UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED

Nican Nawa-Pipil: Poetic Embodiments of *Te Miki Tay Tupal*
(Here Are the Nawa-Pipil Peoples: Poetic Embodiments of 'What Is Ours Does Not Die')

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Interdisciplinary Humanities

by

Violet Elizabeth Barton

Committee in charge:

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Professor Nigel Hatton
Professor Felicia R. López
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2023

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The dissertation of Violet Elizabeth Barton is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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University of California, Merced

2023

DEDICATION

This dissertation is a project of decolonial love
for those who did not survive the war,
for those who could not cross the border,
for those who did not make it to the university,
or who perhaps made it, but could not finish.
It is also for those who did survive the bombs,
but now have to bury the dead ones,
or search for the missing ones.
It is for those who made it to the other side of the wall,
but who live on stolen time and day to day uncertainty.
It is for those whose presence is an absence in the classroom,
but who have dared to dream about one day
walking in there, tall and proud, “keeping your head up”
It is for past, present, and future stories of ‘daring’.
For unlikely success stories that everyone bets on, they will be failures.
For those who nobody believes in
The outcast.
For the violets of the world, who hide beneath the greenery
For the kadejos of the world who terrorize the prairie
It is for you and me
For all who can’t be here.

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I share my gratitude to my Nawat-Pipil and Nahuatl instructors, *Tajtzin Tamachtiani* Alexandro Tepas Lapa, *Tamachtiani* Elías Córdova Gil (*Universidad Tecnológica de El Salvador* (UTEC) and *La Iniciativa Portadores del Náhuat* (IPN) de El Salvador). To *Tamachtiani* Alberto Cruz, *Tamachtiani* Josué Ramos, and *Tamachtiani* Werner Hernández (*Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas (UCA)* and *Colectivo Tzuntejekat)*. To *Nantzin Tamachtiani* Fidelina Cortés, *Tajtzin Tamachtiani* Nicolás García, N*antzin Taachtiani* Anastasia López López *and Nantzin Tamachtiani* Antonia Ramírez. To Professor Rafael Lara-Martínez and to Professor Abelardo de La Cruz de La Cruz for teaching me to think and feel in Nawat and Nahuatl, respectively.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page …… iii
Acknowledgements……..... v
Abstract……. vii
Introduction ……... 1
Notes on the use of Indigenous words and toponymics……..1
Notes on Nawat-Pipil Approach to the canon……...…… 4
Socio-historical content ……..…… …. 9
Study Design…..…… 12
Chapter Organization ……...…… 14
Theoretical Framework…… ……21
Methods……..24
Data……31
Chapter 1: Indigenous Soundworlds – The Nawat-Pipil Language……...32
Chapter 2: Indigenous Deathworlds – Forced Migration……..97
Chapter 3: Indigenous Lifeworlds – Femi(ni)cide……...208
Conclusion…..…….298
Table 1…….304
Table 2…….305
Cultural Consultants Biographies……..
Bibliography……314

LIST OF TABLES

1. Nawat-Pipil Epistemologies
2. Nawat Words Used

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EDUCATION

2023 Ph.D. University of California, Merced. Interdisciplinary Humanities.
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RESEARCH INTERESTS

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2016 Center for the Humanities, Graduate Fellowship for Summer Study: Arabic Language Study ($5,000)
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RESEARCH AND FIELDWORK EXPERIENCE

2022 Ethnographic Fieldwork. Remote. Human Rights Center. UC Berkely. El Salvador, 2 months
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2018-2019 Ethnographic Fieldwork, Fulbright Grant. El Salvador, 10 months
2018 Ethnographic Fieldwork, UC MRPI Critical Refugee Studies. El Salvador, 4 months
2017 Graduate Student Researcher, Ma Vang, PhD. Central Valley, Summer
2014-2015 Ethnographic Fieldwork, Robin DeLugan, PhD. El Salvador, 3 weeks

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PUBLICATIONS

Journal Articles

Barton, Violet E. Stateless at Sea: Media Representations of Kurdish Women's Movements Across Water. University of California, Merced, 2018.

Kaur Hundle, Anneeth, Vang, Ma, Alamri, Neama, Deol, Amrit, Bermudez, Danielle, **Barton, Violet**, Cabrera, Gabrielle, Gutierrez, Brenda, and Medina Maya, Clara. "Thinking the "Twenty-First Century Neoliberal Research University": Preliminary Reflections on Opportunity, Risk, and Solidarity at the New University of California." Critical Ethnic Studies 5.1-2 (2019): 174-204.

Graduate Journals

Barton, Violet. "Environmental Injustice is Racial Injustice." University of California Student Association Graduate Policy Journal 3 (2017): 12-16.

CONFERENCES

Papers Presented

"Titakatiliat Tik Taneshnaj (Dar a Luz en lo Oscuro): An Indigenous Feminist Reading of Trauma-informed
Approaches to Fiat Lux. Trauma Informed Teaching Symposium. UC Merced. In Person. April, 2023 (ENG).
"Tikilnamikit Hueyi Tonojnoymet Iwan Cuauhixti: Aguas Vivas, Volcanes con Consciencia, y Nuevos Comienzos in
and out of Kushkatan". 8th Annual Graduate Student Interdisciplinary Humanities Conference. Hybrid.
March, 2023 (ENG, SPAN, NAHUAT).
"Terror y Complicidad: El Canibalismo Civilizador de la Frontera." Latin American Studies Association. XXXX
Congress. Virtual. May 7, 2022 (ENG).
"Terror y Complicidad: El Canibalismo Civilizador de la Frontera." Seventh Annual Interdisciplinary Humanities
Graduate Student Conference. University of California Merced. Virtual. April 2021. (SPAN).
"Circulo Sagrado Nahuat-Pipil de Kushkatan." Panel. Latin American Studies Association. XXXIX Congress. Virtual.
May 2021 (ENG).
"Confronting COVID-19: Nahuat-Pipil Feminisms, Cosmovision, and Life in Kushkatan." 43rd Fulbright Conference. Virtual. October 2020 (ENG).
"Soundscapes of Survivance: How Nawat Pipil Women's Singing "unmakes" Western Borders. National Women's Studies Association Annual Conference, San Francisco, California, U.S.A. November 2019 (ENG).
"Nawat-Pipil Epistemologies of *tamal iwan istat*: Living Everyday Death in El Salvador." Ethnicity, Race and

Indigenous Peoples Conference, Spokane, Washington, U.S.A. September 2019 (ENG).

“Te Miki Tay Tupal, Ne Nawat Suchikisa: Poetic Embodiments of Nahuat-Pipil Survivance.” Latin American Studies Association. Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A. May 2019 (ENG).

“Living Everyday Death in El Salvador: The Poetic Embodiments of Te Miki Tay Tupal.” Fulbright Research Seminar, Guatemala City, Guatemala, Central América. April 2019 (ENG).

“Apátridas en Alta Mar: Representaciones de las Mujeres Kurdas Cruzando El Mediterráneo Durante la Guerra en Siria.” Instituto Especializado de Educación Superior para la Formación Diplomática (IEESFORD), Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, San Salvador, El Salvador, Centro América. February 2019 (SPAN).

“Estoy Donde Pienso: Afirmando la Humanidad de Nuestros Ancestros.” IX Congreso de Pensamiento Humanístico de Centro América, El Caribe y México. San Salvador, El Salvador. September 2018 (SPAN).

“Quien Tiene Boca se Equivoca: Linguistic Terrorism in the Era of Civility, Collegiality and Conformity in the Neoliberal University.” Fifth Annual Interdisciplinary Humanities Graduate Student Conference. University of California Merced. Merced, CA, U.S.A. March 2018 (ENG).

“¡No seas terrorista, india!: Resistance, Survivance and Technologies of Terror in the 1980s War in El Salvador.” Mesoamerican Studies Center Conference. University of California Merced. Merced, California, U.S.A. November 2017 (ENG).

“Homeland (In)Security: War, Statelessness and Geographies of Survivance Among Nahuat Women in El Salvador,” XXXV International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association. Lima, Perú, April 2017 (ENG).

“Historias Ocultas: Refugiados Surgiendo de los Mares.” Fourth Annual Interdisciplinary Humanities Graduate Student Conference, University of California Merced. Merced, CA, U.S. A. April 2017 (ENG).

“(Un)storied Lives: Refugee Bodies Emerging from the Waters.” Research Week, Graduate Student Poster. University of California Merced. Merced, CA, U.S. A. April 2017 (ENG).

“Water, War and Empire: Refugee Bodies at Sea." National Women’s Studies Association Annual Conference. Montréal, Québec, Canada, November 2016 (ENG).

“Des-orientando la Identidad Femenina: El Caso de la Grand Odalisca.” Third Annual Interdisciplinary

Humanities Graduate Student Conference, University of California Merced. Merced, CA,
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"The Ties that (Un)bind: Indigenous Women and Geographies of Survival." Center for the Humanities Conference,
Graduate Student Poster Session, University of California Merced. Merced, CA, U.S.A., April 2015 (ENG).

