical resemblance to a woman lying down. The poem states in its first lines: “Percibo tu cuerpo / recorro tus contornos” (I perceive your body / I explore your curves; 80-81). The poetic voice places the woman in a position in which she is observed, quite literally, like landscape and without a voice of her own—emphasized with the poem’s “monologue.”

This criticism of the representation of women within Nahua literature should not be perceived in any way as an attempt to discard male authors as chauvinists disconnected from “modern” gender equality in “developed” countries. Such an erroneous conclusion perpetuates the re-presentation of Nahua communities as backward. Machismo is by no means a phenomena limited to Indigenous communities nor supposed “Third World” countries. The colonial tendency to relegate Indigenous peoples to a false binary of saint or devil has contributed to a lack of discussion over women’s rights. Held to an iniquitous higher standard, admittance of internal discrimination against women is perceived as proof that these communities really are retrograde and in need of outside help to change this situation. State-sponsored programs and incursions into Indigenous communities such as the Oportunidades welfare program and ethnographic studies funded by the government have played a crucial role in the perpetuation of this

presupposed Indigenous dependency.²² Nahua women authors attempt to remedy this problem through their works and displace the notion that they do not have the agency to do so themselves without outside intervention.

Introduction to Contemporary Nahua Women Authors

While close research of present-day Nahuatl literature is scant, attention to contemporary Nahua women authors is virtually non-existent and constitutes a field in need of serious consideration. There are practically no articles on the subject, with the exception of Frances Karttunen's analysis in which she identifies this problem. As mentioned previously, this lack of attention is not due to a lack of Nahua women writers. There are numerous authors, among them: Yolanda Matías García (Guerrero), Yankuik Metzli Nopaltecatl (Sierra de Zongolica), Ethel Xochitiotzin Pérez (Tlaxcala), Fabiola Tiego Carrillo (Tlaxcala), Calixta Muños Corona (Tlaxcala), Zabina Cruz (Puebla/Tlaxcala), Eugenia Ixmatlahua Tlaxcala (Sierra de Zongolica), Salustia Lara de la Cruz (Morelos), Delia Ramírez Castellanos (Morelos), Eustacia Saavedra Barranco (Morelos), Olivia Tequiliquihua Colohua (Sierra de Zongolica, Veracruz), Ángeles Tzanahua (Sierra de Zongolica, Veracruz), Delia Ramírez Castellanos (Morelos), Olivia Tequiliquihua Colohua (Sierra de Zongolica, Veracruz), and Judith Santopietro (Córdoba, Veracruz). In this brief introduction, I describe the works from a selection of these authors whom I had the opportunity to interview: Yolanda Matías García, Isabel Martínez Nopaltécatl, Fabiola Carrillo Tiego, and Juditzin Santopietro. Nahua male authors and publishing houses treat these writers as marginal voices and do not give space for them to

share their writing. An understanding of this context shared among Nahua women authors will help frame the context in which Ethel Xochitiotzin Pérez writes.

Yolanda Matías García is the most experienced author and the only Nahua woman writer with poems within an Indigenous literary anthology from the 1990s.²³ Support for her work has not gone beyond the two poems in *México: Diversas lenguas, una sola nación*, and the general attitude toward her literature has been dismissive as “overly emotional.” Matías has an intriguing story behind what led her to start writing in Nahuatl. She is from the municipality of Tixtla, Guerrero, an area of conflict not far from Zapoteco’s home municipality of Zitlala. Her husband was assassinated in social movements during the nineties in Guerrero.²⁴ Indicative of their political inclinations, she introduced me at home to her son Lenin. After her husband’s death, Matías saw the surge in Indigenous publications in the 1990s and decided to participate with her own literary production. In our meeting she recited much of her poetry from memory, as she has lost her sight. Her poetry is personal and seeks to elicit a strong affective response from the audience. She recently published a book of poetry, *Tonalxochimeh / Flores del sol* (2013), and much earlier she released a CD with much of this poetry accompanied by guitar, entitled *Xochitlahtol ika moyollot / Palabra florida para tu corazón*. Her personal experiences as an active participant in protests and literary production distance her significantly from how she is depicted by Nahua male authors.

Similar to Ethel Xochitiotzin Pérez in her opposition to metaphors that privilege men such as the sun, Isabel Martínez Nopaltécatl does not view the sun as masculine and claims both the space of the sun and moon. From the municipality of Zongolica,

Veracruz, she uses the penname *Yankuik Metztlí* (New Moon). Unlike most contemporary Nahua authors, Yankuik Metztlí does not translate her poetry into Spanish. Her penname *Yankuik Metztlí* combines with metaphors of a New Sun, and claims a metaphorical space that is symbolic of opening a space for women’s voices. She calls for a landscape in which Nahua women’s voices are represented by Nahua women.

The Nahuatl from her region has a unique pronunciation and vocabulary.²⁵ In part due to these unique aspects of their variant and also geographical remoteness, Nahua authors in Zongolica voice concern over the difficulty in finding venues to publish—which is even more difficult for women writers. Authors have resorted to creating their own collectives and publishing houses in order to distribute their works. Telling of this situation, Yankuik Metztlí publishes her poetry on Facebook. The following is one of Yankuik Metztlí’s poems, perhaps indicative of this absence of an audience:

<p>amika nechkaki, nokxipa ninehnti, nikakti: in kuikalmeh tekolomeh; tlen nechyolosewia.</p>	<p>No one listens to me, I am always walking, I am listening: to songs of the owls; that extinguish my heart.</p>
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<p>okuitzo, owetzke wan otlanke. (Metztlí)</p>	<p>It choked, they fell and ended.</p>
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Yankuik Metztlí is the songwriter for a Nahua heavy metal band in Zongolica. “Songs of the owls” alludes to this musical genre, as *tekolotl*, the ominous owl, is a symbol of its harsh sonorities. The genres of rap, hard rock, and heavy metal have attracted a number of Nahua artists.²⁶ They are drawn to these genres due to their unabashed quest to expose hypocrisy, rather than, according to these artists’ descriptions, singing of a nonexistent idyllic space that the privileged class and official government discourse attempt to

inculcate. These genres openly denounce inequalities in society and serve as a vehicle to bring attention to contemporary Nahua communities. They resemble more the perspective of *ixtlamatliztli* (that knowledge with the face), focused on actual, lived experiences on the ground instead of official discourse. *Yolosewia* (“extinguish my heart”) can signify both to extinguish and to calm, and heavy metal serves as a cathartic mode of expression giving voice to these plights, often obscured in public discourse—and also relates to *yoltlallamiquiliztli*, the knowledge with the heart, and importance of affectivity in cognition. Heavy Metal compositions subvert numerous stereotypes tied to Nahuatl, among them the idea that it is not a modern language. Audiences are often surprised to hear, within a contemporary music genre, lyrics composed by a Nahua woman in what the general public considers an extinct language.

Yankuik Metztlitli takes great pride and comfort in her language, as seen in the following poem:

No tlahtol; ich atl motlelowa. No tlaltzin nowan wetzkatok yeh tlen nochipa nech tlamaka.	My language; blown upon the water. My land rejoices with me; it always gives me sustenance.
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Similar to Ethel Xochitiotzin, Yankuik Metztlitli parallels her language and literary production with the landscape. This language to her is as important as the physical sustenance provided by the land. The choice words within ceremonial spaces, blown upon the water, are also essential to petitioning for the necessary rain that brings forth sustenance. Yankuik Metztlitli also finds that poetry provides a medium through which to express her own words, discourse, and language.

Fabiola Carrillo Tieco is from San Pablo del Monte, Tlaxcala and she is currently completing her Ph.D. in History at the Universidad Autónoma de México. She is part of a growing movement of Nahuatl women writers who, in the face of literary, academic, and communal contexts traditionally dominated by men, forge forward to write and publish their works. Awareness of Carrillo Tieco's opposition to this marginalization makes a close analysis of her short story "In tlazinque" ("The Lazy One") even more intriguing. In this narrative, Aurelia, the "lazy one," refuses to care adequately for her elderly mother, Doña Margarita. Aurelia is inordinately lazy and spends most of the day asleep. When she marries the sacristan's son, the town people hope that this will cure her stupor, described as a mysterious disease. Nonetheless, to no avail, she becomes even lazier and wholly neglects her family. Her husband runs away, Doña Margarita passes away from neglect, and Aurelia, as lazy as ever, ends up on the street selling chamomile branches door to door to survive.

While it might be tempting to read this story as a lesson for women to comply with domestic responsibilities, I argue that this narrative instead serves as a warning not to lose the affective attachment with one's mother. The one thing for which the town people are never able to forgive Aurelia is the abandonment of her mother. The act of writing this narrative itself in Nahuatl is symbolic of that connection with ancestors and respect for their knowledges—something that in many instances younger generations poorly care for or even reject.

Judith Santopietro challenges the perception that one needs to speak Nahuatl to be Nahuatl. Her grandfather was from the same region as Isabel Nopaltécatl, but he moved to

the industrial city of Córdoba, Veracruz and ceased to speak the language. Santopietro self-identifies as Nahua, but meets resistance to this self-identification from both within Nahua communities and from non-Nahuas. There is suspicion on both sides why one would want to assume a marginal identity unless the person carries the “inescapable” markers of indigeneity such as having grown up speaking an Indigenous language.²⁷ Her book of poetry, *Palabras de agua* (2010), contains a poem entitled “Estela de voces” (Stela or Inscribed Stone Slab of Voices) in which she reclaims a Nahua identity. She translated the poem into Nahuatl with the help of poet Sixto Cabrera González:

Monumento de la palabra,
la génesis en las paredes
tan antigua
como la vírgula de roca,

Tetlamanal tlajtol,
peualistli itech tepamimej,
satekitl yauejkika
kemi i machioyo texkali,

tormenta de guijarros que caen de la montaña. (82) ejekatemej tlen uetsij itech tepetl. (83)

Monument of the word,
genesis on the walls
as ancient
as the stony diacritic,

storm of pebbles that falls from the mountain.

Nahuatl language is a key marker of identity used to exclude other Nahuas who do not speak it. As will be explored, Ethel Xochitiotzin Pérez is similarly excluded because she grew up a heritage speaker hearing Nahuatl but was discouraged from using it. In this poem Santopietro plays on the word *vírgula* (diacritic) and the imagery associated with the diacritic on the *i* of the word itself. The accent on the *i* of *vírgula de la roca* alludes to the voluta or shell-like symbols that represent speech in Mesoamerican pictographs.²⁸

These ancient words, although broken up in her family line, come back now with great

force as a “storm of pebbles.” Like the perspective of *tlaixpan*, this past, these ancient words are in front as a guide, but form part of a dynamic present in which Santopietro uses them in new and unexpected ways. Santopietro’s approach to Nahua identity has significant implications and a potential to increase dramatically the number of Indigenous peoples in the census calculations. Government-sponsored programs use language as a determining factor, but one must have been raised with the language to qualify. This policy creates a framework in which Indigenous populations will inevitably continue to decline. Once a generation ceases to speak the language, there is apparently no return to indigeneity as future generations who choose to learn it cannot be considered Nahua. In turn, Santopietro proposes a more fluid conception of who is Nahua that can work against the continual depiction of Nahuas and other Indigenous peoples as “endangered.” Such a move is subversive to Mexican national discourse of *mestizaje* and portrayal of increasing distance from markers of Indigenous identity as “progress” toward becoming a “modern” subject. If language were to cease being a determining factor, the number of Indigenous peoples in Mexico would increase to much more than the official 10% of the population. Santopietro thus not only seeks to forge a space for Nahua women’s artistic production, but also to help expand our notion of who is Nahua.

This introduction highlights a diverse group of women authors who share a common desire to transform literary circles dominated by male authors.²⁹ In their focus on recognition from the nation-state, Nahua male authors fall into the error that Andrea Smith signals. More research and support are needed to bring visibility to Nahua women’s works. In regard to the publication of Nahua women writers’ works, there are

promising signs that things are changing rapidly at the current moment. In recent years, Nahua women authors have begun to succeed in having publishing houses distribute their works. Judith Santopietro published her book of poetry *Palabras de agua* (Words of Water) in 2010. That same year INALI (the Mexican government's Institute of Indigenous Languages) printed the anthology *Pensamiento y voz de mujeres indígenas* (Thoughts and Voice of Indigenous Women). This collection contains essays, short narratives, and poetry from eight Nahua women writers (including one poem from Ethel Xochitiotzin Pérez). Near the end of 2013, Yolanda Matías published her first book of poetry, entitled *Tonalxochimej / Flores del sol* (Flowers of the Sun). Fabiola Carrillo Tieco has recently published her first book of short stories entitled *In xinachtli in tlahtolli. Amoxtli Zazanilli / El semillero de las palabras. Libro de cuentos* (2014). I now proceed to analyze more in depth a book of poetry from one of Ethel Xochitiotzin Pérez's *Tlaoxtika in tlajtol*.

Zohuatlahtolxochitl / Women's Worded Flower Collective: A Brief Biography of Ethel Xochitiotzin Pérez

Ethel Xochitiotzin Pérez is from Santa María Tlacatecpac, municipality of Contla de Juan Cuamatzi in the state of Tlaxcala. She has continued to write poetry and narrative in Nahuatl for more than a decade, despite an unfavorable context both within and outside her community. In interviews she tells of resistance from her own community to her writing and the intense pressure to confine herself to domestic responsibilities.³⁰ Xochitiotzin has continually gone against this pigeonholing and as evidence she obtained a Bachelor's in Hispanic Literature from the University of Tlaxcala, has worked as a professor of Nahuatl, and participates in organizations such as the Jóvenes Creadores en

Lenguas Originarias (Young Creators in Indigenous Languages) and the Nechicoliztli Zohuatlahtolxochitl (Women's Worded Flower Collective).

In 2013, Xochitiotzin, along with Fabiola Carrillo Tieco, Calixta Muñoz Corona, and Zabina Cruz, formed a writers' collective in Tlaxcala, named Nechicoliztli Zohuatlahtolxochitl (Women's Worded Flower Collective).³¹ Through this organization, these authors seek to open new spaces for dialogue among Nahua women and for the publication of their works. They comment that doing so allows them to bypass male-dominated groups of authors that have tended to treat them condescendingly. The name of the organization itself reflects this desire, as it would be more common to say *xochitlahtol* (flowered word) instead of *tlahtolxochitl* (worded flower). The latter is innovative and places emphasis on the flower, a common Nahua metaphor for women, carrying the word.

The group of Nahua women writers in Tlaxcala, *Zohuaxochitlahtol*, had a heated debate over what to name their organization. In May 2013 I was present at the first meeting of this collective. Things were going smoothly in this all day meeting until the end when we attempted to write the name of the collective. A debate ensued as to whether to use the word *cihuatl* or *zohuatl* for *woman*. *Cihuatl* is more common outside of Tlaxcala, and one of the authors, from Puebla, argued that it was better to use *cihuatl* because it comes from Classical Nahuatl. Basically the term "Classical Nahuatl" is used to refer to a prestigious form of Nahuatl used in colonial documents from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.³² The authors from Tlaxcala, among them Xochitiotzin, consider *zohuatl* emblematic of their region. This collective is still recovering from the

fissure created by this debate. The argument about what constitutes Classical Nahuatl is interesting, because actually both forms, *cihuatl* and *zohuatl*, can be found in colonial documents.³³

Such arguments evidence that there is by no means homogeneity among women authors. It is significant that one of the authors would perceive *cihuatl* as more prestigious, coming from Mexico City. Such a perception could arguably be seen as succumbing to male-dominated circles that privilege the Nahuatl of documents and a variant in Mexico City. The Nahua women from Tlaxcala assert their own voices from their communities, positioned as marginal to Mexico City. This wider context points to the significance of the title of Xochitiotzin's first poem "Soatzin," which I analyze in detail in the next section. Nahua women authors counter narratives that depict them as traitors to the national narrative. They position themselves as agents within historical discourse and knowledge production.

In interviews Xochitiotzin describes how Nahua male authors take on a condescending attitude when she shows them her work. After looking at her poetry, one male author put her out completely by commenting: "Tienes mucha madera, pero aún te falta mucho" ("You have a lot of potential [literally 'you have a lot of wood' as in 'raw material'], but still you're lacking a lot").³⁴ She would need the discipline and refinement bestowed by male writers to achieve publishable quality. Another male author mentioned that she had *hueyi iyollo* ("a big heart"), referring to her bravery to continue writing in such an unfavorable context. These comments, rather than recognize her work, only acknowledge that Xochitiotzin has an uncanny determination to keep writing. They do

fail to treat her as an equal or encourage the publication of her literature, and in fact such remarks often mask an unwillingness to do so. A male author even went so far as to suggest that Xochitiotzin would need to obtain an M.A. or Ph.D. to improve her writing, even though the author himself does not hold any degree.³⁵ In fact, few male authors have completed studies past a bachelor's while Xochitiotzin has. The underlying logic to this author's comment suggests that women need to have an extra amount of formal education to be able to offer valuable contributions outside the domestic space—that they are in and of themselves incapable of offering *ixtlamatiliztli* (“knowledge with face”). Their personal experiences are not as pertinent since they are confined to an excessively narrow context—at least such comments would have people think this.

When Xochitiotzin was born in Contla in 1973, there was swift decline in the number of Nahuatl speakers. According to anthropologist Jacqueline Messing in her study “Multiple Ideologies and Competing Discourses: Language Shift in Tlaxcala, Mexico” (2007), the 1970s suffered a dramatic downturn in the population of speakers of Nahuatl forty years old and younger (557–58). Xochitiotzin grew up a heritage speaker of the language in this context. Her parents would not speak Nahuatl with her, but she did hear the language from her grandparents and on the street. Both her parents know the language, but they avoid speaking it due to social discrimination. Not having grown up using Nahuatl actively, Xochitiotzin did not learn to speak until later when she decided to study the language on her own initiative upon seeing the surge in Indigenous literatures while completing her degree in the late 1990s. This dynamic has led other authors, particularly male authors of a certain elite, to dismiss her as incapable of producing

quality literature in Nahuatl. In fact, one author quickly observed that the title of *Tlaoxtika in tlahtol* is grammatically “incorrect” and should instead be *quioxtica in tlahtol*, since *tlaoxtica* is intransitive and thus cannot specify an object.³⁶ Such structures evidence, according to this author and others, that Xochitiotzin thinks in Spanish and translates from Spanish.³⁷ Nonetheless, as Xochitiotzin describes in interviews, she thinks in both languages and the poems are a product of going back and forth. For this reason I always include both the Nahuatl and Spanish versions of her poetry either side by side or with the Spanish version in footnotes. My translations are based on a comparison of these two versions, as sometimes the Nahuatl carries additional meanings not evident in the Spanish and vice versa. As opposed to making the literature somehow “inauthentic” or “grammatically wrong,” her literature evidences a fluid dynamic between the two languages that makes a bilingual reading all the more intriguing and relevant.³⁸

She began to write during her studies in Hispanic literature at the University of Tlaxcala with a scholarship from FOECAT (Fondo Estatal para la Cultura y las Artes de Tlaxcala) in 1999. In interviews she speaks of resistance to her studies within her community. They warned her that “vas a morir de hambre” (“you’re going to die of hunger”). In reply, she would say that there were other kinds of wealth than money.³⁹ Poetry represented a means to make her voice heard. She now has three children and she tells of the challenges of continuing to write in spite of pressures at home to cease to do so. In the following section I begin my analysis of her first book of poetry written under these conditions.

Soatzin / Precious Woman: Analysis of First Poems of *Tlaoxtika*

Xochitiotzin's unpublished book of poetry *Tlaoxtika in tlajtol / Desgranando la palabra* (Grinding Words)⁴⁰ consists of fifteen poems. The poems vary in length from four verses to longer poems of two pages. *Tlaoxtika* progresses from remembrances of the past to the center of the book, which focuses on maize. The final poems explore how the poetic voice will speak in spite of discrimination. It is difficult to translate the title *Tlaoxtika in tlajtol* into English, as *tlaoxtika* refers to drying out corncobs and then brushing off the kernels. Xochitiotzin translates the title into Spanish as "Desgranando la palabra," literally "dekerneling the word." Nonetheless, English lacks a word for this action.⁴¹ I choose to translate it as *Grinding Corn* because the kernels are brushed off to grind them and make *masa* (ground up corn for making tortillas). This becomes a metaphor for writing, as writers bring words together, each word like a kernel, to create something new. This in turn is an apt metaphor for Xochitiotzin's work and Nahua women authors in general, as they "grind Nahuatl words" and transform them into a space where women are recognized as agents.

Throughout the poems, as the title of the book indicates, Xochitiotzin focuses on words and different ways of describing. In the introduction, written in Spanish, Xochitiotzin explains that the poems address love, denounce discrimination, vindicate the Nahuatl language, and play with that language: "Cada verso desgrana soledad, discriminaci3n, amor, sabor y color del idioma de esta comunidad [Municipio de Contla de Juan Cuamatzi]" (Each verse removes and collects kernels of solitude, discrimination, love, flavor, and color of the language of this community [Municipality of Contla de Juan

Cuamatzi]; i). This description in the introduction can apply to a single poem with multiple interpretations. Often a love poem can be analyzed as a poem about a lover or else an intimate connection with ancestors and the Nahuatl language.

My close observations of *Tlaoxtika in tlajtol* are divided into three sections, each based on themes emphasized: the past and remembrance within the first poems, maize metaphors within poems at the center of the text, and articulation of Nahua identity within the final poems. I begin with an analysis of the first poems in this chapter's section, "Soatzin / Precious Woman: Analysis of Remembrances in the First Poems of *Tlaoxtika*." The first poems ("Soatzin" / 'Woman'; "In tonal tomiketsitsi" / 'Day of the dead'; "Kanik tlakati in kosemalotl" / 'Where the Rainbow Is Born') begin, not with a "look back" but instead forward to the past and remembrance. As opposed to an anchor that draws the subject "back" to the past, remembrance of ancestors projects toward a dynamic present and future. In the section, "Grinding Words and Corn Metaphors: The Centrality of Maize within the Mid-Point Poems of *Tlaoxtika*," I explore how at the center of the book Xochitiotzin focuses more explicitly on maize as a metaphor for writing. The section focuses on the poems "Niknekiskia" / 'I wish'; "Ixtololotsin tlen kitsakuilia ixayak tonantsi intlali" / 'Eyes that Detain the Face of Our Mother Earth'; "Xochitlaoltzin" / 'Flowered Maize'; "Achtlitonaltsin" / 'Sun's Seed.' This metaphor is used to challenge traditional depictions of Nahua symbols and the marginalization of women. In the final section, "'They Say': Concluding Poems of *Tlaoxtika*," I analyze how Xochitiotzin poetic persona turns inward and dialogues with herself and Nahua identity through the poems "Yejuan kijtoa" / 'They Say'; "Malinalli" / 'Entanglement';

“Teskatl” / ‘Mirror.’ She refuses to let her voice be marginalized. These three sections combine to illustrate how Xochitiotzin asserts for a different poetic framework in which women make history rather than just carry it, actively produce knowledge rather than passively receive, and articulates her own identity as opposed to accepting an imposed one.

The first poem, entitled “Soatzin” (Revered Woman), centers the text on women’s voices. Much can be gleaned from the title itself. The words *soatl* and *soatzin* with the reverential suffix *-tzin* are significant because they conspicuously represent the Nahuatl variant of Tlaxcala. *Soatl* contrasts with *cihuatl* (also “woman”) of the more prestigious Nahuatl from Mexico City and other regions. In other words, *cihuatl* is more common within male-dominated academic and literary circles described at the beginning of this chapter. Xochitiotzin’s use of *soatl*, knowing full well that this “dialectical” word could be frowned upon, reflects her transgression of Nahua literary hegemony.

The poem “Soatzin” consists of ten verses, and the lines vary in length from three to eleven syllables.⁴² I quote “Soatsin” in its entirety to continue my analysis of it:

“Soatsin”

Popokatsi kosemalotl
 Monauaktsi tlajtol yes in metsintli
 Timauiltia ika in tonaltsi
 Kuikatia in yolotl
 Oajsiko se papalotsi
 Uan omotlakenti ika motlajtol
 Poliui
 kajtok ajuiak ipan tlen tlali
 Ichpopokatsi kosemalotl
 Tlajtol tonaltsi. (1)

“Mujer”

Niña arco iris
 Junto a ti la palabra es luna
 Juegas con el sol
 Arrullas el corazón.
 Llegó una mariposa,
 Y se vistió con tus palabras
 Se pierde
 Dejando el aroma de la tierra
 Niña arco iris
 Palabra de sol (2)

“Revered Woman”

Young woman rainbow
Next to you the word is lunar
You play with the sun
You lull the heart
A butterfly has arrived here
And has dressed with your word
It is lost
it has left a pleasant smell upon the land
Young woman rainbow
Word of the sun⁴³

Xochitiotzin employs the metaphor of a “young woman rainbow” or “girl rainbow” to represent women, the *soatl* (woman) of the title. In contrast with the rainbow Zapoteco invokes to hit docile women upside the head and wake them from their slumber, the rainbow in “Soatsin” depicts women as exercising agency and self-representation. The sun and water interact with one another to form the colors of the rainbow.⁴⁴ The mix of light and water symbolizes literary creation. These colors also allude to the weaving of traditional clothing and the wide spectrum of colors that go into its creation. Something traditionally done by women in Contla, textiles here serve as an apt metaphor of the creativity of Nahua women that Xochitiotzin uses to represent literary creation. This is alluded to in the sixth verse with “dressed with your word” (2).

An element that appears in the following line and continually throughout the book is the moon, that next to the rainbow “the word is moon.” Like Yankuik Metzli, Xochitiotzin breaks with the portrayal of the moon as exclusively feminine and the sun as masculine. Instead here the sun is associated with women and underscores their power to observe and create texts—from weaving tapestries to the wider meanings of “text” that includes many types of visual, auditory, and written texts. The poetic voice

(Xochitiotzin’s poetic persona) is the butterfly who arrives and dresses with the words that are sun and moon that strengthen the heart. Throughout the poems there is a constant threat of loss, that these words will be lost or rejected, seen suddenly as the sole word in the seventh line: *poliui / se pierde* (it is lost).

The final verse speaks of “palabra de sol” (‘sun word’; 2). Distanced from Zapoteco’s “men of sun,” Xochitiotzin’s words are of strength like the sun. The poetic voice addresses another woman, perhaps Xochitiotzin herself, telling of this strength. These apostrophic verses involve all the senses, of sight (the rainbow), hearing (song), smell (aroma of the earth, which in Nahuatl can also refer to taste), and touch (dressing with words). It is a synesthetic experience in which the poetic voice sees, hears, and dresses with the word. “The word” denotes significant power, especially in Nahuatl, as “*tlahtoani*” (literally “the one who speaks”) denotes “ruler” or “governor.”⁴⁵ This term is usually associated with men, but here Xochitiotzin asserts power over the word. The “words” risk being lost because of the pressure for women not to speak.

The second poem of *Tlaoxtika*, “In tonal tomiketsitsi” / “Día de muertos” (Day of the Dead) invites a deceased female relative to return home during the Day of the Dead. The poem consists of nineteen verses and the lines vary in length from three syllables to a final line of twenty syllables:

Miketsistsi in miktla tuiitse
 ¿Omiteyoj kan tonnemi?
 ¡Xonuiki!
 ¡Xonkalaki!
 ¡Kuali yo ton ajsiko itech mo yeyantsi!
 ¡Xonnenemi ipan ojtli xochitl!
 Ye mitson chia in atsintli
 In ajuialis kopal,
 In sempoalxochitl
 In panchichiual

Ánimas, del Mictlan vienen
 Huesuda, ¿Dónde andas?
 ¡Ven!
 ¡Entra!
 ¡Bienvenida a tu casa!
 ¡Camina hacia el camino de flor!
 Ya te espera el agua,
 el aroma del copal,
 la flor de muerto,
 el pan,

In tlemol	el mole,
In tamal	el tamal,
In ayojtsopelik	el dulce de calabaza,
In xokotl...	la fruta...
¡Xkonana in tlanex uan istatl!	¡Toma la luz y la sal!
Mitsompaleuis ijkuak tonmokeupas	Te ayudará a tu regreso
¡Xkoni moneuktsi!	¡Toma el pulque!
Mouitia moyolotsi	Embriaga tu alma.
Axa nimitsontlaokolia nin tlauii tlen yes noxochitlajtol. (3)	Hoy te regalo esta luz que es mi poesía. (4)

Spirits come from the land of the dead
 Bony one, Where are you?
 Come!
 Enter!
 Welcome to your home!
 Walk toward the pathway of flowers!
 Water awaits you,
 the aroma of copal,
 flower of the dead,
 bread,
 mole,
 tamales,
 pumpkin sweets,
 fruit...
 Take the light and the salt!
 It will help upon your return
 Drink the pulque!
 Make your soul drunk.
 This day I give you this light, my poetry, as a gift.

The poem resembles ceremonial language in its structure with the listing of the different elements that go into the ceremony, constituting a mixing of colors that alludes to the rainbow of the previous poem: *in cempoalxochitl* (cempasúchil flowers), *in panchichiual* (bread), *in tlemol* (pork with mole sauce), *in tamal* (tamales), *in ayojtsopelik* (sweet squash), *in xokotl* (fruit). The poem sets the stage in the first line by stating that the deceased souls are coming. The poetic voice calls out to one relative, *omiteyoj* and in Spanish, *huesuda* (“bony one”) to return home.⁴⁶ This deceased relative follows the path of cempasúchil flowers scattered on the ground leading to the front door. She consumes the light and food at the altar (“toma la luz y la sal”). This sustenance will give strength

and direction for the eventual return to the land of the dead. The poem ends by speaking of its own words as this light to guide the ancestor on her way.