Conference Planning
"Beyond (un)natural Crisis, Disaster and Catastrophe: Ecologies of Care and 'Other' Worlds-in-making".
Interdisciplinary Humanities Graduate Student Conference. University of California Merced. Merced, California, U.S. A. March 2023.
"Congreso Indígena para la Descolonización de Centro América". Hermandad del Jaguar, el Quetzal, y la Serpiente
Estelar. El Salvador, Central América. January 2023.
"Native and Indigenous Voices." Native and Indigenous Student Coalition. University of California National Center
for Free Speech and Civic Engagement. University of California, Merced. Merced, California, U. S. A. March-April 2022.
"Indigenous Peoples and the Latinx Landscape: Imaginative Reformulations and New Configurations of
Racialized Identities." Global Latinidades Project. University of California, Merced. Merced, California,
U. S. A. April 2022.
"Precarity and Possibility: Imaginings of a New Academy." Interdisciplinary Humanities Graduate Group Conference. University of California Merced. Merced, California, U.S. A. March 2017.
"Mesoamerican in California: Immigrants' Resistance, Social Movements, Rights, and Memory." Mesoamerican
Studies Center Conference. University of California Merced. Merced, CA, U.S.A. November 2017.
"Water: Ways of Being and Knowing Conference." Center for the Humanities, University of California Merced. Merced, CA, U.S.A. April 2017.
"Black Arts Movement Conference." University of California Merced. Merced, CA, U.S.A. February - March 2014.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Teaching Assistant, Division of Undergraduate Education, University of California Merced:

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Graduate Teaching Fellow, School of Engineering, University of California Merced:

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Introduction to Critical Refugee Studies (Spring 2018)
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Campus Talks
"Ilnamiki: Nahuat-Pipil Epistemologies of Healing". Guest Lecture, Race and Ethnic Relations. California State University Stanislaus. Merced, CA. USA. February 2023.
"El Salvador Today: This is Why we Charge Ethnocide". Film Discussant: "Ama, la Memoria del Tiempo". Art for the Future. University of New Mexico, Museum. October 2022.
"Indigenous Women and Struggles for language, land, and life in Kushkatan". Guest Lecture, Indigenous Memoir. University of California Merced. Merced, CA. U.S.A. November 2020.
"Passing." Guest Lecture, British and American Literature 1830s-1940s. University of California Merced. Merced, CA, U.S.A. November 2019.
"When War Never Ends: *Te Miki Tay Tupal*, Poetic Embodiments of Nahuat Survivance". Guest Lecture, History of Anthropology. Universidad de El Salvador, San Salvador, El Salvador, Central America. June 2018.
"Stateless at Sea: Media Representations of Kurdish Movements Across Water." Guest Lecture, Introduction to Critical Race and Ethnicity. University of California Merced. Merced, CA, U.S.A. November 2017.

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Gender, and Violence in the United States. University of California Merced. Merced, CA, U.S. A. March 2017.
"Ideological Roots of Violence and the State", Guest Lecture, Sociology: Terrorism and Genocide. University of
California Merced. Merced, CA, U.S. A. March 2015.
"Indigenous Women in the Global South", Guest Lecture, History: 1000 Years of the Global South, University of
California Merced. Merced, CA. U.S.A. March 2015.

CERTIFICATIONS AND TRAININGS

University of California, Merced

2023 Cybersecurity Awareness Fundamentals, UC Learning Center.
2022 Preventing Harassment and Discrimination: Non-supervisors, Clery Act and Title IX, UC Learning Center.
2022 Level 3: Advanced Pedagogy Series. Center for Engaged Teaching and Learning
2022 Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research Course 1. CITI. June 16, 2022
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2022 Conflicts of Interests Course I. CITI. March 30, 2022.
2021 Uprooting Inequity Seminars, Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
2021 Level 2: Evidence-Based Teaching Practices. Center for Engaged Teaching and Learning
2020 Diversity Awareness Workshop, Campus Climate Office
2020 Level 1: Preparing to Teach in an Online Environment, Center for Engaged Teaching and Learning
2019 "How to Write an Article in 12-weeks" Workshop, Center for the Humanities
2019 Diversity Awareness Workshop, Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
2019 General Compliance Briefing: University of California Ethical Values and Conduct, UC Learning Center
2019 UC Cyber Security Awareness Fundamentals, UC Learning Center
2019 Ergonomics for Computer Users, UC Learning Center

2019 Nawat Nivel 4, Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas, San Salvador, El Salvador
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2019 Nawat Nivel 2, Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas, San Salvador, El Salvador
2019 Nawat Nivel 1, Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas, San Salvador, El Salvador
2018 Filosofía Nahuat-Pipil, Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas, San Salvador, El Salvador
2018 Diplomado en Interculturalidad con énfasis en el aprendizaje de la lengua Náhuat-Pipil, Nivel básico
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2018 Social/Behavioral Research Course: Basic Human Subjects Training, Collaborative Institutional Training
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2018 Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) Training, Collaborative Institutional Training
Initiative (CITI) Program at the University of Miami, Registered Institution: University of California, Merced
2017 Certificate in Creating Diverse Curriculum for Hispanic Serving Institutions, Center for Engaged Teaching an
Learning
2017 Certificate in Critical Multicultural Pedagogy, Center for Engaged Teaching and Learning
2017 Certificate for Undocu-Ally Training, Services for Undocumented Students
2017 UC Cyber Security Awareness, UC Learning Center
2016 Certificate in General Pedagogy: Improving Teaching by Assessing Learning, Center for Engaged Teaching and
Learning
2016 Certificate in General Pedagogy: Developing Teaching Strategies, Center for Engaged Teaching and Learning
2016 UC Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment Prevention Training for Non-Supervisory Employees, UC Learning
Center
2015 Certificate in General Pedagogy: Mastering the Classroom with 1st Generation College Students, Center for
Engaged Teaching and Learning
2015 UC Cyber Security Awareness, UC Learning Center
2015 Grant Writing for the Social Sciences and Humanities, Grant Writing Institute 2015, Office
of Research and Economic Development
2014 UC Ethical Values and Conduct, UC Learning Center
2014 Information Security Awareness, UC Learning Center

2014 Research Ethics Training, Office of Research and Economic Development
2014 Research Subjects Compliance Training, Office of Research and Economic Development
2014 Research Misconduct Training, Office of Research and Economic Development
2014 Conflicts of Interest Training, Office of Research and Economic Development
2014 Intellectual Property Training, Office of Research and Economic Development
2014 Authorship and Publication Training, Office of Research and Economic Development

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AWARDS AND HONORS

External

2019 United States Department of State: Fulbright Certificate of Completion
2019 United States House of Representatives 16th Congressional District: Congressional Record Honoring Achievements
2019 California Legislature, 21st Assembly District and 12th Senatorial District: Assembly Resolution No. 1557 in Honor of Fulbright Award
2019 Merced County Board of Supervisors: Certificate of Recognition of Fulbright Achievement
2018 United States Congress: Special Congressional Recognition for Social Justice Leadership Award
2018 United States Senate: Recognition for Social Justice Leadership Award

University of California Merced

2018 Outstanding Graduate Student Nomination, Office of Student Life
2018 Social Justice Leadership Award, Margo F. Souza Leadership Center
2018 Outstanding Women's Award, Office of Student Life, Women's Programs
2018 Social Justice Leadership Award, Office of Student Life
2017 Social Justice Leadership Award, Office of Student Life
2017 Student Advocate of the Year, University of California Student Association (UCSA)
2017 Outstanding Women's Nomination, Office of Student Life, Women's Programs

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PUBLIC HUMANITIES ART EXHIBITIONS

2023 *Ceremony*. 8 x 10". Mix media. Imagining America: Collective Rituals of Repair, Renewal, and Release.
2022 *Selected Works*. Organizer. A collaboration of the Graduate Student Association and the UC Merced
Kolligian Library.
2021 *Soplo Divino*. 14 x 17". Digitized color pencil. Indigenous Research Methods Seminar.
2020 *The Graduate: She Monster*. Digital Auto-portrait. Postponed unveiling due to COVID-19 pandemic.
2018 *Dreaming of Justice*. University of California Merced, Bobcat Art Show. *The People's Choice Award.*
2018 *30th Anniversary of Toni Morrison's Beloved*. In Collaboration with Kim McMillon, PhD, Nigel Hatton, PhD
and the University of California Merced's Kolligian Library.
2017 *A Day in a Life: Violence and Survivance*. Pop up Art Exhibit. Neoliberalism Symposium in collaboration with
Sean Malloy, PhD, University of California Merced.
2017 *Refugee Currents: Bodies at Sea.* Oil on Canvas 30 x 48". Center for the Humanities Fellowship, Public
Humanities Project in partnership with the University of California Merced's Kolligian Library.
2016 *Homeland (In)security: War, Statelessness and Survivance Among Nahuat Women*. Mix media, clay micro
sculptures. Graduate Student Association's *Selected Works Exhibit* in partnership with the Kolligian Library.
2015 *Fractured.* Oil on Canvas 18 x 24". *Enlightened Perspectives* Exhibit in Partnership with Graduate Division
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UNIVERSITY SERVICE

2021-2022 Elected President, Graduate Student Association (GSA)
2020-2021 Appointed Graduate Representative, CARE Advisory Board/Coordinated Community
Response Team (CCTR)
2017-2018 Appointed Graduate Representative, Center for the Humanities Steering Committee
2017-2018 Appointed Graduate Representative, Campus Physical Planning Committee

2017-2018 Appointed Graduate Representative, Advisory Board for Dean of Students
2016-Present Appointed Graduate Representative, Mesoamerican Studies Center
2016- 2017 Appointed Graduate Representative, Grant Selection Committee Equity, Diversity, Inclusion
2016-2017 Planning Committee, Center for the Humanities' Wild Scenic Film Festival
2016 Appointed Graduate Representative, University Search Committee for Director of Title IX Office
2015-2016 Appointed Graduate Representative, Graduate Dean's Advisory Council on Diversity
2015 Appointed Graduate Representative, University Search Committee for Director of Chancellor's Advisory Council on Campus Climate, Culture, & Inclusion
2014-2017 Appointed Graduate Representative, Chancellor's Advisory Council on Campus Climate, Culture, & Inclusion of the Academic Senate
2014-2016 Appointed Graduate Representative, Academic Integrity Work Group
2014-2016 Appointed Graduate Representative, University Hearing Board/Student Conduct Board

Systemwide

2016-2018 Graduate Representative, Committee on Academic Freedom
2015-2016 Graduate Representative, Committee on Affirmative Action, Diversity, and Equity

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EXTRACURRICULAR UNIVERSITY SERVICE

2022-Present Member, Hermandad del Jaguar, El Quetzal, y la Serpiente Estelar, Hemispheric Coalition
2021-Present Consultant, Asociación Coordinadora de Comunidades Indígenas de El Salvador
2020-Present Chair, Board of Directors for Community Initiatives for Collective Impact (CI4CI), Merced
2018-2020 Co-Founder, Director, CounterAct! Online Newspaper
2018-2019 Elected, UAW Executive Board Guide, Local 2865
2017-2018 Planning Committee, Women's Empowerment Conference, Women's Programs