This poem highlights the connection with ancestors, in particular here a female ancestor and connects to a view of the past is seen as in front of the subject. The path both directs the ancestors back to their home, but also points the attention of the living toward deceased relatives. Although most often men direct ceremonies, Xochitiotzin interjects her voice here like a religious leader officiating a ceremony in honor of the dead.⁴⁷ It is significant that this comes right after the poem “Soatsin.” Xochitiotzin speaks of the power of women’s voices and then directs her attention in the following poem to a deceased female ancestor. She connects with a tradition of strength and highlights that she is not alone in the power of her voice. Relationships of kinship cross over into death and help cultivate the “interrelatedness and responsibility” that Andrea Smith proposes outside the confines of nation-state frameworks.⁴⁸ Against government depictions of the need to “move forward” toward a future of modernization, the poetic voice of “In tonal tomiketsitsi” looks instead to the past—a look forward rather than back to communal relationships based on reciprocity. In this poem the poetic voice shares food and light from the altar to strengthen the relative, and this relative could very well be the woman who serves as an inspiration in the poem “Soatzin.”

In the fourth poem, “Kanik tlakati in kosemalotl” / “Donde nace el arcoiris” (Where the Rainbow Is Born), Xochitiotzin continues to highlight the importance of women’s voices. This two-page poem consists of thirty-one lines varying in length from

two to nineteen syllables. Named in the first line of the poem, Xochitiotzin's poetic persona represents a rainbow with its powerful colors and word. I cite the poem in full.⁴⁹

Ethel Xochitiotzin Pérez

Maseual tlale.

Itech moikpa tlakati Kosemalotl

Ikpame tlen kitlajkiti nouipil uan nech tlaulilia nonakayo.

¡Xinechiuili se ilpilkatl,

Ma ki paleui no ijte!

Ti achtli,

ti ameyal

tlani in Malintzi.

Tetepetla

Altepetsi kanik tlakati moxayak

Ye uejkaui tlen tokojkoluan okitlajkitijke motlapoal,

okichijchijkej komimej,

tlen kiuika in tlapal, in ajuialis uan in uelika nin tlali.

ijkuak oajsiko in kastilla tlatlaka seki kiposteki,

omokajkej oxexelo mo nacayo.

kineluayotia Contla

axan motlakayo ikpame omotlalo,

ikpatl tlen kuika moneluayo.

acuic

axolhuaca

xochayatla

xicotenco

cuatzincola

aztatla

Tlacomulco

xelhua

Juárez

ikpatl tlen kitlajkiti in ayatl, in tilma, in ilpilkatl.

ikpatl tlen kixtilia ajuiak tlilmol

ikpatl tlen moneneloa ika in xochipitsauak uan ueuexayakatl

ikpatl tlen kitlajkiti iyolotsin in Conteco. (7-8)

Ethel Xochitiotzin Pérez

Indigenous land.

The rainbow is born upon your weaving

threads that weave my *huipil* and fill my body with light.

Make me a sash,

give strength to my womb!

You are a seed
you are a spring
at the foot of Malintzi.
Tetepetla
Place where your face is born
A long time ago our ancestors constructed your story,
they made pottery,
which carries the color, flavor, and smell of this earth.
When the Spaniards arrived, they broke some,
they remained scattered in your body.
Contla is founded
now threads ran through your body,
threads that carry your roots.
Juárez,
Aztatla,
Tlacomulco,
Xelhua,
Xicotenco,
Xochayatla
Cuatzincola,
Acuic,
Axolhuaca.

Threads that weave blankets, *saltillo*, *ceñidores*,
threads that release the aroma of black *mole*,
threads that move to the music of *Xochipitzahuatl*, and of the *Catrines*,
threads that weave the heart of the *conteco* and the *conteca*.

The poetic voice equates Xochitiotzin with *tierra morena* (brown land) in Spanish and *maseual tlale* (Indigenous/campesino land) in Nahuatl. Although described like the landscape, this imagery is far from the objectification of women as landscape in Nahuatl men's literature. The combination of *moreno* (in the context of Xochitiotzin's poetry used to denote darker phenotypes that *mestizos* attempt to conceal) and *maseual* (Indigenous) mark a racialized subject. Implicit in this description of Xochitiotzin's pride in her land and color of skin is a criticism of those who attempt to "whiten" themselves.⁵⁰ This topic comes up repeatedly in *Tlaoxtika* with descriptions of her body as "tierra morena."

The rainbow—Xochitiotzin’s poetry—is born within the land’s weaving. This imagery ties together ancestors’ artistic production with Xochitiotzin’s literature. The word *urdimbre* in Spanish can refer to the weaving as well as to an intriguing turn in a work of literature, which Xochitiotzin seeks to do through her poetry. These ancestors’ threads weave together her *huipil*. The poetic voice asks to be made a *ceñidor* (a “tightener” or “sash”) and for strength for her womb in order to give birth to new ideas. She wants her words to “be seed” and “be a spring” at the foot of the Malintzin. In the following line she refers to Tetepetla, now a small archaeological zone near Contla. As mentioned in the introduction, her references to the Malintzin challenge the traditional depiction of the Nahua woman as a traitor. From this Indigenous geography Xochitiotzin’s “face is born.” This area has a long history, and Contla (the name itself comes from *comitl* or pot) were known for making pottery. Remembrance of this artisan work is a sensorial experience in which each pot carried the color and aroma of the earth. Paralleled with the description of Xochitiotzin’s body as the earth’s hue, the pots are metaphor for Nahua women.

The center of the poem breaks the creation of pottery, as Spanish colonialism invades and shatters the pots. Their pieces are scattered throughout Xochitiotzin’s body, the history of her people, but now in shards due to pervasive colonialism that continues to the present. The name of the volcano Malintzin itself is significant, as mentioned in this chapter’s introduction. Rather than blame Doña Marina for the conquest, she displaces such depictions and points toward the conquerors themselves and the conquest discourse that still prevails today, especially in the treatment of men toward women.

Xochitiotzin’s poetic persona refers to the founding of the municipality of Contla and how it is formed of a number of smaller communities, described as different threads that carry its roots. In doing so she highlights an Indigenous decolonial geography: Juárez, Aztatla, Tlacomulco, Xelhua, Xicotenco, Xochayatla, Cuatzincola, Acuic, Axolhuaca (9).⁵¹ This list is similar to the series of ceremonial elements in “Día de muertos” that appear in Day of the Dead observations. All the different senses are brought into the literal and metaphorical weaving of these communities together, threads that unite the unique sights, smells, and sounds of the region: weavers, black *mole*, and the traditional sounds of *xochipitzahuatl*.⁵² This depiction goes against traditional depictions of Contla as an area in decline.⁵³ The poetic voice speaks of a region full of history and knowledge production for the present. As emphasized in this section, Xochitiotzin looks to this history of her municipality and ancestors’ traditions as an inspiration for unexpected and not so traditional turns in her own literary production—such as with the maize-centered metaphors that she de-centers, which I analyze in the next section because it initiates a focus in the book on corn.

Grinding Words: Corn Metaphors in the Central Poems of *Tlaoxtika in tlajtol*

The fifth poem of *Tlaoxtika*, “Niknekiskia,”⁵⁴ marks a shift to a greater focus on maize. This poem can be read as both a poem to a lover and an intimate relationship with the word, metaphorically represented as maize. I cite the poem in full:

“Niknekiskia”

Nik nekiskia nies ni amatl,
uan ijkon notech
tej titlakuilos.
Nik nekiskia nies ni metsintl

“Quisiera”

Quisiera ser papel,
Para que sobre mí
tú escribas.
Quisiera ser luna,

ijkon tinechmauisos.
 Nik nekiskia nies ni tonaltsin,
 ijkon ni mitsontlanextilis mo tlajtol.
 Nik nekiskia nies ni atsintli,
 ijkon ni mitsonkixtilis moamik
 Nik nekiskia nies ni neuktli,
 ijkon nimitsonuintia.
 Niknekiskia nies kuali tlali
 Ijkon in achtli uelis nikanaskia.
 Niknekiskia nies nisemikak xopanistli,
 Ijkon nimakaskia semijkak xochitlajtolistli. (11)

para que me contemples.
 Quisiera ser solecito,
 para alumbrar tus palabras.
 Quisiera ser agua,
 para poder saciar tu sed.
 Quisiera ser pulque,
 para poder embriagarte.
 Quisiera ser tierra fértil,
 para poder tomar tu semilla.
 Quisiera ser eterna primavera,
 Para darte siempre poesías. (12)

“I Wish”

I wish I were paper
 So that on me
 you will write
 I wish I were moon,
 so that you will contemplate me.
 I wish I were sun,
 to illuminate your words.
 I wish I were water,
 to quench your thirst.
 I wish I were *pulque*,
 to be able to make you drunk.
 I wish I were fertile land,
 to be able to take your seed.
 I wish I were eternal spring,
 to be able to give you always poetry.

The poetic voice begins by stating that she *would like* to be paper, so that the person or thing to which she directs the poem could write on her. The conditional tense, especially in Nahuatl, indicates that some obstacle exists that might impede this relationship.

Discrimination pervades that makes literary production more difficult. The symbols of sun, moon, and water appear in the following lines. All these are key elements in corn harvesting as well as calendric indicators of when to harvest. The poetic voice would like to be a fertile land to receive “your seed.” This poem can be read as an intimate

relationship with the corn crop, and the poetic voice positions herself as a subject with valuable contributions toward a successful harvest. Corn gives Xochitiotzin the strength to live, think, and produce her literature—the paper to be written on—and in turn she wishes to offer all the elements necessary to producing a successful corn crop. The repetition of *ni* (I) at the beginning and center of every other verse emphasizes Xochitiotzin’s own agency and desire to participate in this agricultural production equated with literary production.

The sixth poem, “Ixtololotsin tlen kitsakuilia ixayak tonantsi intlali” (Eyes that Detain the Face of Our Mother Earth) focuses on the importance of “close observation,”⁵⁵ the *tlachiyaliztli* analyzed previously:

“Ixtolotsin tlen kitsakuilia ixayak tonantsi intlali”

Se tonal oajsik motlachilis,
 Onejne ipan nonakayo.
 Tlachilis tlen kitsakuilia in kauptl
 Ixtololotsin tlen kitlapoa in yolotsin tlen maseual tlalli.
 Tlachilis tlen tlajtoa uan mouetska ika in tlanesi.
 ika in Malintzi, uan in
 ika in maimetlan tlajkiti in kosamalotl,
 ika in iljuitsintli altepetl.
 Tlachilis tlen kixexeloa in ajuyalis in kuauime,
 in tiopantsintle,
 in mextle,
 in tlajtlakaj,
 in tlaxkal.
 Tlachilis tlen patlani nochi in altepetsin.
 Tinejnemi, amo tikauas mikis in kauptl. (13)

“Ojos que detienen el rostro de nuestra madre tierra”

Un día llegó tu mirada,
 Caminó por mi cuerpo.
 Mirada que detienen el tiempo,
 ojos que abren el corazón de la tierra morena.
 Mirada que habla y ríe con el crepúsculo,
 con la Malintzin, la Cuatlapanga
 con las manos que tejen el arco iris,
 con la fiesta del pueblo.
 Mirada que desprende el aroma de los árboles,
 De la iglesia,
 De la nube,
 De la gente,
 De la tortilla.
 Mirada que vuela por todos los rumbos.
 Camina, no dejes morir el tiempo. (14)

“Eyes that Detain the Face of Our Mother Earth”

One day your observation arrived
 It walked over my body.
 Observation that detains time
 Eyes that open and laugh at sunrise
 with Malintzin, and Cuatlapanga
 with hands that go to weave the rainbow,
 during the communal festivities
 Observation that parses the aromas of the trees,

of the church,
of the moon,
of the people,
of tortillas.
Observation that flies over all communities.
You walk, you will not allow time to die.

This poem was inspired by an art exhibition Xochitiotzin attended in Tlaxcala.⁵⁶ The paintings represented Tlaxcalan landscape such as the Malintzin. These ekphrastic verses describe the viewing of this landscape art as “stopping time” and leading her to find her own body—this look “walks over” her own body. This affective connection with her surroundings, referred to with *tierra morena*, *maseual tlalli*, alludes back to the paralleling of her body with the landscape in “Donde nace el arcoiris.” Cuatlapanga from the sixth verse is the name of another small volcano near the Malintzin. In Tlaxcala, this volcano is also called “el cerro del rostro” (face mountain) because it resembles a yelling face. Like with the Malintzin, there are multiple narratives associated with Cuatlapanga, among them a story of golden church bells having been hidden within them during the Mexican Revolution. As Xochitiotzin’s poem imagines, the landscape has a face—not only in the literal image suggested by the silhouette of Cuatlapanga—but also in the sense of being able to communicate narratives. The story regarding the golden bells reminds community members of the destruction and theft brought on by Revolution, which is a narrative that counters the laudatory remembrances of official government discourse.

The body-landscape symbiosis Xochitiotzin creates constitutes a relationship in which humans are not superior to physical surroundings. This is a look—both Xochitiotzin with the ability to observe and the landscape with its own face that communicates histories—that is able to produce poetry (the rainbow) and constitutes a

sensorial experience that goes beyond physical eyesight or solely cognition. *Tinejnemi* (you walk) in the final verse, in its associations with literally walking as well as careful thought, highlights the importance of an affective intelligence in which the mind is not superior to the body, which is why this look leads the poetic voice to explore her own physicality. Rather than an “out of body” experience, the look described is one that helps her to know her body. This close observation—nurtured by corn in the tortillas referenced in the third to last verse—keeps time from dying because it can then be transmuted into artistic production that will survive the artist’s death.

The seventh poem in *Tlaoxtika in tlajtol / Desgranando la palabra*, “Xochitlaoltzin” / “Flor de maíz” (Flowered Maize) is at the center of the text of fifteen total poems and is key to understanding the book. This poem focuses on corn as a metaphor for writing and the Nahuatl language. The poem consists of two stanzas, the first of twelve verses and the second of five. The lines vary in length from two to fourteen syllables:

“Xochitlaoltzin”

Titlaoya motlahtol itech in ilcahualiz
yalhuaya,
onijtlati notlahtol,
ihkon amo niccaquiz motlahtol.
onia uan oniquilca,
nicmati que nicatqui.
in mayanaliz in papalotl
nechylchichahti.
cuentla nechchia notekitl,
tonaltzin,
metzintle,
atl,
quitlamaka noyolo.

“Flor de maíz”

Desgranas tu voz en el olvido.
Ayer,
escondí mi voz,
para no escuchar tus palabras.
Emigré del olvido,
sé que existo.
El hambre es la mariposa que me
acompaña
Afuera esperan mi trabajo.
sol
luna,
agua,
alimentan mi corazón.

¡Xquitta!
monacayo motema masehualtlahtol,
tlapohualiz tlakijti motlahtol.
nelhuame quitemoa moxayac,
huan quitlatia in kaultl. (15)

¡Mira!
Tu cuerpo se baña de voces morenas,
la historia teje tu voz.
Raíces que buscan tu rostro,
y ocultan el tiempo. (16)

“Maize Flower”

You remove kernels of maize, your voice out of oblivion
yesterday,
I hid my language,
that way I would not hear your words.
I left and I forgot,
I know how I am here.
The butterfly’s hunger
will strengthen my heart
outside they await my work,
sun,
moon,
water,
feed my heart.

Look!
your body fills up with Nahuatl,
your voice will tell, will weave.
roots search out your face,
and conceal time.

This poem begins by using the metaphor again, common throughout different variants of Nahuatl, that associates maize cultivation with writing. Humans are also made of corn and the writer is made of her poetry. There can be no separation between the two. The removing and collecting corn kernels represents speaking and writing down words, like kernels of corn in a row on the cob—but in the poem these words are lost in oblivion or forgetfulness (in Nahuatl the word *quiilcahua* denotes “leaving behind memories”). This is especially tragic if one knows that not a single kernel of corn should be wasted,⁵⁷ and with this metaphor Xochitiotzin suggests that not a word of what she states in her poetry

should be lost. The displacement of *tlahtol* alludes to the marginalization of the Nahuatl language in general, but also more specifically to Xochitiotzin's double marginalization as a Nahua woman—or triple marginalization as both a Nahua woman and writer. She feels that she has important messages to communicate through her literature, but these messages are not heard—they are memories left behind. Outside pressures and criticism have led her at certain points in her life to give up writing, or at least not to share it openly—onijtlati[h] notlahtol / I hid my language.⁵⁸ As stated earlier, *tlahtolli* in Nahuatl means language, individual words, and discourse in general.⁵⁹ With these different significations of *tlahtol*, Xochitiotzin refers to both the marginalization of Nahuas and their language on a large scale, and also to very personal experience with her own individual words and discourse.

She hides her voice to not hear “tus palabras,” which could refer to not wanting to hear the words of those who discriminate against Nahuas and also Xochitiotzin's own previous internalization of this discrimination and avoidance of the Nahuatl language. The poetic voice is afraid of what might be said, and people might laugh at her for speaking Nahuatl. The enjambment “yesterday” is set apart in the poem to emphasize that the temptation to abandon her language was in the past. She speaks of “emigrating out of forgetting.” This is a significant metaphor that relates to her own personal migration from her hometown in Contla to the capital of Tlaxcala. Xochitiotzin was tempted to hide her background when she moved to the city to study at the University of Tlaxcala.⁶⁰ She resists this temptation and accepts her language as a gift from her ancestors, and, from the

perspective of *tlaixpan*, Xochitiotzin uses that language in innovative ways to question discrimination against women within and outside her community.

In the following verse she speaks of hunger as a butterfly, which is the desire for her poetry to be known. She then states that “kuentla kichiah notekitl” (outside they await her work). There is a play on the word “kuentla” here for “outside,” as it also resembles the name of her home municipality of Contla. There is a switch back and forth from speaking of an “outside” public and among her own community.⁶¹ The poetic voice describes the hunger she feels as stronger than physical hunger. This poetic persona again takes strength from the sun, moon, and water, listed in the final verses of the first stanza. As mentioned previously, these are also the key elements in maize production, and as such serve as a metaphor for literary production and filling a spiritual need for spiritual sustenance.

In the second stanza the poetic voice once more focuses on the importance to observe with the single line “¡X’ kitta!” (‘Look!’). She speaks of “your body” being bathed in “brown voices.” These “brown voices” represent a racialized body with a closer connection to surroundings as in the poem “Donde nace el arcoiris.” People attempt to change their clothes and use cosmetics to hide their history, but it still is evident.⁶² Nahua characteristics embody a history that weaves “your voice.” The roots “hide time” because they carry a history that needs to be known. With the mixing perspectives here between *neh/yo* (I) and *tej/tú* (you), sometimes it is evident that the poetic voice is speaking to herself and to her own words. “Your voice” and “your face” are the voice and face of

Xochitiotzin's poetic persona, and can also refer to the voice and face of the members of her community.

The eighth poem, "Achtltonaltsin" / "Semilla de sol" (Sun's Seed) consists of two stanzas, the first of eleven verses and the second also of eleven verses. The lines vary in length from two to fourteen syllables:

Kiajoki in achtli tonaltsin,
kitlapoua ueyatl kiilkauilis.
¿Moteska petlani?
¡Kema!
xnexi in ajuyalis in nakayotl
xkixmati in metsintli.
Ye kiuintia in xochitlakatsin,
Tlajtol kualtsitsi
Tlanesi ijtek in mixtle in nekte
yejua kiteki in neljuatli in nakayotl.
Poliui in kauitl

¿tlika?
¿Tlika tlatia motlajtol?
tla motoka moyekoa tlaol.
¿tlike mopatla moneljuayo?
tla in tlaltsintli tlajtoa in te
¿tlika tikixtilia mokuikatil?
tla in keuitl nejnemi ika ye.
¿Tlika amo tiktoka motlajtol?
tla mostla niknechikos mo xokotl.
¿tlika amo timouintia?
Uan timopoluiste ika in sitlallimej

She raises the sun's seed,
she opens the sea of forgetfulness.
Is it your mirror that shines?
Yes!
Discover the aroma of the body
Know the moon.
It makes the poet drunk
Beautiful words.
The sun rises among clouds of *pulque*
they cut the root of the body,

Levanta la semilla de sol,
abre el mar del olvido
¿Es tu espejo que brilla?
¡Sí!
Descubre el aroma del cuerpo
Conoce la luna.
Ella embriaga al poeta,
Seduca las palabras.
Amanece entre las nubes del pulque
ellos cortan la raíz del cuerpo.
Se pierde el tiempo

¿Por qué?
¿Por qué ocultar tu voz?
Si tu nombre sabe a maíz.
¿Por qué cambiar tu raíz
Si la tierra habla de ti?
¿Por qué desplazar tu canto
Si el tiempo camina con él?
¿Por qué no sembrar tu voz?
Si mañana recogeré tu fruto.
¿Por qué no embriagarnos?
Y perdernos con las estrellas.

Time is lost.

Why?
Why is your language/words/discourse hidden
if your name says maize?
Why change your roots
if the precious earth speaks of you?
Why remove your song
if time walks with it?
Why not sow your voice
If tomorrow I will gather your fruit?
Why not get drunk
And lose ourselves among the stars?

Similar to how Nahua literary production has been dominated by male authors, fieldwork in the cornfields has been dominated traditionally by men. As in the poem “Niknekiskia,” the poetic voice overturns this metaphor of the male farmer by placing herself in the position of the planter, and by extension the writer. In the first stanza, Xochitiotzin focuses on the temptation to try and forget her roots. The temptation to *salir adelante* (“to get ahead”) in Tlaxcala, as anthropologist Jacqueline Messing analyzes, constitutes an attempt to discard signs of indigeneity (559-560). A lexicon is employed that features “verbs of motion, action, and change” to indicate leaving behind the traditional juxtaposed with becoming modern, a part of the present (560). Nonetheless, in the second stanza, Xochitiotzin rejects this discrimination, asking rhetorical question of why one would stop speaking. Far from the backwardness that is typically depicted, she represents the knowledge production from her community as part of a dynamic process.

The importance of corn can be seen in the poem “Achtltonaltsin” / “Semilla del sol” in the title itself. The Nahuatl language commonly associates maize with the sun, and here maize is described as the sun’s seed. As seen previously at the beginning of this

chapter, male authors associate the sun and corn seed with their own strength. Notably, *achtli* or *xinachtli*, the choice corn seed, is another word for semen. In turn, women are traditionally associated with the moon and its weaker light. Nonetheless, here Xochitiotzin claims the space of the sun and seed for women, metaphorically representing the connection of corn with literary production, a claim of space with a potent voice for Nahua women's writings. Significantly, the word for "choice corn seed" in Nahuatl can also mean "heart," and with it Xochitiotzin constructs an affective space in which cognition is interwoven with emotions, closely connected to rituals petitioning a successful corn crop.

The one-word verses of *¡kema!* / *¡sí!* (yes!) and *¿tlika?* / *¿Por qué?* (why?) highlight that markers of Nahua identity still surface in spite of attempts to occult them. The *sí* and *por qué* rise up in opposition to those who would attempt to cut the root of Nahua cultural practices. As the corn crop comes back from this in its cycle, repeated over and over since the arrival of the Spaniards, Nahua knowledge production will also continue to thrive. The mirror similarly represents acceptance of Nahua identity, against a "sea of forgetfulness" that attempts to disassociate the poetic voice from her Indigenous perspectives and practices. Nonetheless, this sea shines like a mirror reflecting the deep history from which she comes. This look again discovers the aroma of the body and closely observes surroundings. It is an observation that transcends and looks beyond the everyday, symbolized in the waking amidst clouds of pulque. Nonetheless, "ellos" (they, colonizers) interpose and cut "the root of the body." Time, in other words historical remembrance, is lost in this violence. As in the previous poem "Flor de maíz," this

cutting symbolizes the epistemic and physical violence exercised against Nahua populations. “They,” like the *coyomeh* described within Huastecan literature, are those who wield a colonial discourse and discriminate against Nahuas.

Nonetheless, like the corn crop, this history can be recuperated. This is the focus of the second stanza. In an anaphoric structure, the poetic voice repeats the question *tlica* / ¿Por qué? The question implies that it would be nonsensical to hide her voice and not speak Nahuatl. The poetic voice asserts the power of her words and decides not to hide those words that grow with the strength of maize. Throughout different Nahua regions the lines on a page are described as furrows in the fields. The poetic voice argues that Nahua women also plant valuable words on the page. Each “why?” questions the desire to hide indigeneity: Why hide “your voice”? Why try to change roots? Why displace the community songs? Why not plant “your voice”? These words bring one to a sublime experience, symbolized here with getting inebriated and losing oneself among the stars. The *tlika* of each line calls the reader to question discrimination and to value Indigenous knowledge production. In the following section, I analyze in particular how Xochitiotzin takes head on that discrimination against Nahua women and the Nahuatl language.

“They Say”: The Concluding Poems of *Tlaoxtika*

The final poems shift to more of an inner-dialogue of Xochitiotzin with her surroundings. In the ninth poem, “Yejuan kijtoa,” Xochitiotzin speaks of what “they say” about the root of the flower described in the previous poems “Flor de maíz” and “Semilla de sol”:

“Yejuan kijtoa”

in neluayo xochitl moxipetsoa
Itlajto patlani kanik saso
Itech itemikilis kitlajkitti in tlauli ixayak
¡X'konkaki!
Ipa iyolotsi uetsi sitlallime
Tonauak mota okse
Kuentla kitlaneluayokixtilia
Kemia tlieui in xochitl
Uan xochitlakaualtsin nin tlajtol
¿Kox kuajtsintli?
¿ameyali? (19)

“They Say”

That the root of the flower denudes itself
its words fly all around
Dreams weave the light of its face
Listen!
Over its heart fall stars,
outside they eradicate its root.
The flower darkens,
but they feed the word.
Is it a tree?
A spring?

“Ellos dicen”

Que la raíz de la flor se desnuda,
su voz vuela por todos lados,
el sueño teje la luz de su rostro.
¡Escucha!
Sobre su corazón caen estrellas,
afuera extirpan su raíz.
Oscurece la flor,
pero alimentan la palabra.
¿Es árbol?
¿Manantial? (20)

Dreams weave together the light of her face. The line *¡X'konkaki!* (Listen!) is set apart to emphasize the importance of listening to these words. Outside “they” extirpate its roots, again alluding to those who attempt to destroy Nahua practices. The flower darkens but a different “they” nourishes “the word.” The final lines ask if corn is a tree or a spring, accentuating its strength and ability to nourish as a symbol again of Xochitlotzin’s heritage. The poetic voice makes clear that “they” can say what they want—in a sense othering these oppressors by not naming them—but she will value that heritage passed down by her ancestors.

In the tenth poem, “Malinalli” / “Enredadera” (Entanglement), Xochitiotzin speaks of the word entangling her heart. This short poem consists of seven lines that vary in length from one to eleven syllables. She speaks to “the word” in the second person informal:

Tlajtol tlen tikmalina noyolotsin
tiktemoa itech in mesintl
¡Xijsa!
timahuilti itech nonauak,
amo ximopolo,
amo ximopolo,
amo. (21)

Palabra que enredas mi corazón
¿Qué buscas en la luna?
¡Despierta!
Juega conmigo,
no te pierdas,
no te pierdas,
no. (22)

Word, you entangle my heart
What do you look for in the moon?
Awake!
do not get lost,
do not get lost,
no.

The poetic voice asks “the word” what it looks for in the moon and at the center of the poem exclaims that it must “wake up.” This highlights the need to not leave the word or Nahuatl language dormant. The poetic voice tells the word to play with her and to not be lost, repeated in the final three verses. As analyzed in the previous chapters, *Polihui* is commonly used constantly to refer to how the Nahuatl language is being lost: *poliuhhticah tlahtolli* (the word is being lost). But here in this book of poetry Xochitiotzin counters this loss with *tlaoxtika in tlajtol* (grinding words). The title’s use of the present progressive emphasizes that this grinding of words is happening now. The last one syllable line of the poetry is a definitive no in defiance of those who attempt to disappear the language. The title of this poem is especially significant since *Malinalli* (entanglement) is popularly considered to be Doña Marina’s original name before

baptism, and Marina was chosen because of its similarity.⁶³ The poetic voice in “Malinalli” breaks with depictions of Doña Marina as a traitor or “entanglement,” and instead calls for a reawakening of Nahuatl words/writing from women.

Xochitlotzin offers a short poem of four verses entitled “Teskatl” / “Espejo” (Mirror). It is the twelfth poem in *Tlaoxtika* and the lines vary in length from four to twelve syllables:

Mo ixtololotsin okitak notesca,
teskatl temiki,
temiktli amo kipia xayak.
Xayakatsin.
tlajtol tlapokjtok. (25)

Tus ojos vieron mi espejo,
espejo lleno de sueños,
sueños sin rostro.
Rostro,
palabra abierta. (26)

Your eyes say my mirror,
mirror full of dreams,
dreams without a face.
Precious face,
word that is open.