2017-2018 Secretary, Student for Justice in Palestine
2016-2020 Co-founder, President, Graduate Students of Color Coalition
2016-2019 Member, Anti-Oppression Committee, UAW Local 2865
2016-2018 Vice President, Latinx Graduate Student Association
2016-2018 Co-founder, President, Refugee Coalition
2016-Present Co-founder, Graduate Cultural Resource Center (GCRC) Committee
2016 Student Advocate to the Regents (StAR), University of California Student Association
2016-2017 Member, Planning Committee, Human Rights Film Festival
2015-2020 Founding Member, Graduate Pedagogy Association
2015-2020 Instructional Intern, Center for Engaged Teaching and Learning
2015-2016 Constitution and Bylaws Committee, Graduate Student Association
2015-2016 Chief of Staff for External Vice President of the Graduate Student Association
2014-2015 Organizing Director for External Vice President of the Graduate Student Association
2015-Present Member, Native and Indigenous Student Coalition
2015-2017 Secretary, African Diaspora Student Association
2014-2017 Conversation Partner, Conversation Partner Program, Center for Engaged Teaching and Learning

LANGUAGES

Arabic: Beginner - Reading, Writing, Speaking
French: Beginner - Reading, Writing, Speaking
Nahuatl Intermediate - Reading, writing, speaking
Nahuat-Pipil: Intermediate - Reading, Writing, Speaking (Critically Endangered Language)
Spanish: Native - Reading, Writing, Speaking

ACADEMIC AFFILIATIONS

Critical Ethnic Studies Association
Latin America Studies Association
National Women's Studies Association
Native American and Indigenous Studies Association

MEDIA

"Innovate to Grow Expands to Include, Inspire First-Year Students." UC Merced Newsroom, January 5, 2023.
https://news.ucmerced.edu/news/2023/innovate-grow-expands-include-inspire-first-year-students

"Campus' Second Fulbright Student Scholar Prepares for a Homecoming." UC Merced News. May 21, 2018
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ABSTRACT

This study is an anti-colonial response from the global South to an enduring epistemicide attempt in El Salvador, initiated by the Spanish invasion and occupation of Kushkatan in 1524, which has perdured for nearly five centuries through the dynamism of the modern/colonial logics of U.S. empire *and new forms of war* that are not over. This Nawat-Pipil project of cultural and spiritual repertoires is interested -- politically and discursively -- in a recovery of Indigenous critical theory through different cultural forms such as music, song, poetry, performance, agriculture, ceremony or what I refer to as "poetics of embodiment", as concept-bearing practices that help us understand Indigenous presence in El Salvador, today. In this light, in Chapter 1, I make meaning of the current state of the Nawat-Pipil language through an analysis of three contemporary Nawat-Pipil songs using the coloniality of power (Quijano 2000), *testimonio*, critical ethnographic methods, Indigenous epistemologies, and the sacred energies of *ejekat* (aire/air) as methods to critically analyze the poetics and the politics of the sonority of a 'moribund' language. Despite the precarity of the Nawat-Pipil language today, Nawa-Pipil women are continuing to re-affirm Native presences in the Kuhskatan territories and beyond and defying the limitations imposed by the biopolitics of the state and the logics of neoliberalism. In chapter 2, I trace the forced migratory journey of a Salvadoran family to the U.S.-Mexico border. Through the coloniality of migration (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2015) and newspaper reports, I examine the connections between the media, racial capitalism, and the asylum-migration policies that, through the Steinle case (2015), re-activated a specific conjuncture of racism in the 2016 presidential elections, resulting in harsher migration controls that placed the family in the Rio Grande's waters, resulting in their death. I conduct an Indigenous reading of their tragic drowning, using ancient stories, poetry, Indigenous epistemologies, and the sacred energies of *tal* (land) and *a*t (water) to offer alternate readings of their tragic fate, to help us re-envision a more humane hereafter. In Chapter 3, I analyze the brutal murder and disappearance of policewoman Carla Ayala by several male police officers in 2017, in El Salvador. I juxtapose her heinous killing to the Nawat-Pipil story of creation, *Nanahuatzin* being retold through a play titled *Nusiwapiltzin* to show Indigenous conceptions of womanhood in ancient Nawa texts. Through the coloniality of gender (Lugones 2007), I unpack the concept of feminicide, to shed light on the violences of the modern/colonial gender system that have resulted in El Salvador having one of the worst feminicide rates in the Western hemisphere, in contemporary times. The metatextual reading of *Nanahuatzin* through *Nusihuapiltzin* sheds light on the colonial connections between a woman's body and the territory, and the sacred connections that exist between agriculture, astronomy, and womanhood.

Introduction

1. Notes on the Use of Indigenous Words, Toponymics, and Other Key Terms

Kushkatan[1] means "place of jewels" in *Nawat-Pipil* and it is the name of the ancestral land and territory of the *Nawa-Pipil*[2] peoples, located on the Pacific Coast of Central America. Prior to the Spanish invasion and occupation in 1524, it extended from Río Ceniza in the West to Río Lempa in the East, of what is now known as the territories of El Salvador. A part of the *Goathemala*[3] viceroyalty and diocese during colonization, this nation, the smallest and most densely populated Central American country today[4], was initially named by lead colonizer Pedro de Alvarado "the Province of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World." In 1821, it gained independence from Spain, and it was renamed Republic of Salvador, becoming one of the five provinces of the Central American Federation, until it was declared an independent state in 1841[5]. In 1915, it was renamed Republic of El Salvador[6].

In this study, I use *Nawa-Pipil* to refer to the *pueblos originarios de Kushkatan* (the native peoples of Kushkatan) who are also known as Nahua. I use *Nawat-Pipil* to refer to their language, which is also spelled Nahuat-Pipil. While Nawat-Pipil is part of the Uto-Aztecan language family, it is different from the Nahuatl spoken in *Mexco*[7]. The word '*pipil*', in Nawat-Pipil means "boy or child-like". Others state that the word '*pipil*' comes from the Nahuatl word *piltzin/pilzin*, which means 'noble child' or 'prince,' as the

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[1] *Causcat, cozcatlan, cuxcaclan, cuxcactlan* in *Nawa-Pipil*, from the word *cuscat*, which means jewel, necklace; the Nawat locative *tan* means place, region, city. *Kushkatan* means the 'place of richness', of 'jewels' or 'necklaces' (Meza 2012: 187).

[2] *Pipil* comes from the Nawa word *piltzin* (*pi-piltzin* is the plural of *piltzin*), which means child or royalty, noble with reverence. Many believe that *Pipil* was a pejorative adjective that the *Tlaxcalteca* armies who accompanied the Spaniards during the invasion of *Kushkatan* in 1524, used to mock the way Nawa people spoke the Nawat language in the isthmus. According to experts, Nawat-Pipil is the most archaic form of Nahuatl in the Uto-aztecan family of languages (Lemus 2015: 66).

[3] Known in Nawat-Pipil as *Cuauhtemallan*, it means place of many trees or eagles, known as Guatemala, today. www.collection.cooperhewitt.org/countries/23424834/#:~:text=Etymology,Conquest%20gave%20to%20this%20territory. Accessed October 7, 2021.

[4] Approximately 6.3 million Salvadorans live in the national territories today, in an area of approximately 250 square kilometers, which according to historians, was divided into 14 departments in the nineteenth century (Barón Castro 2002: 72). Since the 1980s war, 1.6 million Salvadorans live abroad, forcibly displaced by unending political and structural violence, resulting in the remapping of the nation into fifteen departments (DeLugan 2012: 95). For demographic data see the Word Bank's Data Commons site www.datacommons.org/place/country/SLV/?utm_medium=explore&mprop=count&popt=Person&hl=en. Accessed October 11, 2021.

[5] See Barón Castro (2002: 70).

[6] See legal reference (Decreto Legislativo del 7 de junio de 1915, publicado en el Diario Oficial n.º 133, tomo n.º 78, del 9 de junio de 1915).

[7] *Mexco* is the Nahuatl world for Mexico and it means the place of the umbilicus (IDIEZ 2012: 105). In Paragraph XIV of the Florentine Codex, López Austin & García Quintana (2000), state a different meaning, citing that the ancient name of *Mexicatl* (one person) or M*ecitli* (group of people*),* derives from *me*, *metl, (*maguey) and *citli* (hare). Thus, *Mecitli* refers to the story of a priest named *Citli*, who was raised on a large maguey leaf (me, metl). See www.florentinecodex.getty.edu/book/10/folio/139v?spTexts=&nhTexts=

suffix *-tzin/-zin,* is used in Nawat and Nahuatl as a marker of respect and nobility to denote a "reverential" status. *Pipiltzin* is the plural form of *piltzin*. Thus, it is believed that Nawa peoples called themselves *Piltzin/Pilzin/Pipiltzin* because they descended from noble Nahuatl families that migrated south to the Central American isthmus and settled in *Nawitzalku*,[8] in Western El Salvador (Lemus 2016: 49). Further, the Nawa-Pipil are also known as *Yaquis*. Linguist Jorge Lemus proposes that this could be related to the Nahuatl verb *yawi,* which means to go; its past tense form, *yahki* (went), could have been used to mean 'those who left' or 'migrants' (48). Some scholars have reported that the use of the word *pipil* to refer to Nawa peoples in El Salvador connotes a pejorative status. However, because many Nawa-Pipil leaders and communities in Western El Salvador proudly identity themselves as "Nawa-Pipil," I have chosen to use this identifier to support their political claims.

I use *Nahua* to refer to the Mexica people in *Mexco* and *Nahuatl* to their language to respect their spelling conventions. It is important to note that in Kushkatan, there is no agreement yet as to the spelling conventions to write the Nawat-Pipil language. Therefore, I use the spelling that was taught to me by Nawat-Pipil speakers, and I do not intend any harm by making this choice. Simply, I am using what I am familiar with, so far. So, if at any time, it may appear as if in this study I am switching from Nawat to Nahuatl, it is to respect current conventions that support the idea that while both languages belong to the Uto-Aztecan family and can be legible to each other, the Nawat and Nahuatl languages are different from each other.