The words *ixtololotsin* and *ojos* look like what they represent with the multiple *o o*: the eyes. This visual on the page imitates the looking into a mirror with eyes directed back at the reader. Imagery of the mirror is tied to the poem’s plays with point of reference. In a reflection, “your eyes” saw “my mirror” could be an internal dialogue of the poetic voice with herself. As the poem describes, this is a mirror full of dreams that the poetic voice desires fulfilled. Nonetheless, these are dreams without a face, symbolic of them not yet having been realized. The poetic voice then sets “Xayakatsin” (precious or revered face) apart in its own verse for emphasis with a reverential suffix. This “face” is then described as “tlajtol tlapokjtok” (open words). These words are “open” because the poetic persona aims to give these dreams a face. She has the power to choose and shape these words and

desires. While *Tlaoxtika* emphasizes the importance of language and ancestors, these connections to the past do not restrict her. In interviews she speaks of how in her poetry she seeks to break with “lo trillado” (hackneyed representations) in previous Nahuatl poetry, and she seeks to give her own unique contributions in Nahuatl and Spanish.⁶⁴

Near the end of the text, in the thirteenth poem entitled “Xolko temiktlī” / “Surco de sueños” (Furrows of Dreams), Xochitiotzin’s poetic persona alludes to the physical and emotional abuse she has suffered within and outside her community. I close with an analysis of this poem:

Ipa in yeyantsi oajsik in chokalis
 Oteten in tepetl
 Non ichpopokatsi okipolo ni ajauil
 Okikajteua se xolko temiktl
 Nikan amo yen tej
 Mostla tikalakis ipan tlanex
 ¡Xnejnemi! Xkaua ipan nin amatl moyolkokolis

Sobre esta hacienda llegó un mar de llanto
 inundó la montaña.
 Esa niña perdió sus juegos,
 dejó un surco de sueños.
 Aquí no eres tú
 Mañana entrarás al crepúsculo,
 ¡Camina! Deja en el papel las cicatrices de tu llanto.

On this estate arrived a sea of weeping
 it flooded the mountain.
 That girl lost her games,
 she left a furrow of dreams.
 Here you are not you
 Tomorrow you will enter the twilight,
 Walk! Leave the scars of your weeping upon the paper.

The poetic voice tells of suffering on the *hacienda*, or large estate on which Nahuas are commonly employed for low wages. Suffering of these workers inundates the community: “Oteten in tepetl” (It flooded the mountain). Water and hill/mountain constitute a town or city (the meaning of *altepetl*), but here water is a destructive force that washes them out. The *haciendas* would seek to take over large tracts of land, thus

displacing (or “flooding”) out community members and in turn hiring them under unjust conditions.

Xochitiotzin’s poetic persona parallels this oppression with her own traumatic experiences. When she was a young girl, Xochitiotzin experienced abuse from a man in the community.⁶⁵ The recovery from that occurrence has in part fed her desire to uproot the discourses of male domination that help fuel such incidents. She represents the effects of this through the poetic voice of “Xolko temiktli.” As a child this poetic persona “lost her games” and “left furrows of dreams.” Her innocence and youthful optimism was taken away and she is no longer herself: “Nikan amo yen tej” (‘Here you are not you’). Nonetheless, the poetic voice does not remain in a victimized state of mind, but rather exclaims in the final line: “¡Xnejnemi! Xkaua ipan nin amatl moyolkokolis” (‘Walk! Leave the scars of your weeping upon the paper’). “Leaving scars of weeping” on paper symbolizes the cathartic transference of past trauma unto the page, which the text *Tlaoxtika* we have just experienced ourselves as readers represents. In this turn the verses on the page themselves suggest the image of both the furrows of a field and scars lines across the page. With the imagery of furrows and the water that originates from tears, the poem hints at a possible renewal through the expression of this suffering—both Xochitiotzin’s personal traumas as well as the generalized suffering of those in her community under difficult economic circumstances—a strength can be cultivated that would allow them to walk, *xnejnemi*. This walk is symbolic of active participation of Nahuas in challenging economic and social inequalities, as well as the knowledge production that the root *nemi* suggests in Nahuatl. As I have analyzed in this section,

Xochitiotzin in the final poems emphasizes her own articulation of a Nahua identity in which women have a potent voice and do not hesitate to denounce discrimination.

Concluding Remarks: Beyond “Receptacles of Tradition”

This chapter has sought to introduce contemporary Nahua women authors, and offer a close observation of Xochitiotzin’s *Tlaoxtika in tlajtol*. I analyzed three main themes in her text: the past and remembrance within the first poems, maize metaphors at the center of the text, and articulation of Nahua identity within the final poems. Nahua perspectives articulated within this text—principally *tlachiyaliztli* (observance), *ixtlamatiliztli* (knowledge with the face), *tlaixpan* (that which is in front), and *yoltlallamiquiliztli* (knowledge with the heart)—functioned as a theoretical grounding that allowed me to offer more in-depth reading of Xochitiotzin’s poems. I illustrated in my analysis of *Tlaoxtika* that she addresses the main topics in a way that undermines male-dominated spaces. Xochitiotzin transforms common metaphors within Nahua poetry to position women as decision makers within and outside their communities. In doing so, she subverts Nahua male authors’ traditional objectification of them.

In my textual analysis, I concluded that Xochitiotzin writes against a context that attempts to bar her from literary spaces. In doing so she takes up “masculine” metaphors such as the sun and maize—a male dominance exemplified in the overview of this problematic in male authors’ writing near the beginning of the chapter—and uproots the narrative framework in which the male is the stronger light of the sun and women the moon, or men the “choice seed” and women like a passive landscape receiving it. Through her poetry, she instead positions women as agents of change within their

communities and capable of offering the wise solutions that emerge from Nahua stressing close observance and ancestral knowledge production. Xochitiotzin's text points toward new directions in Nahua literary production and promises to change the ways in which we perceive it. She helps to correct the erroneous presupposed absence of Nahua women writers described in the introduction to this chapter.

In contrast with Nahua women writers, Zapotec and Maya authors have extensive publications and have also received recognition such as the Premio Nezahualcoyotl. This recognition is one of the most famous prizes within Indigenous literatures. Recipients receive extensive news coverage, one hundred thousand pesos (approximately \$10,000), and the publication of one of their works. Natalio Hernández was the first recipient of this award in 1993, and authors Librado Silva Galeana (1995) and Juan Hernández (2006) are the other Nahuas to have won the award. Zapotec poet Natalia Toledo was the first woman to win this recognition in 2004, and Maya novelist Marisol Ceh Moo most recently in 2014. Toledo has published four books of poetry and Ceh Moo multiple novels. While these Indigenous women writers have gained extensive access to publication venues, Nahua women are virtually unheard of in these circles. This chapter identifies some of the reasons why this is the case, among them a resistance both inside and outside their communities to their participation in literary production. Nonetheless, in spite of publications from women of other Indigenous nations, they by no means have had it easy. They have also met with similar challenges in attempting to distribute their works. A case in point, of the fifteen writers who have received the Premio

Nezahualcoyotl, Ceh Moo and Toledo are the only women among the awardees. Rather what we see with Nahua women is this gender discrimination taken to an extreme.

An important role in the publishing process, it almost seems unnecessary to say, is that of a healthy editor-author relationship. Without this help, it is difficult for an author to publish. Unfortunately, the older generation of authors tends to be reluctant to help younger authors with publication, and even more so male authors seem reticent to aid Nahua women authors. Whether due to a perception of women authors as competition within a small niche of the publishing world or preconceptions about these writers, the fact is that little has been published. A more propitious setting would also entail Nahua women entering positions of power in which they themselves are the editors deciding what gets published and offering help to new authors—a structure in which they do not have to receive approval of the “male editors of the sun.”

There may be fear that receiving these works that critique male chauvinism within Indigenous communities could work counter to Indigenous movements fighting for autonomy and reparations. Similar to Andrea Smith’s experience shared at the beginning of this chapter, one male author told me that first Nahua authors must win the fight to receive recognition for their communities before turning inward to critique practices within the community. According to him, it is a conversation that needs to occur, but now is not the time. Such criticism would reinforce the stereotype that in Indigenous communities people are backward. Nonetheless, Nahua women authors do not agree with such perspectives.

The postponement of this issue seems like a perpetual excuse that would keep it from ever being addressed. This is obviously not an issue restricted to Indigenous communities but one that encompasses the globe. Addressing the problem, rather than reinforce stereotypes, should instead defy the persistent idea that Nahuas themselves cannot analyze and question their own communities. It also shows the diversity of voices within communities popularly believed to be homogenous. Nahua women writers' perspectives are not to be victimized, but rather to represent agents of change. They know of the situation and who better than they to offer solutions to this situation.

Within the texts explored in this chapter, we see strategies of self-representation common to women's literary movements in many parts of the globe, such as overturning of metaphors that attempt to objectify women and offering perspectives that break with male-dominated approaches. They help us question the often artificially imposed borders that nation-states attempt to impose and the national discourses that most often favor male subjects and ignore the great diversity of languages and communities within nation-state borders. This cultural production helps us to understand topics such as linguistic diversity, migration, and gender relations across the globe. My research points to the importance of seriously engaging with this literature, which underscores the multiplicity of voices and perspectives within Latin America, as well as among Nahuas themselves.

A promising area of research that this study points toward are future studies of not only contemporary Nahua women authors from the last two decades, but also the works of artists from the 1980s and earlier. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, it is important to reiterate that a very different narrative could be told about the

beginnings of the Nahuatl literary movement than that painted by the selection of a near majority of male authors in *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl* and other publications. For example, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Frances Karttunen points to Isabel Ramírez Castañeda and Julia Jiménez González and Luz Jiménez as key figures in the beginnings of contemporary Nahuatl literature. I am confident that there are many more authors like Jiménez whose works should be studied as well as numerous authors like Xochitiotzin who write without receiving overdue recognition.

Giving space to dissenting views within the communities, as is the case for many Nahuatl women authors, helps enrich Nahuatl and Indigenous studies at large, as would future publications by Nahuatl LGBTQ2 authors, some of which we already have in other Indigenous nations, such as Victor Cata in Juchitán, or Manuel Tzoc and Adela Delgado Pop in Guatemala. Nahuatl women authors like Xochitiotzin today expand the horizons of not only contemporary Indigenous literatures but also Latin American cultural production in general. Ethel Xochitiotzin, representative of these authors, seeks to correct heterosexist male lineages of Nahuatl literature and create a space for Nahuatl women's voices. Nahuatl women are not passive "receptacles" of tradition, as stereotypically so often portrayed, but rather they are knowledge producers who question, transform, and innovatively rewrite the knowledges within their communities.

¹ For example, Irma Pineda and Natalia Toledo, among many other authors, publish in the *Diidxazá* [didza'za] language; Mikeas Sánchez in Zoque; Celerina Sánchez in Tu'ún ñuu savi; Juana Karen in Cho'ol; Enriqueta Lunez in Tsotsil; Briceida Cuevas Cob and Marisol Ceh Moo in Yucatec Maya.

² By "author" I do not mean solely authors of written texts. An excessive focus on the written word resembles the formation of a cultured elite—predominately men—critiqued by Ángel Rama in *Ciudad letrada*. Such a framework encourages the creation of a privileged class with the goal of inscribing oneself in the upper echelons of intellectual production. Linda Tuhiwai Smith addresses the idea of "Native intellectuals" in *Decolonizing Methodologies* and warns that "What is problematic is that this group of men have been named by the dominant non-indigenous population as individuals who represent 'real'

leadership. They have been idealized as the ‘saviours of the people’ and their example remains as a ‘measure’ of real leadership” (73). Rather than challenge patriarchal hierarchies, this approach reiterates male-dominated knowledge production and constitutes gaining a space within the present system instead of transforming it. A focus on written texts excludes the intellectual production of Nahua women through other mediums such as textiles, visual art, oral narratives, music, and ceremony. Nahua independent scholar Eneida Hernández prefers the terms *saberes* (knowledges) and *valores* (values) to refer to Nahua cultural production in general and avoid a privileging of written texts (see “Xochikali Tepeko: Moyolitia sintsi”).³ For more on this stigma, see Delfino Carro Muñoz, *El estigma de los tlaxcaltecas* (2012). Tlaxcaltecas offer counter discourses to this anathema, emphasizing that Tlaxcala never “sucumbió a las presiones ejercidas sobre ella” (García Cook XXV). This history emphasizes this heterogeneity among Nahuas, especially across regions, as Tlaxcaltecas tend to see “Mexico” from Mexico City also as conquerors, conflated for Tlaxcaltecan authors with the fact that Nahuas from other regions dominate publishing houses.

⁴ Tetepetla is a small archaeological zone located to the northeast of Xochitiotzin’s home municipality of Contla. The site is most well-known for the extended fortifications surrounding it, with walls and ditches constructed on the northeastern side of the Malinche volcano. The size of this site suggests that the area near Contla at one point held an expansive population, in the early postclassic period between 900-1100. Within the symbolism of Xochitiotzin’s poetry, these fortifications at the foot of Malinche represent strength and active resistance in the historical figure Malinche, in contrast to Paz’s depiction of her as handing herself over to the Spanish conquistadors. See “Tetepetla: Un sitio fortificado del ‘clásico’ en Tlaxcala,” from *Comunicaciones: Proyecto Puebla Tlaxcala*. No. 10.

⁵ One finds texts from authors such as Delfino Hernández, Natalio Hernández, Librado Silva, and Alfredo Ramírez. See Karttunen, 441. Volumes of *Estudios de cultura náhuatl* can be consulted online at <http://www.historicas.unam.mx/publicaciones/revistas/nahuatl/ecnum.html>.

⁶ Isabel Ramírez Castañeda wrote a paper in 1912 on the cultural practices of Milpa Alta. This paper is published in the *Proceedings* of the 18th International Congress of Americanists. That same year, Ramírez shared Nahuatl texts with Frans Boas, and Boas published these texts in the 1920s. He describes Ramírez along with another author as “informants” (438). Luz Jiménez worked as an “informant” for Benjamin Lee Whorf in the 1930s, Robert Barlow in the 1940s and early 1950s, and Fernando Horcasitas in the 1950s and 1960s. See Karttunen, “Indigenous Writing,” 338-440.

⁷ Patriarchal hierarchy is deep rooted in Spanish colonialism (colonialism in general for that matter), and Nahua women experienced a decline in their authority in politics, law, and religion (See Truitt 416-417). Nevertheless, far from passive subjects, these women exercised agency to create spaces of empowerment in the colonial system. See Jonathan Truitt, “Courting Catholicism: Nahua Women and the Catholic Church in Colonial Mexico City”; Susan Kellogg, *Law and the Transformation of Aztec Culture, 1500-1700*; Stephanie Wood, “Gender and Town Guardianship in Mesoamerica: Direction for Future Research”; Karen Vieira Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest: The Gendered Genesis of Spanish American Society, 1500-1600*; William B. Taylor, *Drinking, Homicide, and Rebellion in Colonial Mexican Villages*.

⁸ In addition to this cognitive abuse, a number of Nahua women writers with whom I spoke shared experiences of sexual harassment and abuse both within and outside their communities.

⁹ I shift between the words *ixtlamatini* (knowers with the face) and *intellectual* because of the problematic connotations *intellectual* carries of one separated objectively from the subjects one studies. *Intellectual* overemphasizes cognition at the cost of affect. While there are notable attempts to shift this meaning, beginning with Gramsci and the concept of an “organic intellectual,” I consider that using *ixtlamatiquetl* more effectively points toward a decolonized notion of who constitutes a producer of knowledge and opens to a wider conception of what constitutes “text”—music, artisan work, dance etc.

¹⁰ Unpublished manuscript, 2012.

¹¹ I heard this repeatedly during fieldwork from 2010 to 2013.

¹² Gayatri Spivak highlights the problem of Third World intellectuals not being taken seriously when she states: “For me, the question ‘Who should speak?’ is less crucial than ‘Who will listen?’ ‘I will speak for myself as a Third World person’ is an important position for political mobilization today. But the real demand is that, when I speak from that position, I should be listened to seriously; not with that kind of

benevolent imperialism” (59-60). To this can be added “benevolent patriarchy” within Third World communities of male intellectuals toward women.

¹³ This emphasis on observation reflects numerous studies regarding “observational learning.” Such studies have shown that Indigenous peoples of the Americas have a greater capacity to learn from close observation. See Barbara Rogoff, “Learning by Observing and Pitching In to Family and Community Endeavors: An Orientation”; Andrew D. Coppens, “Children’s Initiative in Family Household Work in Mexico”; Suzanne Gaskins, “Open Attention as a Cultural Tool for Observational Learning.”

¹⁴ This view of the past is similar to how history is conceptualized within the Aymara language. The word for “FRONT” (*nayra*, “eye/front/sight”) is also a basic expression meaning PAST, and the basic word for BACK (*qhipa*, “back/behind”) is a basic expression meaning FUTURE” (Núñez and Sweetser 2). For a discussion of this concept in Aymara, see Rafael E. Núñez and Eve Sweetser, “With the Future Behind Them: Convergent Evidence from Aymara Language and Gesture in the Crosslinguistic Comparison of Spatial Construals of Time.” Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui emphasizes this view forward to the past in the terms *nayrapacha* (past-as-future) and *pachakuti* (overturning of time). See Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *Violencias (re) encubiertas en Bolivia*, 39-51.

¹⁵ See Rafael E. Núñez and Eve Sweetser, “With the Future Behind Them: Convergent Evidence from Aymara Language and Gesture in the Crosslinguistic Comparison of Spatial Construals of Time.”

¹⁶ These depictions within Nahuatl poetry are analyzed later in this chapter.

¹⁷ Personal interview, 10 February 2013.

¹⁸ bell hooks addresses a similar problem within feminisms and ethnic vindications, critiquing racism within feminist movements and sexism within ethnic movements. See bell hooks, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* (1984).

¹⁹ The lack of invocations to the Mexican nation-state probably also contributes to her works not being published. It is important to note that Tlaxcala has traditionally been viewed at odds with the Mexican central government and viewed as peripheral to Mexico City. In *Tlaxcala: Sociedad, economía, política y cultura*, Sociologist Mario Ramírez Ranaño mentions that jokes abound in Mexico City regarding Tlaxcaltecan liminality and poverty—such as Abel Quezada’s satires that the state should be sold to Switzerland because of its economic importance, a laser should be burned into the state and create a hole that could then be filled with water for the capital’s recreation, or else the state turned into a giant parking lot for capitalinos (9).

²⁰ For an excellent analysis of the conflation of masculinist constructions with national discourses in Mexico during the late nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century, see Héctor Domínguez Ruvalcaba, *Modernity and the Nation in Mexican Representations of Masculinity* (2007). Andrea Smith contends that feminism is closely entwined with struggles against colonialism and nation-state models that inherently create marginalized communities. See Smith, 160.

²¹ One of the main tenets of *indigenismo* is an unequal relationship in which those from the dominant sectors of society speak on behalf of marginalized indigenous peoples incapable of defending themselves. Nahuatl male authors speaking for women resembles Pablo Neruda’s *indigenista*-laden declaration that he would speak through the “dead mouths” and spirit of indigenous peoples (*Canto general*, 78).

²² See Pablo Yanes, “Mexico’s Targeted and Conditional Transfer: Between Oportunidades and Rights” (2011).

²³ See *México: Diversas lenguas una sola nación. Antología de poesía en lenguas mexicanas* (2008).

²⁴ Personal interview, 5 April 2014.

²⁵ For example, *tlahtolli* and *tlaxcalli*, word and tortilla, are pronounced *tláhtolli* and *tláxcalli*. Yankuik Metzli takes great pride in the idiosyncratic aspects of her community’s variant.

²⁶ For example, Mardonio Carballo and Martín Barrios have both produced music in these genres.

²⁷ Personal interview with Judith Santopietro, 10 September 2013.

²⁸ This symbol is referred to as *voluta* in both Spanish and English because of its similarity to a similar to a shape found within architecture in columns.

²⁹ It is disconcerting that it appears even more difficult for women authors from the Huasteca, the region from which the greatest number of male writers come. I spent nearly an entire year in this region, and I was unable to meet women who dedicated themselves to writing. Nonetheless, I am confident that there are

women writers in the Huasteca, especially considering that it is presently the region with the largest population Nahuas. I hope that future studies can highlight their works.

³⁰ Personal interview, 10 February 2013.

³¹ While they still maintain contact with one another, this collective has been unable to continue meeting due to the costs of travel to the city of Tlaxcala.

³² A case in point, while *Estudios de cultura náhuatl* has allowed space for contemporary Nahua authors' writings, the journal is still by far and large about Nahuatl documents from the colonial period. Less than 5% of its articles pertain to contemporary Nahuatl.

³³ Alonso de Molina gives both *cihuatl* and *zouatl* in his dictionary. Karttunen specifies that *cihuatl* is "the standard form for the valley of Mexico" (*Nahuatlaxitlahuquetl*).

³⁴ Personal interview, 10 February 2013.

³⁵ Personal interview, 10 February 2013.

³⁶ The root of this word is *oya*. *Quioya* would specify an object (to shell *it*) whereas *tlaoya* uses the unspecified *tla* (simply "to shell").

³⁷ Xochitiotzin's shiftings between Spanish and Nahuatl resemble Spivak's consideration of "the role played by language for the *agent*, the person who acts, even though intention is not fully present to itself" (398). Spivak argues that "the task of the feminist translator is to consider language as a clue to the workings of gendered agency. The writer is written by her language, of course. But the writing of the writer writes agency in a way that might be different from that of the British woman/citizen with the history of British feminism, focused on the task of freeing herself from Britain's imperial past, its often racist present, as well as its 'made in Britain' history of male domination" (397-98). See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Politics of Translation," *The Translation Studies Reader* (2000). Xochitiotzin, as both author and translator, exercises multiple layers of agency in writing and she does not have the same ethical bind to be loyal to her own "original." As shall be seen in the chapter, reading between the differences in the Spanish and Nahuatl versions reveals "workings of gendered agency" in Xochitiotzin's translation.

³⁸ In *Speaking Mexicano*, Jane Hill recognizes the stigma both from Nahuas and non-Nahuas against supposedly "corrupt" Nahuatl (1-3). The supposed standard of an "authentic," "pure" form of the language often causes greater harm than good, leading to a synthetic form of the language that only a handful of speakers can use. In contrast, Hill uses the term "synthetic" to refer to the use of loan words in Nahuatl to emphasize the agency and creativity of those who employ such language rich with influence from both Spanish and Nahuatl (1).

³⁹ Personal interview, 10 February 2013.

⁴⁰ Unpublished manuscript from 2012.

⁴¹ "Shelling" is technically the correct term, but this word has fallen out of use for corn along with the practice of doing drying out maize in the United States and Europe. See "shell, v.," Oxford English Dictionary.

⁴² As analyzed previously in other chapters, Nahuatl poetics are not organized around a certain number of syllables, but rather on a rhythm that must flow continually. In the introduction Xochitiotzin identifies the poems as being written in free verse (i). Her descriptions of writing in "free verse" are symbolic of her own desire to break free from prior convention both in Spanish and in Nahuatl. In interviews, Xochitiotzin described to me that "Soatzin" was meant to be set to music, her own melody that she had created. There is a certain rhythm that for the most part authors attempt to achieve that resembles ceremonial language and chants, and it is difficult to quantify how this rhythm is achieved. She is influenced by this style. All authors with whom I have had the opportunity to speak describe the attainment of this rhythm as intuitive—you know if it is right when you hear it. It is quite common to list different elements one line after another in rapid succession in this formula. This is reflected often in the lack of punctuation in many of the poems in Nahuatl. In some poems the Spanish version carries punctuation but the Nahuatl version does not.

⁴³ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are the author's. As mentioned previously, Xochitiotzin's poetry constitutes a mutual dialogue between Nahuatl and Spanish. The translation I give also attempts to do such, informed by both versions of the poems.

⁴⁴ These are two elements that Xochitiotzin describes in interviews as giving her strength to write poetry. Personal interview, 10 February 2013. In narrations from this region transcribed by Xochitiotzin for a book

to teach Nahuatl, she shares a story entitled “In ueuetonaltsin uan tlakuatsin” (“The Old Sun and the Possum”) in which the rainbow represents literary production: “kinkaua kimauiltiaj ika itlapal in kosemalotl, kitlakuiloa ixayak in tlapoualis, tlen kitlapoa yej” (“[the sun] lets them play with the colors of the rainbow, they write/paint the face of his stories, which he tells”) (*Manual de náhuatl*, 73; http://issuu.com/digital-editorial/docs/manual_nahuatl). Children play with the colors of the rainbow and thus are able to create art themselves.

⁴⁵ See Susan Schroeder, “The Annals of Chimalpahin,” 3.

⁴⁶ The female gender of the *huesuda* in Spanish indicates that she directs herself to a woman.

⁴⁷ See Hugo Gino Nutini, *Todos Santos in Rural Tlaxcala: A Syncretic, Expressive, and Symbolic Analysis of the Cult of the Dead*, 116.

⁴⁸ These relationships of kinship relate to the concept of *comunalidad* (communality) as a system of social relations outside the bounds of the nation-state. Zapotec anthropologist Alejandra Aquino Moreschi highlights the tensions between the neoliberal government and proponents of *comunalidad*: “ante la apuesta del Estado por un multiculturalismo ‘ornamental y simbólico’ . . . ellos le apuestan a la autodeterminación comunitaria; frente al modelo estatal de democracia partidista que se ha caracterizado por el fraude. . . ellos le apuestan a un modelo de gobierno basado en la idea de ‘servicio’ y compromiso con la comunidad. . . finalmente, frente al individualismo imperante le han apostado al trabajo comunitario como base del bien común” (12). Along with Aymara feminists, Aquino also warns against the idealization of Indigenous communities and the need to criticize the “patriarchal junction” (entronque patriarcal) of unjust relationships between men and women in both Pre-Columbian and Western patriarchies (15). Xochitiotzin similarly highlights the kinship within her community, but not at the cost of ignoring the unjust relations between men and women.

⁴⁹ Spanish version entitled “Donde nace el arcoiris”: “Ethel Xochitiotzin Pérez / Tierra morena. / El arcoiris nace en tu urdimbre / hilos que tejen mi huipil y llenan de luz mi cuerpo. / ¡Hazme un ceñidor, / dal fuerza a mi vientre! / Sé semilla, / sé manantial / al pie de la Malintzi. / Tetepetla lugar donde nace tu rostro. / Hace siglos nuestros ancestros construyeron tu historia, / diseñaron ollas, / cada una lleva el color, el sabor y el aroma de esta tierra. / Cuando llegaron los españoles, fueron quebradas, / quedaron esparcidas en tu cuerpo. / Se funda el pueblo de Contla / ahora tu cuerpo se forma de hilos, / hilos que llevan tu raíz. / Juárez, / Aztlata, / Tlacomulco, / Xelhua, / Xicotenco, / Xochayatlá / Cuatzincola, / Acucic, / Axolhuaca. / Hilos que tejen cobija, saltillo, ceñidores, / hilos que desprenden el aroma del mole prieto, / hilos que se mueven al son del *Xochipitzahuatl*, y de los *Catrines*, / hilos que tejen el corazón del conteco y la conteca” (9-10).

⁵⁰ Personal interview, 10 February 2013. When I visited Xochitiotzin in Tlaxcala, we went through an open air market where whitening cream was sold. She complained of how people with darker skin use cosmetics in an attempt to whiten their skin.

⁵¹ Literary critic Jahan Ramazani comments on the tendency of writers fighting colonial practices to list names of cities and geographical features: “Consequently, imaginative writers often make use of the decolonizing list to invert this process, repossessing multinational regions through toponym-studded poems” (144). Particularly through the poem “Donde nace el arcoiris,” Xochitiotzin makes a decolonial turn by referring to the municipality only by its Nahuatl name (rather than the full name with its patron saint, San Bernardino Contla) and by listing the Nahuatl names of its nine communities (with the exception of Juárez, named after Indigenous President Benito Juárez).

⁵² *Xochipitzahuatl* (“Precious Little Flower”) is a traditional melody played on special occasions such as weddings. See Juan Luna Ruiz, *Tlaxcala*.

⁵³ For more details regarding these depictions, see Jacqueline Messing, “Multiple Ideologies and Competing Discourses,” 556. Contla lies in what could be described as the marginality of marginality. If the capital city of Tlaxcala is considered inconsequential in national perceptions of the state, Contla even more so as residents of the capital of Tlaxcala itself consider it excessively provincial and the area does not even register in the national imagination.

⁵⁴ In the poems one can see the influence of Spanish in the spacing of many words (such as the separation of the subject and object markers from the root of the verb, seen in the alternation between the spelling *niknekiskia* and *nik nekiskia*. *Nik nekiskia* resembles more Spanish syntax “Yo quisiera”). The idea of

something constituting correct grammar or orthography plays an important part in power struggles in which a certain way of speaking is imposed upon others. As analyzed previously, command of a certain elite Nahuatl or claims to such a Nahuatl functions particularly as a way for men to marginalize women's Nahuatl. Women are popularly viewed as speaking a Nahuatl of the kitchen, or daily chores, but not possessing a Nahuatl that transcends everyday tasks.

⁵⁵ Xochitiotzin gives the approximate translation of “tu mirada” (“your look”) in Spanish, but the word *motlachilis* carries the deeper meaning of “close observation” or a “watchful look.” In interviews, Xochitiotzin speaks of the importance of being able to carefully observe one's surroundings. She states that all people should possess this ability, but many do not because of distractions.

⁵⁶ Personal interview, 10 February 2013.

⁵⁷ See Alan Sandstrom, *Corn Is Our Blood*, 122.

⁵⁸ “Onijtlati[h] notlahtol” in orthographies that do not mark long vowels, such as Xochitiotzin's, can also mean “I burned my words.” *Onijtlātih* with a long ā is “I hid” and *onijtlatih* is “I burned.”

⁵⁹ Tlaxcalan Nahuatl uses *tlahtol* without the absolute ending *-li*, hence the title of Xochitiotzin's book *Tlaoxtika in tlajtol*.

⁶⁰ Personal interview, 10 February 2013.

⁶¹ In interviews, Xochitiotzin lamented that there was not much of a public for her poetry within her hometown. While they would politely listen, most considered poetry as a profession to be a wasteful use of time that would lead to literal hunger. Personal interview, 10 February 2013.

⁶² In interviews Xochitiotzin speaks of not being able to hide that history and those roots, that they can be seen on the skin. Personal interview, 10 February 2013.

⁶³ See Karttunen, “Rethinking Malinche,” 302.

⁶⁴ Personal interview, 10 February 2013.

⁶⁵ Personal interview, 10 February 2013. Out of confidentiality, I do not give details regarding this abuse.