The title of this study, *Nican Nawa,* can be translated as 'Here are the Nawa', but it also conveys the idea of *Anahuac* (the Nawat-Pipil name for the Central American isthmus) reaching this far south (from the Central Valley in Mexco to present-day Nicaragua); *nic-atl-nahuac,* also can mean 'here by the water,' which can be interpreted as 'those from Anahuac came this far near the water'. I use it to mean 'We Nawa-Pipil peoples made it this far' as an affirmation that honors the audacity of Nawa-Pipil and their descendants to be here.

Te miki tay tupal is a Nawat-Pipil epistemology of resistance and survivance that means *lo nuestro no muere* or what is ours does not die, which was widely used by Indigenous peoples in the aftermath of the 1932 *Matanza* (slaughter). I center this Nawat-Pipil epistemology to frame this investigation for the message of empowerment that it connotes, highlighting an Indigenous refusal to disappear. In this light, *te miki tay tupal* helps us account for the strategic visibility/invisibility of Indigenous people in El Salvador, related to the 1932 historical moment to explain how indigeneity went "underground" following ethnocide and the biopolitical processes implemented by the nation-state, at the time.

Lastly, in this study, I have made every effort to use Nawat-Pipil [geographical]or Nahuatl place names known to the elders in *Kushkatan* to trace Indigenous presence in the land, whether these names are backed up by literature or not. I do so to affirm the elders' historical memory and document their knowledge-keeping of Nawat-Pipil geographies and stories in contemporary transnational spaces, hoping that every piece of information that Nawa-Pipil communities and I gathered during the time we collaborated

[8] Now known as Nahuizalco.

to make this investigation possible will edify our canon. In this regard, I will use *Kushkatan* to refer to the territories of the Nawa-Pipil, and El Salvador, to refer to the government structure/governmentality in place of the unceded territories occupied by the nation-state. Overall, I consider the use of Nawat-Pipil toponymics in this study, as an inconspicuous Indigenous countermapping method that faithfully accompanies Indigenous memory-making and knowledge-keeping about the land present in our eyes, ears, and heart.

2. Notes on Nawa-Pipil Approaches to the Canon

This dissertation is a contribution to Central American Studies, Indigenous Studies, Nawa-Pipil philosophies as a subfield of Philosophy, Oral History, Memory Studies, Immigration Studies, and Gender and Sexuality Studies. It is an anti-colonial response from the global South to an enduring epistemicide[9] attempt in El Salvador, initiated by the Spanish invasion and occupation of Kushkatan in 1524 and the ensuing five centuries of continuous ethnocide of Indigenous peoples, which include *new forms of war* that are not over, that persist through the dynamism of the modern/colonial logics of U.S. empire. An incomplete work, this project about Nawat-Pipil cultural and spiritual repertoires that are alive today, is interested -- politically and discursively -- in a recovery of Indigenous critical theory through different cultural forms such as music, song, poetry, performance, agriculture, ceremony or what I refer to as "poetics of embodiment", as concept-bearing practices that help us understand Indigenous presence in El Salvador, today.

From this perspective, this dissertation is an invitation to center the Nawat-Pipil systems of knowledge as an anti-colonial global project that transcends European and North American modernity to redefine the Mesoamerican canon beyond the 'capitalist/patriarchal Western-centric/Christian-centric modern/colonial world-system'[10].

In the chapters that follow, I take a Central American feminist of color border thinking/immigrant consciousness stance (Anzaldúa 2004), to feel, think, and reflect with my heart, about the processes of colonization in 'the field'/my home, through a *Kab'awilian* methodology (Chacón 2018). I do so, to re-read with the eyes, ears, and heart of the one who saw the past (*yultaketzalis*), re-member past traumatic events (*ilnamiki*), re-cognize *the Other* (*ixmati*), and make meaning of present conditions in El Salvador, through the embodied poetics of the Nawat-Pipil language, its philosophies, and stories.

Nawa-Pipil stories are filled with beings, whose entities inextricably mix human, plant, animal, and other subjectivities that inhabit the world (such as gods, spirits, the dead, inhabitants of other cosmic levels, meteorological phenomena, even objects). Living in an interrelated world, animals and spirits perceive each other as humans, as 'persons' with their own consciousness, language, and culture, and they perceive humans as animals (De Castro 1998: 470-472). In other words, how humans perceive other species is different to how they perceive us. Further, they rely on the exteriority of the body, as a site of differentiation, to travel and activate the power of cosmological transformism, at specific moments (Ibid). In this Indigenous conception of the world, human culture is not universal to other beings and entities in the world, as there is a state of undifferentiation between humans and animals that is described in mythology. The preponderance of perspectives of the self, among various beings and entities in the world, entails that *the Other* is ontologically prior and therefore, we must often assume the

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[9] I borrow Sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos's definition of epistemicide to speak of the attempted "death of the knowledge of [a] subordinated culture" (2016: 18). Grosfoguel connects the destruction of knowledges that is tied to the destruction of peoples, to the epistemic privilege of mostly, White European men or men of color who think like White men or identify as, which prevails in the university, today (2015: 5, 23).

[10] See Grosfoguel's explanation of Enrique Dussel's notion of trans-modernity (2015: 41).

perspective of *the Other* and temporarily occupy their point of view, to see and understand ourselves from that perspective. For this reason, Indigenous myths show how animals lost the qualities retained by humans (animals are perceived as 'ex-humans'). Yet, the common point of reference for all entities and beings of nature is not the human species, but rather humanity, a unique perspective that differs radically from Western paradigms (Ibid). As such, it is important to engage with Indigenous myths with an understanding that bodies and spirits participate in the same milieu to transmit to transmit ancestral knowledges that are sacred and that reinforce a system of values for the community (Ibid 484-483). By centering Nawa-Pipil stories, I endeavor to create a space to critique of European and North American modernity from below -- *con ojo de venado* (a deer's eye) – to transcend the harsh realities of borderized spatialities and disconnected temporalities of histories that have been attempted to be silenced and erased.

I utilize Nawat-Pipil, Nahuatl, and Spanish languages in this Western-style mode of dissertating other truths, to recover ancestral understandings of the present order and situate what is not legible to the European and North American canon in spaces where the trans-territorial movements and voices of Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies, poems, songs, theatrical performances, and stories are possible. Without any pretentions of grandeur, this study centers the collective theorizing and perspectives of my Nawat-Pipil *abuelas y abuelos* in Kushkatan and the cosmos and contributes to grounding critical Indigenous theory through memory-making, place-making, and countermapping the discursive ground of the West by utilizing three case studies: the Nawat-Pipil language, forced migration, and feminicide. Each of these case studies highlights the lived experiences of every-day Salvadorans today, who may or may not intentionally identify as Indigenous, but whose histories of violence and oppression make it clear that their lived-experiences intersect with this and other subjugated modern/colonial identities, such as those of Indigenous descendants, Afro-descendants, and women of color. In this regard, this study interrogates what it means to be Salvadoran at a time when, by law[11], for the first time since the 1932 Matanza and the aftermath of the deracination laws[12] of the early 1930s, the country has redefined itself as a multicultural society by including the existence of Indigenous, Afro, and other ethnic groups. These legislative changes have opened a space for Salvadoran families to rethink how they see and identify themselves and others, based on personal and collective genealogies, historical memory, and lived experiences. Additionally, the large influx of Salvadorans who have migrated to other parts of the world since the 1980s war, has created another space for Salvadoran families to access information that otherwise has been suppressed at gun point in El Salvador, for decades. This phenomenon is informing particularly, younger generations of Salvadorans, to critically interrogate their racial/ethnic origins and cultural roots, their biases, and prejudices, etc. and to question the impact of ethnocide/epistemicide in El Salvador at a personal and at a political level, seeking to understand their internalized oppressions and colonization[13].

To add to this complexity, there are thousands of mostly young Salvadorans, who have been forcibly returned or deported from the U.S. to El Salvador in recent years. For

[11] See Article 63 of the Salvadoran Constitution (DeLugan 2021: 38).
[12] See Jorge Cuéllar's research on racial formation in El Salvador in the early 20th century (2018).
[13] See Nelson Maldonado-Torres's theory of the coloniality of being (2007).

the most part, they only identify as Salvadorans in name, but not culturally because they have grown up in the U.S. and assimilated to its cultural expectations. Many of them have been criminalized in the U.S. through gang affiliation and immigration status, and as such, they constitute another generation of Salvadorans that is also questioning their cultural roots and identities, grappling with the idea of what it means to be a 'transnational citizen' of nowhere, neither in the North, nor in the South[14]. The confluence of these postwar, migratory dynamics at the local and global levels, are shifting the meaning of who can claim to be Salvadoran, Indigenous, Indigenous descendant, woman of color, Afro-Salvadoran, Salvadoran-American, etc. and who cannot, given that ten years ago El Salvador defined itself simply as a mestizo-nation and most of these intersectional identity terms, were not part of the vocabulary in the nation's imaginary. In this light, nuancing Salvadoran identity in this study, is an act of political provocation and a part of this epistemic project that I hope entices Salvadorans/others to think critically about who we are, where we come from, what do we know and what do we not know about ourselves, our lineages, our cultural trajectories, and why would we find gaps of information in our genealogies at this point in time.

Simultaneously, the *tatas* and the *nanas* speak with sincerity and pride about their Indigenous origins, casting no doubt about their claims to Indigeneity, which they courageously have held onto for centuries, even when it could have cost their lives. While there is a wide range of opinions as to who is Indigenous and an Indigenous descendant among active members of Nawa-Pipil communities, all of them agree that in El Salvador, "todos somos Indígenas" (we are all Indigenous) in some degree, citing that we share the same blood. For Instance, *Tata* Fidel Flores states that his community in San Ramón in *Centzunat*, welcomes anyone who has unlearned the colonial ways and is now self-identifying as Nawa-Pipil. He adds that is never late to learn the Nawat-Pipil language and other cultural aspects of being a natural (an Indigenous person). He states that, just like Salvadoran immigrants to the U.S. do not speak English when they first arrive there, Salvadorans who have been colonized to believe that they are mestizos may not speak Nawat-Pipil when they unlearn the colonial ways. He blames the violences of coloniality for the epistemicide and the linguicide -- not the survivors of it -- who had to strategically disappear at specific moments in history to survive.