Remapping toward the East: Inconclusive Conclusions and New Horizons in Nahua Cultural Production

In his famous drawing entitled “América invertida” / “Inverted America” (1943), Uruguayan artist Joaquín Torres García flips a map of the Americas on its head to situate it toward the South.¹ Such a move suggests a different framework in which the global South takes center stage in knowledge production. More recently Nahua artist Eneida Hernández completed a piece of artwork, entitled “Universo de las hilanderas” / “Universe of Women Spinners” (2010), in which she reorients space toward the East (see Appendix 1). This image touches upon main themes explored in this study. Her embroidered painting represents the five cardinal directions in Mesoamerica: East, North, West, South, and the fifth point where one stands. The central point is the East, since that is where the sun rises. Opposed to a hierarchical perspective with a North or South above in competition for hegemony, such a perspective places the world map horizontally “on its side” in what can be described as a heterarchical conceptualization.² As a Nahua woman artist, Eneida Hernández also associates the sun with women and their power to observe and create texts. Her alternative cartography questions male-dominated nation-state discourses and their framing of land and knowledge production according to conquest and invalidation of supposedly inferior “Others.” According to a colonized logic of national elites, subalternized and racialized populations who put in question the territorial and conceptual borders of the nation-state are deemed anathema and disposable. Implicit within “all-inclusive” national discourses is the exclusion of certain sectors of society—historically Indigenous populations among others.

Although a seemingly inconsequential shift, Hernández's turning of the map suggests that there are no superior epistemes, but rather numerous nodes of knowledge production—symbolically represented as spinning—along a network in which Nahuas are as significant as other actors. Eneida Hernández's art(net)work addresses one of the principal objectives of this study, which is to pay serious attention to Nahua perspectives. It is to see these epistemes as “central” in the sense of important and crucial, while at the same time challenging the rigid centers and borders that nation-states attempt to impose. The desire to evidence Nahua intellectual contributions in the present constitutes a principal aim throughout the texts of Natalio Hernández, Ildefonso Maya, Gustavo Zapoteco Sideño, and Ethel Xochitiotzin Pérez.

Eneida Hernández's image also points toward the heterogeneity and tensions within Nahua cultural production itself. There are numerous issues of contention within Nahua cultural production in addition to divergences and tensions across gender divides, rather than an overriding depiction of “Nahua literary production.” The present study has highlighted the diversity within this literature to challenge stereotypical depictions of Nahuas and Indigenous communities in general as homogenous. Attention to these divisions helps break down attempts to “other” Nahua communities as outside “modernity,” homogenized within in a distant pre-history, and devoid of individual subjectivities. In contrast, this study has seen Nahuas in flux and movement that call into question static re-presentations.

Migration constitutes a key concept and experience that unsettles these static views. Natalio Hernández wrote *Xochikoskatl* over a period of almost five years as a

means of coping with the social cacophony of Mexico City; Ildefonso Maya moved from his hometown community in Veracruz to the city of Huejutla de los Reyes, Hidalgo and also resided for years in Mexico City; Gustavo Zapoteco Sideño migrated from Guerrero to Tlaltizapán, Morelos in the nineties and has lived there since; Ethel Xochitiotzin Pérez left her home community to complete a Bachelor's in the University of Tlaxcala; Mardonio Carballo relocated from the Huasteca to Mexico City as a teenager to attend High School. Writing has served as a cathartic outlet for these artists to come to terms with an urban milieu that attempts to erase their very presence. They evidence a creation of networks that span across rural, urban, and spaces in-between and question the construction of “outside” and “inside” Indigenous communities relegated solely to rural areas; rather, rural communities form part of a wider system that spans across state, national, and international boundaries. Demands for land rights coexist with the strengthening of Nahua communities beyond those lands.

In the line *Iajki Estados Onidos* (She went to the U.S.) from “O yo te lloro como papán,” Mardonio Carballo's reference to his sister having traveled to the “Estados Onidos” constitutes an attempt to shift the map onto its side like Eneida Hernández's painting. Her washing cars instead of *nixtamal* suggests a displacement of Nahua practices; however, Carballo seeks through his work to overturn that marginalization. Although fraught with dangers and brought on by economic inequalities, the move toward the United States was still an exercise of his sister's agency. The reference to *nixtamal* symbolizes the contributions that Nahuas have to offer, and symbolizes a change in which Nahua knowledge production is recognized for its importance—not for

manual labor such as cleaning cars. As seen in the texts of this study and Nahua literary production in general, corn and its form as *nixtamal* constitute a metaphor for art and philosophy. Of great significance, *Iajki Estados Onidos* (She went to the United States) can also refer to leaving for Mexico City (where his sister actually lives now), as the official name for Mexico is the Estados Unidos Mexicanos. Such a move reveals the cracks within national discourse that attempts to paint a unified Mexican nation-state.

This play on *United States* resembles Natalio Hernández's proclamation analyzed in the first chapter that Nahuas are truly Mexican because they speak Mexican to signal the complex diversity within the country. The states are not unified, which Carballo ironizes by changing the *u* of *unidos* to *onidos*. This Nahuatlized version of the word underscores the divisions within Mexico, and the internal word *nido* (nest) also suggests the irony that the nation-state is not a welcoming space, a "nest," for Indigenous peoples. Rather than assimilate into supposedly superior urban centers in the United States or Mexico, Nahua artists highlight the innovative strategies that Nahuas employ to protect their cultural practices and worldviews. Ildefonso Maya's multitude of "mis"-pronunciations similar to "Onidos" in the figure Epitacio satires nation-state assimilationist education and dismantles the "national" language that figures central in its projects. Gustavo Zapoteco Sideño through *Cuicatl pan tlalliouatlmej* protests against both economic and social inequalities often masked by state developmentalism, and *Cuicatl*, although funded by Mexican government institutions, contains metaphors reflecting support for armed movements that seek radical change such as the Ejército Popular Revolucionario and Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional. Nahua women

authors such as Ethel Xochitiotzin Pérez call into question male-dominated discourses that pervade both nation-state discourse as well as Indigenous movements. As seen in my analysis of these authors, they bring attention to the complexities and nonconformities that make the nation-state uneasy.

Nahua writers' travel toward urban centers proposes a remapping in which, instead of receiving from the North, the movement is outward (*Iajki Estados Onidos*, **went to** the United States) to offer important perspectives that have been taken lightly. This study has used a number of these perspectives as the theoretical footing for an analysis of contemporary Nahua cultural production, among them: *tlaixpan* ("that which is in front"), *ixtlamatiliztli* ("knowledge with the face"), *yoltlallamiquiliztli* ("knowledge with the heart"), and *tlachiyaliztli* ("close observance"). These perspectives are renewing Indigenous empowerment within Abya Yala, that is, within Indigenous societies that deconstruct Latin America epistemically speaking, offering innovative theoretical and aesthetic approaches to challenges throughout the continent. *Tlaixpan* ("that which is front" or "altar") is tied to a reconceptualization of space and time reflective in the texts of Nahua authors. The altar appears explicitly in Ildefonso Maya's *Ixtlamatinij* and throughout this cultural production. Altars face toward the East to greet the morning sun. The ark over the altar represents solar passage across the sky.³ As the movement of the sun itself, the care for ancestor's knowledges represented upon the altar is not at all static—evidenced in Eneida Hernández's use of traditional designs in a highly innovative painting and within the unexpected turns of the literature analyzed in this study.

Yoltlallamiquiliztli is a central concept within Natalio Hernández's *Xochikoskatl* that questions the Western view of cognition separated from affective responses. An understanding of *yoltlallamiquiliztli* allowed me to bring out the deeper meaning of the heart in Hernández's poetry. These heart metaphors appear in every single poem of *Xochikoskatl*. At the time of its publication in 1985, *Xochikoskatl* was an unexpected development that used *yoltlallamiquiliztli* and other Nahuatl perspectives in Mexico City and in medium not previously associated with present-day Nahuas (a full-length book of lyric poetry).

The title of Ildefonso Maya's play *Ixtlamatinij* (those who possess knowledge with the face) derives from the term *ixtlamatiliztli*, and the performance challenges the notion that knowledge production takes place principally in educational institutions of urban centers in which "objective" analysis is emphasized. Such an "objective" approach has failed to heal the wounds of colonialism among Nahuas and instead continues to flay open the wound to this day, like Epitacio cutting his mother's hand. Far from an "objective" approach that purports to alleviate injuries more effectively, this faceless perspective places a finger in the colonial wound by rejecting Indigenous knowledge production and its own solutions to societal challenges. In contrast, Maya highlights within *Ixtlamatinij* the importance of Nahuatl local knowledges and personal experiences.

Tlaixpan figures as a crucial perspective within Gustavo Zapoteco Sideño's *Cuicatl pan tlalliouatlmej*. The knowledges passed down by ancestors appear with force within the text to uproot colonial practices—symbolized in the white man's death upon the altar in the poem "Angustia." *Tlachiyaliztli* figures prominently within Ethel

Xochitiotzin Pérez *Tlaoxtika in tlajtol* that emphasizes Nahua women's ability to closely observe surroundings and offer solutions to societal challenges. This study has both explored the appearance of these concepts within Nahua literature but also used them as theoretical guideposts in the method of analysis itself. References to the heart, altars, face, and observation took on wider implications with these Nahua perspectives.

The main themes of migration, heterogeneity, and authority have been crucial to my analysis. As mentioned in the introduction, when I first set out to research "contemporary Nahua literature," I expected to find at most a few texts to research and obtain "the Nahua perspective." Soon I realized such a project had been both impossible and naive. Far from any conclusive survey of "contemporary Nahua literature," this study has sought to bring attention to the plethora of works and the importance of analyzing them. There is no one "Nahua perspective," but there is a wealth of present-day cultural production that should be taken seriously. My findings point to the importance of specificities, of not only moving beyond the general marker of "indigeneity" but also within the specificities of "Nahua." Nahuas tend to identify first and foremost with the small community from which they or their relatives originate and the many kinship relationships that are tied to and transcend that space. As we come to understand these specificities, instead of offering provincial knowledges, their relevance to issues on a global scale comes increasingly into view.

Opening Up the Archive and Repertoire: Review of Texts Analyzed

Throughout his work beginning with *Xochikoskatl*, Natalio Hernández rejects what he terms a victim mentality. In this victimization of Indigenous peoples, the

specificities and knowledges that each community has to offer get lost in an endangered culture discourse. This discourse does not propose strategies to replace colonial practices, but merely laments that colonialism exists and speaks excessively of resistance.

Hernández was especially drawn to the Zapatista movement because of the concrete proposals and perspectives it offered as alternatives to a neoliberal state model. In a similar vein, *Xochikoskatl* proposes perspectives articulated within the Nahuatl language that help us understand pertinent issues such as migration, linguistic diversity, and interactions among different cultural practices.

Hernández represents Nahuas as actively participating in and questioning of the nation-state with epistemologies interwoven with the landscape, a respect for elders, an alternative view of time, and an affective intelligence. In his constant movement between his hometown of Lomas del Dorado and his other home in Mexico City, he negotiates the crossroad of territory and migration. It is significant that this literature surged in the 1980s and 1990s at a time when globalization began to accelerate. There is an assumed incommensurability between Indigenous claims to territory and their increasing migrations across the globe, and this assumption feeds into the idea that globalization spells the disappearance of Indigenous peoples. The term *indigenous* erroneously suggests this idea of being fixed to a certain land. Nonetheless, migrations are nothing new to Indigenous communities. They migrated into the continent of Abya Yala during the last glaciation to start with, and migrated continuously during pre-Hispanic times. It was only during the centuries when Spain occupied their territories that they latter tried to fix them in place, out of fear of insurrections. Migration serves as a main trope

throughout Hernández's *Xochikoskatl*. Hernández addresses these tensions and refashions a different sense of belonging and political representation. Thousands of Nahuas live in cities of Mexico, United States, and other areas away from their original lands. He represents an early engagement with this context that uproots re-presentations of Nahuas as "disappearing into the shadows."

In his play *Ixtlamatinij*, Ildefonso Maya questions the validity of Secretariat of Education rhetoric regarding "progress" brought to Nahua communities through government-sponsored Indigenous education. Maya thus questions the SEP archive of literature proclaiming the redemption of these communities through the repertoire of *Ixtlamatinij*. In a very real sense, there is an immense archive of SEP literature housed in the Mexican National Archive and Secretariat of Education that makes claims to having brought "Progress" to Indigenous communities.

Maya attempts to shift the audience's mentality toward education and elicit respect for Nahua practices and perspectives. This is a fitting transition from Natalio Hernández, as the perspectives that Hernández describes in his poetry appear within Maya's play. Ildefonso Maya and Natalio Hernández, as well as nearly all authors over the age of fifty, were hired as bilingual teachers to assimilate Indigenous alumni into the nation-state program. This marked a period of increased written literacy in Indigenous populations. Far from passive receptacles of the SEP's program, these professors began to contest the system. They pushed for acceptance of Indigenous languages and new programs that would respect their cultural practices and local knowledges. One of the key

objectives of their literary production is to create a space for this respect, especially among youth.

While Natalio Hernández's *Xochikoskatl* focuses on the experience of a Nahua in Mexico City, Ildefonso Maya's play depicts the actions of a Nahua who has traveled to the city and returns to his home community. Both highlight the movement of Nahuas and the tensions that arise from these movements. Neither should be read as a nostalgic longing for the original community. The works do not reject migration, but rather offer strategies for negotiating through it. The lyric poetic form in Hernández's *Xochikoskatl* allows him to emphasize his subjectivity against a backdrop of stereotypes that attempt to depict Indigenous peoples as desubjectivized, lost in a homogeneous community, and thus unable to make personal, calculated decisions. The dramatic format of *Ixtlamatinij* allows Maya to represent a multiplicity of voices and the importance of community knowledges and strategies against contrary perspectives that seek to eliminate them. The performance of the play itself serves as a means to lead both actor and audience to question pervasive discrimination.

The generational tensions among artists, such as that evidenced between Gustavo Zapoteco Sideño and Natalio Hernández, help to underscore the diversity within contemporary Nahua production. Although Gustavo Zapoteco Sideño and Natalio Hernández have their differences, they both attempt to create a space for Indigenous writers. A question that this raises is the possible creation of an elite class of authors. A criticism aimed toward literary production is that few read it. Older authors especially have been accused of being *indios permitidos*—the notion from Cusicanqui and Hale

explained in chapter three—funded and utilized by the government to show that it is attempting to help Indigenous populations. While it is important to raise this issue, I argue that neither Hernández nor Zapoteco Sideño is a passive recipient of these contexts. Both attempt to maneuver and open spaces to Native voices. A generational approach has the advantage of identifying a sentiment shared among many authors, but at the same time carries the drawback of grouping together authors who often differ significantly from one another. Ildefonso Maya and Natalio Hernández are significantly different from one another, both in their literary style and in strategies to fight discrimination. Gustavo Zapoteco Sideño and Mardonio Carballo differ greatly from one another too, especially in the latter's presence in nearly every possible form of media and even more open denunciation of injustices. In some ways the perception of a generational divide is in part rooted in electronic mediums. Younger authors use a wide array of media in addition to written texts to publish their denunciation of discrimination. In contrast, older authors have a more limited presence.