Tata Nicolás Sánchez-Vides shares that the epistemicide/linguicide/ethnocide against Indigenous peoples continues in El Salvador. For his Nawitzalku community, he says that it is heart breaking to send young people to the university because they return home, believing that being Indigenous is synonymous with being 'backwards' and they are ashamed of their Indigenous identity and roots. This, he says, is a point of rupture with Nawa-Pipil cultural legacies for many young people. With teary eyes, he describes the Indigenous features of young people, stating "I don't know how they can refuse their Indigeneity. We carry it in our faces. We are Indigenous and must be proud of it" (Interviews 2019). He points out that to undo the harm of the colonial violences, Indigenous communities must maintain their spiritual practices and cultural traditions alive.

[14] See Zilberg (2004).

In Witzapan, during a conversation with several elderly men and women, the Nawat-Pipil language is central to defining who is Indigenous. For instance, if a person does not speak the language, most active maternal Nahua-hablantes (Nawat-speakers) argue passionately that the person is not truly Indigenous. This is a significant finding because many active maternal Nawat speakers in Witzapan, do not openly practice Indigenous cosmovision and ceremony anymore, but participate in catholic or evangelical activities in one of the town's many churches. *Nanztin* Antonia Ramírez states that she learned that she was Indigenous because her mother told her so, stating "Yo soy natural, así me crié aquí, pero sólo ultimamente hablo en Nawat por que antes me daba verguenza. La gente se reía de mi" (I am natural, I was raised that way, here, but only lately I speak in Nawat because before, I was ashamed of it. People would laugh at me"). Other women repeat similar stories of having felt ashamed for speaking Nawat-Pipil in public, but now, they say they feel happy to be able to re-member it with each other, to sing in Nawat-Pipil, to re-tell the stories they grew up hearing from their parents and grandparents, and especially to teach it to young generations who are interested in learning it.

Among the Salvadoran intellectual community, the conversation about Indigeneity and race in El Salvador, takes on a different tone. In an informal conversation with a former government official, he states that Indigeneity in El Salvador has almost disappeared and that most people who claim it need to prove it by either speaking the language as active maternal speakers or by blood quantum. Otherwise, he sums up, "all we have left is a bunch of peasants who romanticize the past and do a ceremony here and there, or you'll see a few young people dancing barefooted with feathers in their heads. Occasionally, you'll see a woman with a refajo (wraparound skirt), but that means nothing". At a dinner conversation, an anthropologist states that Indigenous people in El Salvador are gone and all we have left is a bunch of people claiming to be Indigenous, so they can get NGO moneys for their little projects. He adds that they all end up fighting among each other for the funding, but that everything of substance is gone. Meanwhile, Lemus (2015: 33-35) states that the two local studies about Indigenous identity in El Salvador that are cited most frequency show that Indigenous people are characterized by low-socioeconomic status and harsh working conditions in the field (Marroquín 1975), and dark skin color, poverty, harsh working conditions in the field, language proficiency, religious practices, and low self-esteem (Chapin 1991). Lemus offers that given these negative associations and racialized insults that occur frequently, most Indigenous people in El Salvador deny their Indigenous identity and prefer being classified as ladinos or campesinos (Ibid). Lastly, Lemus points out that postwar neoliberal policies that promote tourist economies such as *La Ruta de las Flores* or *El Mundo Maya* have influenced Indigenous communities to adopt a Maya identity as a way of making a living, which he refers as the "Mayización de El Salvador", which is reinforced by the existence of Maya temples of the pre-classic and late classic periods found throughout Western and central El Salvador (ibid 37, 38). All of these complex and evolving dynamics make it challenging to define who can claim Indigenous identity in El Salvador.

Throughout the chapters, particularly in the forced migration chapter, I intentionally break down some words with hyphens as a method of decoding to create phonemic awareness about the signification and re-signification of combined words and

invoke a cognitive pause on the reader to invite a search for meaning or implied, missing element.

To this end, this investigation is an act of *Kab'awilian* political translation that demands the perspectives of those who are excluded from the university, to be seen, heard, and felt outside of the Western gaze, to transcend the politics of translation that enclose human experience from a "state of undifferentiation" (Viveiros de Castro 1998). By this, I mean,

From this notion of Indigenous perspectivism, I seek to delink from our minds, what Western modernity has inscribed through coloniality on our bodies and territories, centering Indigenous knowledges to theorize the effects of colonial histories, without ignoring what Nawat-Pipil communities are doing to resist and survive in alternate worlds, every day. The translation movements I attempt here -- from one language to another, from one temporality to another, from one spatiality to another, from one people to another, from words to silence, justify my use of colloquialism and vernacular thinking for they inform what Walter Mignolo calls the "ontological colonial difference" (2011) that makes possible for this transnational Nawa-Pipil thinkers collective, to think from within our difference, creating conditions of possibility for an ethics of alterity (Arias 2017) that links Indigenous epistemologies with immigrant consciousness and border-crossing, and delink our thinking from territorial and imperial politics of knowledge.

In this light, my attempts to translate across borders, marginalities, binaries, politics, words and silences, will not be perfect but it will be intentional, as I strive to honor and affirm the lives and dignity of Nawat-Pipil communities in Kushkatan, whose unique positionalities, perspectives, and lived experiences have been the site of continuous extractive and exploitive research practices by the West, rendering them at times, as irrational and less then human. As Sylvia Cusicanqui (2017) and Mishuana Goeman (2013) have asserted in their hemispheric notions of poetic embodiments that the displaced, the exiled, the immigrant, the Indigenous subject have been forced to leave their territories and lost their right to the land, yet they carry their maps and their stories on their backs, where they go. In these spaces, where body-as-territory, and land meet ancestral memory, the coloniality of power cannot reach. Having said that, there will be some Nawa-Pipil experiences with violence that will not be told in this study. The vulnerabilities of Indigenous peoples will be protected because as the *nanas* and *tatas* say, in Mesoamerica the violences of the West can take the person out of her territory, but they cannot take her territory and storytelling out of her person. In other words, Indigenous points of view -- their perspectives -- are located in the body. The ontological colonial difference (Mignolo 2011; 2018) take place in the specificity of bodies; bodies are where alterity is perceived (Viveiros de Castro 1998). Thus, defending the Indigenous right to integrity, to self, to body-as-territory and land, to life, to dignity cannot be achieved within the parameters set forth in Western thought. In this light, strategic silence matters in this investigation. Yet, when given permission by the collective wisdom of Nawa-Pipil communities, I will share *el sentir y el pensar* (the feeling and thinking) of the Nawa-Pipil people that I worked with. But, to do so, to think outside of the colonial canon, requires that we think where we are and to be prepared to embrace the consequences of epistemic disobedience and non-conformance, with humility, but never with our heads down. *Tosepan titataniske* (together we will overcome).

3. Socio-Historical Context: Living Everyday Death with Desesperanz*a* in El Salvador

As a modern nation-state, El Salvador is most known for its 12-year (un)civil war sponsored by the U. S. in the 1980s, which took the lives of an estimated 75,000 people (see Betancur, Figueredo Planchart, and Buergenthal 1993; Stanley 1996; Wood 2003; Viterna 2013 qted. in Green and Ball 2019: 781) and caused significant trauma to those who survived the atrocities of the war (Baró 1989). Thousands more were internally displaced and, at least, one fourth of its population -- including my family and I -- were forced to migrate outside of the country's borders to Mexico, the U. S., and other places by the intense political violence (Macekura 2011: 357).

Since the signing of the 1992 Chapultepec Peace Accords, there have been documented patterns of increased economic (in)security worsened by the adoption of U. S. neoliberal policies[15] in the postwar years; government impunity and corruption[16] that have denied justice and dignity to thousands of fallen Salvadorans who were brutally murdered and/or forcibly disappeared during the war, mostly by government forces; significant levels of gang violence that have created a national climate of (in)security[17] related to organized crime operating within a heavily militarized space that is characterized by every day 'public' killings of civilians, extra-judicial killings, and forced disappearances of young people suspected of gang activity at the hands of police, resulting in unprecedented internal displacement and forced migration of mostly marginalized families. In this context, social scientists are grappling to reframe the patterns of postwar violence seen in the region, as "*new forms of war*" waged by organized crime, which has earned El Salvador the distinction of being one of the most violent countries in the world, during peace time, because of its high homicide rate (Segato and Vitenti 2023: 342; Cantor 2014: 34-37; InSight Crime 2016). Additionally, the conditions of these "new forms of war" have resulted in El Salvador having the highest femicide/femi(ni)cide rate in Latin America (Fitz-Gibbon et al 2023: 302), which feminist scholars Rita Segato and Lívia Vitenti (2023) note that it is not just the growing numbers of missing and murdered Salvadoran women that should be a concern, but also the extreme cruelty and public display of mutilated, tortured, raped, women's bodies that is so shocking.

These oppressive and dehumanizing conditions collapse violently and disproportionately on the most vulnerable bodies, every day, and can be best described in the words of the late Salvadoran scholar Horacio Roque Ramírez (2010), as *living everyday death*[18], for they demarcate a liminal space between the living and the socially

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[15] See William Robinson (2008) for a critical analysis of U.S. neoliberal policies in Central America during the postwar. See Towers and Borzutzky (2004) for an analysis of dollarization of the national currency on the poor.

[16] See Vickers et al (1993), and Allyson (2017), for analyses on government impunity and corruption in El Salvador.

[17] See Pérez (2003) for an analysis of national insecurity in El Salvador and Guatemala.

[18] "*Living everyday death*", an archive of the dead, centered queer Latinos dying of AIDS in the San Francisco region in the 1980s and 1990s. In "Gay Latino Histories/Dying to be Remembered" (2010), Ramírez' denounces that queer Latinos were invisibilized and silenced in the historical narrative of this nation. To counter the violences of racism, cis white heteropatriarchy, and classism, he offers that the living and the dead, both enter historical consciousness when their "talking histories" allow us to break away from

dead. This situation is characterized by extreme human suffering and a deep sense of impending death, which is neither visible, nor audible to those who are unaffected by the relentlessness of these violent experiences, thus highlighting our complicity with historical silence. In this context, in 2018, many Salvadorans spoke of living under a "state of permanent '*desesperanza*"' or hopelessness, that forces thousands of marginalized families to migrate internally, multiple times, before they are ultimately displaced across international borders just to be alive one more day (Cristosal Report 2018), while others did not see a problem or blamed marginalized families for their condition.

For those who make the journey north and reach the U. S.-Mexco border, when they are caught or they surrender to border patrol agents, they face criminalization, family separation, and or indefinite detention within zones of indistinction (Agamben 1998), where many meet their deaths. If they survive the dreadful conditions in U. S. detention centers, they are eventually deported, and upon arriving in El Salvador, they are compelled to embody a new social identity and a new struggle, as they are officially labeled '*los retornados*' (the returned). Under this forced transnational social identity, reminiscent of the Spanish caste[19] system in El Salvador, *los retornados* are deemed to be at the bottom of Salvadoran society and they must start from scratch, with little to no assistance from the government, becoming much more vulnerable than before they migrated -- as many are returned ill or injured, and empty-handed, criminalized -- only to face new impossibilities in old terrains. According to Zilberg (2004), Salvadorans who are forcibly repatriated from the U.S. to the streets of San Salvador, embody the clash of globalization with and beyond the bounds of the nation-state, North-South simultaneously, compelling us to think about the complex relationship between space, identity, and belonging (Ibid 762-770). In this powerful dynamic, Zilberg argues that cultural identity neither corresponds to a territory, nor it is bound by national citizenship, leading us to interrogate the spatial logics of globalization and what it means to be Salvadoran in the post war years. This critical interrogation of spatial logics demands a close examination of our forced trans-dis-locations to other parts of the world in the context of war and *new forms of war* that are not over, requiring different cultural and cognitive mapping as ways to re-orient ourselves in relationship to finding 'home', despite the blurred geo-physical and geo-cultural boundaries that many Salvadoran families are experiencing, lately (Ibid 770-773). In this regard, the *tatas* and the *nanas* say that, now than more than ever, it is imperative for Salvadorans to recover our cultural

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our own complicity for being active producers of silences (Ibid 103). The stories of the dead, he states, help us recognize, mourn, and celebrate the traces of their life, allowing us to archive the oppressions of bodies that refuse to conform (Ibid 123). I think that similarly as queer bodies, Indigenous bodies -- the living and the dead -- interrogate the system through their testimonios of trauma, which Ramírez' says, respond to the silences, the discrimination, the stigma, and the uncertainty of being unseen and unheard (Ibid 106). Their stories are too painful to be contained within this or any other dissertation. Their suffering surpasses any meanings that foreign words may attempt to capture. They escape the boundaries of this text, to become "living reflections on loss, suffering, and death" as ways of being in and of this world (Ibid).

[19] Under the Spanish colonial administration, the caste system is a racialized hierarchy of imposed social relations, rights, and privileges structured according to skin color, with people of European descent and lighter skin at the top and people with darker skin and non-European descent, at the bottom (Tilly 2005: 109).

legacies and understand who we are and where we come from, so that we can navigate through unstable and unfamiliar spaces and places in the North-South geographies through our local, national, and transnational identities with a new political consciousness that, this is the land of our ancestors, and therefore, we are where we belong and we belong where we are[20].

Living under a state of permanent *desesperanza* continues to be the norm for the Salvadoran marginal subject, whose modern histories of violence remain in the collective memory of the people. These histories remind them that state-sponsored violence, repression, and terror have been instrumental for the dominant class and their supporter dictatorships to subjugate racialized and gendered bodies to protect their capitalist interests, which have always had deep ties to globalized economies since colonial times (Menjívar and Rodríguez 2005: 87-91; Samper 1993: 15). In a country where one in three people live under severe poverty, and the average Salvadoran earns approximately $7 per day, but the price of a hamburger meal is higher than an entire day's wages (for those who are formally employed and even worse for those who are informally employed, such as street vendors and care givers), there is significant 'agency' in getting up every day and facing the challenges that each day brings.

What is less talked about El Salvador is the everyday living death conditions of Nawa-Pipil communities in Western El Salvador, whose leaders bemoan that they have been living under a state of continuous ethnocidal violence, displacement and dispossession from the land, cultural erasure and linguicide, and systematic forced assimilation since the Spanish invasion and occupation of 1524. These multiple and simultaneous colonial violences, they state, are uninterrupted and continue to occur at the hands of the Salvadoran state (1821 to the present), foreign governments, and multinational corporations, and never end (Flores 2019; Tepas-Lapa 2019; Sánchez-Vides 2019). With conviction, Nawa-Pipil leaders talk openly about the need to decolonize ourselves and "unlearn" what the Spaniards left behind, which U. S. imperialism is reproducing now, and which has attempted to destroy Indigenous communities everywhere. This way, Salvadorans and the world can benefit from Indigenous epistemologies of being and knowing the world to co-exist differently with each other and the land. These alternate approaches, they state, reside on the other side of the colonial catastrophe that in which we live and are an indictment to the present state of the world, as they know it.

Having spent fourteen months in El Salvador, in 2018-2019, supported by student grants from the University of California Multicampus Research Programs and Initiatives/Critical Refugee Studies Collective (UC MRPI); the U.S. Department of State, Fulbright U. S. Student Program; and the University of California, Merced, Miguel Vélez Latin American Graduate Fellowship, my research was focused on investigating what remains after war, under Nawat-Pipil epistemologies of *te miki tay tupal* (*lo nuestro no muere*/what is ours does not die). Once there, I quickly observed a world of '*caravanas*' and '*retornados*' in newspapers, museums, and public talks, enveloped by the violent U. S.-centric rhetoric of former U.S. President Donald J. Trump, whose threats to suspend

[20] A call for a political awakening from the colonial nightmare that have Salvadorans believing that we are half Europeans, given that the *tatas* and the *nanas* often state that "*todos somos indios*" (Interviews and field notes 2019).

the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) of some 300,000 Salvadoran families weighed heavily on the national consciousness[21]; conversations about the re-integration of 300,000 transnational, possibly bilingual (Spanish-English) *familias retornadas* dominated the air in the news media, museums, public talks, and at the dinner table. Simultaneously, in this transnational space, there were daily, local stories of gang-related kidnappings, assaults, murders, rape, extorsion, and warnings issued by local security forces to remain watchful. More subdued than the first two were Indigenous organizing efforts at various levels, in support of their claims to land, cultural traditions, language, and self-determination, which occasionally made news.

In this context, what became obvious to me as a Salvadoran who was forcibly displaced by war and who made it back home three decades later to experience a new form of war during the postwar years was the persistence of the past in El Salvador. Everywhere I went -- restaurants, shopping malls, open plazas, banks, hospitals, beaches, the countryside, parking lots, etc. -- there were soldiers and police in full assault gear, with their faces covered up with black balaclavas, patrolling on foot and on trucks, with their fingers on the ready position on the triggers of their automatic weapons. Homes were cordoned off by razor-wire or shards of glass on their roofs and fences, and the most sophisticated ones were behind gated communities guarded by armed security. And I was advised by the locals to be home by sundown and urged by the U. S. embassy to never take public transportation. These community environs did not feel like 'peace time'; in fact, they were reminiscent of the war for me, although most Salvadorans were not bothered by the heavy militarization of space and police presence.

Yet, more valuable than my own insights about the militarization of space and place in the postwar years were the teachings of the *Tajtzin* and *Nantzin Tamachtiani* (the elder men and women who know), who taught me about looking beyond new understandings of how these violent continuities of the past keep re-occurring in Kushkatan. The *tatas and the nanas*[22] instantly named the colonial experience as the reason for the perpetual violences. And then, they showed me what Nawa-Pipil communities are doing to resist living everyday death in *Kushkatan* to survive the permanent state of *desesperanza* that surrounds their lives. Their resistance and survivance, they say, are grounded in their ways of being and understanding the world through the Nawat-Pipil language, cosmovision, traditions, and the stories of *los más viejos* (the elders), and not on what coloniality has done to their lives. But their decolonizing efforts go hand in hand with colonization and European notions of modernity. Without the *tatas* and the *nanas*' generous and critical perspectives, the breadth and depth of this research would not be possible.

4. Study Design

The aim of this study is to document the contemporary experiences of resistance and survivance of Nawa-Pipil communities in Western El Salvador through the rich

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[21] *Remesas* (remittances) in El Salvador, constitute one fifth of the national economy that the Salvadoran government does not have to worry about it. When Salvadorans in the U. S. are deported and money stops flowing South, this has a direct impact on national (in)security because it eliminates a significant portion of the money that circulates in El Salvador, which rests on the shoulders of the most vulnerable and marginalized families (Washington 2019).

[22] Terms of endearment for *Tajtzin* and *Nantzin* used in Nawa communities in Western El Salvador.

poetic embodiments of the Nawat-Pipil language, their mythopoetics, epistemologies, contemporary songs, and ways of knowing and being in the world, to confront and unsettle the legacies of death and destruction of the Spanish colonial incursion in *Anahuac* in 1524, which is not over yet. To do so, I examine the long-lasting implications of the coloniality of power (Quijano 2000), the coloniality of gender (Lugones 2007), and the coloniality of migration (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2018) in El Salvador, through a scaffolded interdisciplinary and transnational theoretical approach that puts various scholars in conversation with one another, to illuminate the complexities of socio-historical phenomena that are still evolving. From this perspective, I rely on the research and contributions of historians, sociologists, humanists, anthropologists, linguists, philosophers, social psychologists, cultural studies and literature scholars, critical race and critical refugee studies experts, human rights advocates, Latin Americanists, and decolonial/Indigenous studies scholars, who have theorized on important topics and produced a valuable knowledge-base that is now supporting my efforts and creating space for my deliberations. Most importantly, in this study I have endeavored to intentionally center the contributions of Nawa-Pipil cultural consultants, knowledge-keepers, whose millenary perspectives have mostly been excluded from the Western canon. In this light, I situate our collective investigation in the *Anahuac/Nawat-Pipil* canon, which is over ten thousand years old and flourishing.