Ethel Xochitiotzin Pérez and other Nahua women artists point toward a tension with generations of both older and younger authors. These women question chauvinistic discrimination and position themselves as agents outside of domestic spaces and as loci of enunciation for Nahua perspectives. In doing so they offer an internal critique that defies a common dynamic in which foreign researchers arrive in communities and criticize male chauvinism, as if community members were unable to articulate their own critique (and also as if the researcher's own community of origin were extant of this). There are increasingly more publications from Nahua women artists, and this promises to

uproot problematic views toward women. This revision of Nahua cultural history offers an alternative literary genealogy from before Natalio Hernández in the 1980s. Nahua artist Luz Jiménez began to have her works published as early as the 1940s. The problem with speaking of a Nahua literary renaissance or rebirth (*renacimiento*) is that it both suggests that there was a gap in cultural production and downgrades literatures communicated orally, as if they were not worthy of the merit that written literature receives. This “Renaissance” favors male-dominated literary production, and discredits the long tradition of narratives within the community—narratives often communicated by women.⁴

La bodega / The Cellar: A Question of Readership

There is a large body of contemporary Nahua literature, but where do these texts get distributed? Who reads them? What is the size of this readership? In response to these questions, Mardonio Carballo remarks, “I have books with print runs of one-hundred thousand, thirty-thousand, seventy-thousand copies, but if you try to track them down you won’t find them. You won’t find them in the libraries or in schools. ‘Where are they?’ you ask: in a cellar” (Quoted in Sánchez de la Rosa).⁵ While emphasis has been placed on the publication of Indigenous literatures, the distribution and promotion of a new public for these works is scarce. In his article “Textos con pocos lectores: En busca del libro perdido,” journalist Jaime Eduardo García investigates how Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (CONACULTA) does not seek to function like a publishing house. One of the administrators of this program, Felipe Garrido explains that CONACULTA, “no es una editorial, aunque publique libros. Su tarea más importante es apoyar el trabajo

de los editores que están trabajando en México” (“is not a publishing house, although it publishes books. Its most important task is to support the work of editors who are working in Mexico”; quoted in Jaimeeduardo García). From travels throughout Central Mexico, Veracruz, and Guerrero, I have also seen that the circulation of these books is quite limited, and mostly concentrated in Mexico City. Carballo is probably the most active artist in promoting of a fan base for his work. Nevertheless, he admits that it has been difficult to find circulation in spite of his efforts. Considering the continual reduction in the number of readers, Indigenous print publications may even partially reinforce a stereotype of Native peoples as stuck in older, “analog” mediums.

With the great influence visual media has in the public imaginary in contrast with such a limited audience for print media, why do Nahua authors continue to write? Literature offers a powerful means to reimagine a society that respects Nahua practices and views. Writing also offers a means of catharsis to work through the difficult experiences of discrimination that these authors have faced. While the readership may be limited, the text is often as much for the writer as for the reader. These writings especially help foment dialogue among the authors themselves, who represent probably the audience most attentive to these publications. They also find it a means to question the official stories, such as recent events in Ayotzinapa. Against a backdrop in which there are few readers, Mardonio Carballo describes continuing to write as recognition that you are falling from a high-rise building but having the hope to succeed in building something during the fall down (quoted in Sánchez de la Rosa). It is a hope that they will build up enough of a readership to detain that fall. This literary production also functions as part of

a politics of Indigenous identity, in which it is as much for the authors themselves as for readers. Through these works writers are able to articulate their own notions of what it constitutes to be Nahua outside of official definitions with the very tool used to marginalize them and which they were deemed as incapable of wielding.

Another issue that arises in relation to Indigenous publications is that nearly all are funded by government programs, principally CONACULTA, scholarship programs administered by CONACULTA, and INALI. This funding for publications began in the early nineties amidst protests against quincentennial celebrations of Columbus's arrival to the Americas, and then increased exponentially after the Zapatista uprising in 1994. The Mexican government attempted to coopt Indigenous movements through developmentalist programs and scholarships for writers to show that they were attempting to ameliorate the "problema indio." Although funding for CONACULTA began to drop during the Felipe Calderón administration (2006-2012), and has fallen at an alarming rate during Peña Nieto's administration, there are still programs supporting publication.⁶ This context creates a somewhat ambivalent relationship in which these authors are critical of government actions against Indigenous populations, but then that same government funds the work in which those denunciations are made. In spite of their texts' criticism, "CONACULTA" (The *National* Council for Culture and the Arts) appears in bold letters on the covers and could be seen as reinforcing the very nation-state construction that First Peoples challenge. Why then do authors accept the funding? For one, major publishing houses disregard Indigenous literatures as unmarketable, and major distributors avoid them for the same reason.⁷ Government-funded editorial houses are one

of the few outlets they have to release their work. Even Mardonio Carballo's independent press receives support from CONACULTA. The general sentiment is "We take the funding, but not the recognition." In other words, they take the money but deny they need government approval or recognition to exist. Rather than handouts from the government, the funds are seen as long overdue—and excessively limited—reparations for the damages enacted against Indigenous populations over centuries.

In regards to the politics of publication, another important debate addresses whether Nahua writers and Indigenous authors in general risk constituting a Nahua educated elite. Within the confines of the Mexican state, such a privileged group could be viewed as favoring Western forms to gain acceptance at the cost of other Indigenous forms of expression that transgress the nation-state. In this sense, they become recolonized or, even worse, they recolonize themselves. These authors can find themselves stigmatized by the mainstream literary market place, since they do not write primarily in Spanish. This happens despite the fact that the publications with few exceptions are bilingual, so that a Spanish-reading public can have access to them. At the same time, they alienate themselves from their own Nahua bases and the concerns of their communities.⁸ This split is definitely a risk if written literature is displayed as a "higher" form in comparison to mass media and other artistic mediums. Nonetheless, rather than an elite process, this literature should be seen as a node in a network of numerous forms of expression. All Nahua authors are involved in numerous projects beyond their written texts, and in part these undertakings are vitally important to them in order to affirm that they are still members of the community and not some distant elite.

For example, Ildefonso Maya, Natalio Hernández, Gustavo Zapoteco Sideño, and Ethel Xochitiotzin Pérez have led a number of revitalization projects for the Nahuatl language and cultural practices within their communities. Community members in fact know Hernández more for these efforts than as a writer. Different mediums of cultural expression, from oral narratives to Nahua television programs, should be seen as on equal footing and part of a network of innovative expression. Such a perspective helps avoid the construction of a *letrado* elite. More studies are needed to see how to encourage readership of Nahua texts, but also viewings and listening of other media, within Nahua communities and beyond.

Crossing Borders: New Horizons in Contemporary Nahua Cultural Production

It is my hope that this study helps point to numerous other approaches to both contemporary Nahua cultural production and Indigenous production in Abya Yala in a more general sense. There are many other Nahua texts outside the purview of this dissertation. I have focused for the most part on poetry with the exception of Ildefonso Maya's play *Ixtlamatinij*. Nonetheless, these works, rather than art unto themselves, function as nodes in much larger projects of Nahua artists in demanding Indigenous rights and function with texts in a wide array of genres. For example, Natalio Hernández's poetry has been adapted into song by well-known artist Lila Downs and also by a Nahua children's choir based in the Huasteca and Mexico City. There are many more projects, genres, and media to explore, such as language courses, novels, short stories, film, radio, and television.

This range of expression is especially underscored in Mardonio Carballo's latest publication, entitled *Las horas perdidas* (2014). It is a book/DVD/CD collection that mixes multiple genres: diary, poetry, prog rock, and documentary. The transgression of genre borders highlights the creative potential in breaking with traditional categorizations. *Las horas* represents one of the most innovative developments in contemporary Nahua cultural production and is a promising area of study. Texts such as this one point to new horizons in Nahua cultural production where Indigenous artists fight visual and acoustic colonialism through a diverse array of media.

The dynamic transit viewed in the texts of this study come up against colonial concepts of land with closed systems of cultural territories. Within a colonialized cartography, the mapping process authorizes certain frameworks while denying others. This colonialized logic sets its conditions through everyday practices that seem natural and go uncontested. Natalio Hernández, Ildefonso Maya, Gustavo Zapoteco Sideño, and Ethel Xochitiotzin Pérez, among many Nahua artists, question the strict boundaries of national discourse that try to relegate them to the ungrammatical and unintelligible, outside the present and "modernity." Nahua authors argue for an intellectual sovereignty that is not based on the conquering and dismissal of other knowledges, the destruction of other people's authority. It is a context in which Nahua knowledge production possesses the same validity in relation to other epistemes. I have heard numerous authors express their intent to compete for prizes for general literary production, outside the category of "Indigenous literatures." Huastecan Nahua poet Juan Hernández half-jokingly said, "Quiero un Nóbel," referring to the Nobel peace prize for literature.⁹ He along with other

writers seeks to not only Nahuatlize Western genres, but also the Nobel. They are against the “othering” of these literatures and the idea that they lack the ability to compete with “mainstream” literary production. This gesture is significant in fighting a colonialism of knowledge production in which Indigenous art continues to be relegated to something of a literary minor league. Nahua artists in general seek to be treated as having the same merit as artists throughout the world. This competition for “mainstream” literary prizes is another area to watch.

An important gap in my analysis is the absence of a detailed exploration of Nahua communities’ experiences within the United States. It was in Southern California where I first started to learn Nahuatl nearly fifteen years ago. Attention to Nahua and other Latin American Indigenous artists in the United States promises to help shift the common gaze of the United States toward the South, in which “North American” researchers travel down to investigate “primitive” cultures. Instead, attention to artists in the United States and their views here flip the exchange of ideas to where Indigenous intellectuals offer studies of U.S. populations. This shift also promises to show strategies employed to strengthen a network that crosses international borders and question to an even greater extent the stereotypical notion of Indigenous peoples as stuck in place.

A promising approach is to analyze contemporary Nahua artistic production from the perspective of environmental justice. Natalio Hernández often commented that Nahuas spoke about Mother Earth before it became a fad within global environmental movements to do so.¹⁰ He recounts that when Nahuas spoke of Mother Earth in the 1950s and 1960s, people thought they were crazy. Within Nahua texts appear common themes

of reciprocity, close relationship with the land, and respect for the land as subject. Especially promising is an analysis of Nahua collaborations with numerous other Indigenous nations. Protection of land resources is an issue that has helped spark alliance networks of Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups across the globe.

Another innovative approach to this Nahua cultural production would be through Queer Studies. Studies related to Nahuas or Indigenous peoples in Latin America from this positioning are scarce.¹¹ Mardonio Carballo's texts in particular have much to offer from this approach. He seeks through his art to overturn heteronormativity, evident in his documentary program *De raíz luna*. In a historic episode of this nationally televised program, Carballo interviews Felina Santiago, a Zapotec *muxe* (transvestite) from Oaxaca. Santiago speaks of the discrimination outside of her community since her sex is male and she identifies as female.¹² The broadcasting of this episode was a courageous act, as beatings and killings of non-heteronormative subjects are not uncommon in Mexico. Carballo represents one of the most creative Nahua artists today in his work spanning different types of media and his project to overturn the hierarchical, heteronormative gender map on its side with fluid conceptions of gender. His art is also especially rich from the angle of Media Studies, as he has films, documentaries, music albums, an extremely active Facebook page, radio programs, podcasts, an internet television, and a nationally televised show. Carballo's work underscores a principal objective of this study: to show Nahuas as key actors with valuable perspectives in unexpected places.

I have sought in the present analysis of Nahua literary production to “take their word for it”—that is to say, to engage seriously with Nahua literature often framed within what I explained in the introduction as the “marginality of marginality.” Indigenous peoples in general are placed in what some problematically refer to as a “fourth world,” which suggests they constitute a south even further “down” south from the global South. Instead the horizontal frame of knowledge production Nahua authors propose opens up to exchange of ideas and migrations that positions them as equal players in what Natalio Hernández aptly depicts in his poetry as multiple furrows within the field of knowledge production. Like *tlaixpan* (the altar), which directs one’s view toward ancestors, the texts within this study seek to turn toward the local ancestral knowledges of their communities and highlight their value transcending their communities. This *forward observance* of ancestors does not constitute a freezing in time and place, but rather the innovative and dynamic turns seen in contemporary Nahua cultural production.

¹ For a more in-depth analysis of this image, see Rachel Adams, *Continental Divides*, 11.

² Similarly, in his article “Los mapuche antes de la conquista militar chileno argentina” (Mapuche Before the Chilean-Argentinian Military Conquest), Mapuche historian Pablo Marimán Queménado includes two drawings in which the map of *Wallmapu* (Mapuche territory covering large portions of Chile and Argentina) is also “turned on its side” and reoriented toward the East (60, 77). Although a seemingly small move, this recalibration carries with it great significance in pointing toward a wider questioning of Western conceptions of land, sovereignty, and space. Such a remapping resembles what Santiago Castro-Gómez and Ramón Grosfoguel term “heterarchical thought.” This heterarchical reconceptualization creates a network “in which no basic level governs over everyone else, but rather all levels exercise some degree of mutual influence in different aspects and in accordance with specific historical circumstances” (18).

³ As I said in chapter one, each day is in fact measured by *tonatiuh* (suns) in Nahuatl.

⁴ Nahua authors tell of the first introduction to literature being the stories told by their relatives. For example, Mardonio Carballo tells of having only three books in his home when he was a child, but that we would constantly hear oral narratives from his mother.

⁵ Original quote: “Yo tengo libros con tirajes de cien mil, treinta mil, setenta mil ejemplares, pero si uno los intenta rastrear no los encuentra. No los encuentras en las bibliotecas, en las escuelas, ¿Dónde están?, te preguntas: en una bodega.”

⁶ See Roberto Garduño, “En dos años se reducirá 42% el presupuesto de Conaculta.”

⁷ In his investigation of the distribution of Indigenous literatures in Mexico, Alejandro Sánchez de la Rosa describes a “falta de financiamiento, poca difusión y nulo interés de las editoriales para publicarlos es a lo que se enfrentan los escritores indígenas en México.”

⁸ I thank Arturo Arias and Luis Cárcamo Huechante for their observations on Indigenous *letrados* at the Mellon-Sawyer faculty seminar Territorial Roots and Diasporic Routes, 30 January 2015.

⁹ Personal interview, 15 February 2013.

¹⁰ Personal interview, 12 August 2012.

¹¹ One of the few books that address this topic in Latin America is *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature*. Within Native Studies, see also Andrea Smith, “Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism.”

¹² Interview conducted during the 2012 season of *De raíz luna*. See “Felina Santiago, activista muxe, habla de respeto y diversidad sexual en ...*De Raíz Luna*, hoy por Canal 22.”

Appendix 1. Eneida Hernández, “Universo de las hilanderas”



Fig. 2. Eneida Hernández, “Universo de las hilanderas,” artwork from Natalio Hernández, “Presencia contemporánea de los nahuas” (2011)

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