Given the socio-historical and transnational context of this investigation, I open my research with broad questions to help me reflect on how Nawa-Pipil communities -- both the living and the dead -- create national and transnational spaces of consciousness,[23] outside-of-state forms of governance, to advance their political agendas, Indigenous [human] rights, and claims for self-determination and intellectual sovereignty, amidst competing narratives of the war and postwar. I also question how these competing narratives that emanate from the war and post-war experiences, such as organized crime, forced migration, government impunity and corruption, economic (in)security, militarization, etc. influence Nawa-Pipil identity formation today, at home and abroad. And lastly, I explore how Nawa-Pipil communities negotiate and resist asymmetrical relations of power that have silenced and invisibilized their existence and resistance, at the local and transnational levels, while they are forced to confront the tribulations of living everyday death from of a permanent state of *desesperanza.*

To answer these broad questions, I highlight the durable impacts of coloniality in Kushkatan by locating the continuities of the past in the present, in the context of *living everyday* death and *desesperanza* that Salvadoran families are facing today. To do so, I utilize Aníbal Quijano's theory of the *coloniality of power* (2002), Encarnación Gutiérrez-Rodríguez's theory of the *coloniality of migration* (2018), and María Lugones's theory of the *coloniality of gender* (2007) as an overarching framework to

[23] Willliam Robinson states that as social structures are becoming transnationalized, an epistemic turn is required in concurrence with this shift, to understand how individuals, groups, institutions, and states interact with each other in new global spaces where the cultural and political characteristics of local societies are combined with emerging multilevel and multinational activities. See William Robinson's theory of *global capitalism* (2004) and Walter Mignolo's notions of global colonialism/global capitalism in *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* (2011) for an in-depth understanding of transnational consciousness.

trace the logics of coloniality during colonization and its intimate connections with the 1932 Matanza, the 1980s war, and the 'new forms of war' in the postwar years. I expose the colonial logics in three stories of Nawa-Pipil resistance, which I fold into one strong story of survivance in *Kushkatan*. Each of these stories becomes a chapter, and each chapter is divided into sections.

I tell each of the three stories through *testimonio*[24] to center the voices of the *tatas* and the *nanas,* the Nawat-Pipil mythopoetics and epistemologies that come alive through the Nawat-Pipil language and the grammar of the body in the context of the four sacred elements of Nawa-Pipil cosmovision, and ceremony as methods. The *tatas* and the *nanas* have requested that the information that I document in this study be shared with the public, so their stories can be known to others, especially the Salvadoran community abroad. I endeavor to document Nawat-Pipil perspectives that have not been historicized yet, because asymmetric relations of power in El Salvador have silenced and invisibilized their systems of embodied knowledges that propose alternative ways of being and understanding the world, from territories and peoples that continue to sustain global economies, while simultaneously caring for one another and the planet.

5. Chapter Organization

5.1 Chapter 1: Nawat-Pipil Soundworlds

I explore the poetic and political implications of the sonority of Nawat-Pipil, a moribund language, according to experts. Nawa-Pipil elderly women from the municipality of *Witzapan* in Western *Kushkatan* embody this language every day and everywhere they go to continually reframe their relationship with others, including the Salvadoran state.

Research Questions

I seek to understand how Nawa-Pipil women in *Witzapan* deploy soundings in their mother-tongue to resist, reassert, confront, and survive the afterlives of racial capitalism, state violence, and perpetual war, and how *Nantzin* Antonia's songs re-articulate conditions of possibility and spaces of alterity for listening to the other and generating contemporaneous understandings of Indigenous identities and existence today. What the echoes of the past in *Kushkatan* teach us today through the orality/aurality of a dying language about Indigenous futures in El Salvador. And through *Nantzin* Antonia's centering of what is indispensable and vital – such as the sacred energies of *ejekat* (aire, air), we learn how Salvadoran society might reimagine ways of living, working, and being together in the aftermath of war.

Thesis

I argue that through Indigenous soundings and song, Nawat-Pipil women create alternative sovereign spaces that foreground Indigenous ontologies and soundworlds through *yultaketzalis,* an Nawat-Pipil epistemology that affirms, as a method, the action of *one person existing within the person who speaks* or the action of *listening through the speaker's eyes*, I claim that these sovereign spaces resist the limitations imposed by the

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[24] Arturo Arias states that in Latin America, *testimonio* is the preferred voice of non-writers caught between modernity and coloniality and that while they don't necessarily articulate the truth, they craft the individualized lived experiences of given *testimoniantes* as they struggle with their daily survival and try to give meaning to their being on Earth. Therefore, *testimonios* enable us to understand the nature of an ethics of alterity and the implications of solidarity (2015: 257-258).

biopolitics and necropolitics of the state, and the logics of neoliberalism, which seek to resonate "difference" and re-center European colonial ideals of race and gender in the contemporary socio-cultural and political imaginaries of the Salvadoran nation. Despite the precarity of the Nawat-Pipil language today, Nawa-Pipil women embody Indigenous ontologies and soundworlds to continue to re-affirm Native presence and survivance in the *Kuhskatan* territories and beyond.

Section 1: Coloniality of Power and Biopolitics

I utilize Quijano's concept of the *coloniality of power* (2000) and its reverberations in Michel Foucault's notion of the *biopolitical power* of the state (1990), to trace how Nawa-Pipil voices have been attempted to be normalized by multicultural ideologies after the 1932 Matanza. I discuss the current state of the Nawat-Pipil language in El Salvador, its main characteristics, the centrality of the body in the Nawat-Pipil language, the Indigenous epistemology of *yultaketzalis*, and why it is critical to exist momentarily outside of the colonial architecture to center new alternative ways of seeing and understanding the world.

Section 2: The Sonic Episteme in the Neoliberal State

I cite Robin James's theorizing on the *sonic episteme* and *acoustic resonance* in the neoliberal state (2019) to complicate how the contemporaneous sonic production of Nawa-Pipil women resonates within, through, and beyond the biopolitical and neoliberal acoustics of modern-day El Salvador to create a space of alterity and intellectual sovereignty for themselves. I describe the municipality of *Witzapan*, one of the original Nawa-Pipil settlements in *Kushkatan* and simultaneously, one of the last few places in the country where Nawat-Pipil is spoken today. By doing so, I explore the reasons why Nawat-Pipil continues to flourish in this space.

Section 3: Analysis of *Nantzin* Antonia Ramírez's Sonic Archive

I use testimonial techniques, critical ethnographic methods, Indigenous epistemologies of *yultaketzalis*, and the sacred energies of *ejekat* (aire/air) to make meaning of three Indigenous a cappella songs: *metzas nawat* (*la india pipil* or the Pipil Indian woman), *ne witzapanchin* (*los mingueñitos* or the little people from Witzapan), and *ne nawat suchikisa* (*el náhuat florece* or Nawat flourishes), written and publicly performed by *Nantzin* Antonia Ramírez. I rely on my positionality as an Indigenous descendant from *Kushkatan* and my Nawat-Pipil skills to critically see and hear, through *yultaketzalis,* the sonority of her political and poetic discourses, which expose the multiple and sedimented layers of what for decades has been deemed as 'absent' or as 'noise' by the biopolitical and neoliberal acoustics of 'multiculturalism' in contemporary El Salvador.

5.2 Chapter 2: Nawat-Pipil Deathworlds

I trace the forced migratory journey, across land and water, of Indigenous descendants Óscar and Angie Valeria Martínez from *Kushkatan* to the edges of the U. S.-*Mexco* border, which resulted in their death. I expose the politics and the policies of the U. S. that placed them in the river and that instantly 'disappeared' them after consuming their difference in the news media, following their drowning. I center the struggles for survivance of an historically dis-membered, 'out-of-place' Indigenous community that, through their mother tongue, is continually re-membering (*ilnamiki*) their humanness and

recovering the sacred land and water beneath their feet, to claim a place for themselves within this world, *con ojo de venado* (deer's eye).

Research Questions

I seek to understand how Nawat-Pipil epistemologies of *ilnamiki* and *ojo de venado,* unsettle the spatial logics of U.S. empire, forcing Nawa-Pipil communities to exist in the fixed temporality of geographies of inhabitability and anti-humanness (Wynter) at home, while in transit, and at the U.S.-*Mexco* border. I endeavor to answer how the Nawat-Pipil and Nahuatl languages, as ancestral systems of knowledge, confront and denaturalize the teleological silences of forced displacement and dispossession of its *hablantes*/speakers. In contemplating the drowning deaths of Óscar and Angie Valeria in the summer of 2019, I ponder if and how can the drowned emerge from the river and help us re-imagine sacred and ancestral forms of selfhood to re-construct life anew.

Thesis

I argue that Nawa-Pipil communities and their descendants in *Kushkatan* hold onto ancestral praxes of *seeing the present with the eyes of the past (ilnamiki) con ojo de venado*, to grapple with the violences of the colonial wound that are not over and that have not healed. As they bear witness to living everyday death in El Salvador, Nawa-Pipil communities and their descendants sustain themselves through ontologies and epistemologies, such as *ilnamiki*, to actively recover that which has been lost in the discursive geographies and narratives of the West. These regimes of truth continue to conceive Indigenous peoples as 'still submerged'. It is in the same geographies that Nawa mytho-poetics have been telling us for millennia, in the different configurations of the ancient Uto-Aztecan linguistic family, in different spaces and places of the continent, stories that continue to be re-membered today. Through the unique re-iterations of ancestral stories, Nawa mytho-poetics reveal inexorable threads that unify the continent, altering its geographies and temporalities, making it possible for us to re-imagine a borderless and more bountiful planet for Indigenous futurities, where conditions of possibility for being within and beyond this world, exist in the land and water.

Section 1: North of the Border

Part 1: The Politics

I expose the U.S. politics that put Óscar and Angie Valeria in the water in the summer of 2019. To do so, I utilize Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez's theory of the *coloniality of migration* (2018), to reveal the connections between the media, racial capitalism, and the asylum-migration policies of the U. S. that, through the Steinle case (2015), re-activated a specific conjuncture of racism in the U. S. 2016 presidential elections, resulting in harsher migration controls, thereafter.

Part 2: The Policies

I utilize Achille Mbembe's theory of *necropolitics* (2019) and his conceptual definitions of *matrix of rules* (Ibid 96) and *remote borderization strategies* (Ibid 100) to examine the U. S. spatial logics that authorize technologies at the border sites of empire. I utilize the notion of *river-borders/border-rivers* developed by Salvadoran scholar Jorge Cuéllar (2021) to center the experiences of Central American families migrating north and to highlight U.S. spatial technologies of terror that render the Indigenous body as the most immediate site and place for spatial control, effecting its death. I introduce Laura Briggs's reflections on reproductive justice (2020) to interrogate the history of

Indigenous child-taking by the U. S. from Salvadoran families, which is not over. I frame these histories of violence as a teleologically produced grammar of terror deployed against asylum-seeking families at the U.S. - *Mexco* border, who are actively protesting their location within necropolitical regimes back home and abroad, and demanding a more humane world for themselves, their children, their futures, and the planet. I close this section, with Sylvia Wynter's anti-colonial meditations about the geographies of uninhabitability and antihumanness in a neoliberal capitalist society (McKittrick 2015) to situate Óscar and Angie Valeria's presence/absence in the river, at the U. S. southwest border, altering Western notions of fixed geography and what it means to be human from a Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) perspective.

Section 2: South of the Border

I unpack the impact of coloniality on Indigenous communities in *Kushkatan*, centering Óscar and Angie Valeria's hometown of San Martín on the outskirts of San Salvador, to provide a socio-historical context and understand the current living conditions of Salvadoran families caught in these geospatialities. Utilizing the colonial archives about San Martín, I borrow Wynter's notion of the geo-racial (2015) and Quijano's concept of racial capitalism (2000) to shed light on the racialized division of labor and the violent human exploitation practices connected to indigo production and extraction in central *Kushkatan*, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries.

For those who survived the colonial carnage of the indigo mills, I trace their 'disappearances' from the land through their forced migration to the mountains and/or their systematic forced assimilation and *ladinization* or *de-indianization* processes. I propose that Indigenous 'disappearances' during colonial times and its aftermath in *Kushkatan* became part of Indigenous repertoires of resistance and survivance that continue to function today as systems of knowledges. These systems protect Indigenous self-possession and the relationship with the land and water, in the face of ongoing colonial dispossession. Through epistemologies of *ojo de venado* and *ilnamiki,* I posit that, for Indigenous descendants on the run today, living histories inform their trans-territorial identities, political sovereignty, and permanent fugitive state. In other words, to be an Indigenous fugitive today is to re-member to possess-the-self and the territory one walks on, *con ojo de venado*.

Section 3: *El Otro Viaje* (The Other Voyage) – *Apan / El Río* / The River

Part 1: *Miktan* (Nawat-Pipil story, pre-colonial times, *Anahuac*)

In part 1 of Section 3, I utilize ethnographic methods to shed light on ways of knowing and being -- *el sentir y pensar cotidiano* of Indigenous communities in *Kushkatan*, about what it is like to live everyday death, wherever they are. Centering Nawa-Pipil epistemologies of *ilnamiki* and *ojo de venado* and storytelling as methods, I relate my fieldwork observations and notes, using emic (insider)/etic (outsider) perspectives, and the notion of hybridity (Grosfoguel 2005), to meditate on the stories from our ancestors through different temporalities and spatialities, about what is like to perish in water.

I analyze excerpts from a pre-Columbian Nawa-Pipil text known as *Miktan, or En la profundidad [del agua]* / In the Depths [of Water]. *Miktan* was compiled and first published by anthropologist Leonhard Schultze Jena in 1935 (Lara-Martínez 2016: 5) and it addresses the underwater journeys of those who drown, according to Nawa-Pipil

cosmology. I do so to recover sacred and ancestral readings that help us see present traumatic events through *los ojos del pasado/the eyes who saw the past* con *ojo de venado*. I propose that Nawa-Pipil philosophies illuminate what we cannot see of past intractable events that continue to dis-member the present so that we can re-member it and heal. To undo the colonial harm, the living words of the eldest that are safeguarded in the grammar of the body offer us the possibility of counter-mapping the discursive ground of the West and its deathworlds that persist in attempting to erase Indigenous histories and presences from the land.

Part 2: *Michcuicatl / Cantar de Peces /* Fish Song (*Nahuatl* Story, colonial times, *Mexco*)

In part 2 of section 3, I reflect on excerpts from a Nahua song of lamentation written in Nahuatl, compiled in *Cantares mexicanos* (Circa 1550), titled *Michcuicatl or Cantar de Peces/*Fish Song (stanzas 854, 860, 866, 867, 884). The excerpts of this Nahuatl song capture the agony of the prolonged Spanish invasion and occupation of *Tenochtitlan* (1520-1521), and the fate of those who perished in the waters of Lake *Texcoco* when the Mexica empire fell, describing what is like to live perpetually in the interiority of water. *Michcuicatl* is also based on the Nawa's myth of creation, *The Legend of the Suns* (de Los Arcos 1967) and the eight omens predicting catastrophe (the invasion and occupation of Tenochtitlan) found in Book XII, Chapter 1 of the Florentine Codex (Sahagun Circa 1540-1587). I selected this Nahuatl text as a space of reflection where it is possible to recover a human right to an ethics of accompaniment, from the eyes who saw the past, for Central American Indigenous families who transit in dangerous occupied lands, at a time when there is an intensified need among Black and Indigenous communities for walking in the company of each other (Fanon 2004: 238, 239). Standing alongside others who can be eye-and-ear-witnesses and advocates for each other's futures is restorative and transformational, as it reminds us of the power of the living words of our elders, who in the face of muskets, rifles, pistols, and swords responded with poetry and song.

Part 3: Dear Little Fish (English Poem, Contemporary Times, Turtle Island)

In part 3 of section 3, I summon the presence of a contemporary poem written in English by an Indigenous descendant living in the U. S. diaspora, Diana Magaloni Kerpel, titled "Dear Little One/*Canto de Peces*" (2019). In this poem, Magaloni Kerpel connects the recent deaths of Central American Indigenous children at the U.S. southwest border, with the prophecies foretold in the Florentine Codex, and the experiences of displacement, dispossession, defeat, and death, spoken of in *Michcuicatl*. This poem serves as a way of holding an interminable vigil, a dignified bridge to another world where our 'being present' can lift the burden of their deaths off their shoulders and place it where it belongs: in the West. It is my hope that by being present for the little ones who have died in transit, the living words of our ancestors may become a sacred accompaniment that resonates within the new *tlacuiloqueh* and that they may engender collective healing and transformation to ameliorate the harm caused by our passive by-standing or active denial of human suffering that continues to take place at the border.

Conclusion

By juxtaposing the polyvocal intertextual perspectives of two ancient Nawa texts, one pre-colonial, written in Nawat-Pipil, and another one written during colonial times in

Nahuatl, with a contemporary poem written in English by an Indigenous descendant living in the U. S. diaspora, I seek to highlight the connections and spaces of the past and the present, beyond the binaries of, and, between, around, under, over, the center and the north, the land and water, the visible and the (in)visible, the Human and the (in)Human, the colonized and the colonizer, the living and the dead, to locate the life energy of the living words of Indigenous elders in our lived-spatialities and temporalities, from *Kushkatan* to *Aztlan*. It is in these ancestral, yet simultaneously contemporaneous spaces, that the grammar of the body of the Nawat-Pipil and Nahuatl languages help us re-encounter, sacred ancestral readings of the present order to re-envision a more humane hereafter.

Chapter 3: Nawa-Pipil Lifeworlds

In this chapter, I highlight the brutal murder and disappearance of Salvadoran police officer Carla Ayala in 2017, by her fellow male police officers. I center Ayala's killing, as a signifier of femi(ni)cide at the hands of the Salvadoran state. I do so, to trace the violences of European colonization on the intersectional identities and spatialities of Indigenous women and descendants today, that rendered Carla Ayala undeserving of life, less than human, disposable. I juxtapose this heinous crime with *Nusihuapiltzin,* a contemporary Indigenous play that re-tells the time immemorial Nawa-Pipil story of creation – *Nanahuatzin*, where a woman's body fragments to give life to several boys who discover maize and agriculture. This Nawa-Pipil story underlines how Nawa knowledge systems frame the concept of womanhood in a woman's body-as territory, as land and connect it to the sacred.

Research Questions

I seek to answer how Nawa-Pipil women's experiences of 'living everyday death' confront, subvert, and resist European conceptions of race, gender, sexuality, and state formation that are tied to notions of territory and land; what is being served by femicide/femi(ni)cide in El Salvador; how the Nawat-Pipil language informs embodied cosmogonies of the sacred to resist the patriarchal attitudes of Mestizo and Indigenous men deployed against Mestiza and Indigenous women, and how racialized women and girls' social intersections and spatialities protect them or not against the hyper-masculinized violence of social and state institutions; what are the gendered implications of land dispossession and struggles for territory on Indigenous women in *Kushkatan*; and how Indigenous storytelling helps reconceptualize our understandings that life without European conceptions of race, gender, sexuality, etc. affirms lifeworlds.

Thesis

I argue that feminist, decolonial responses from below, such as *Nusihuapiltzin*, are a continuation of Nawa-Pipil stories, a living text that exposes and confronts the perdurability and violence of European thinking manifested in the modern/colonial gender system, which is responsible for engendering deathworlds in El Salvador. A sacred homecoming, *Nusihuapiltzin* is a site of Nawa-Pipil resistance and survivance where women's embodied connections to the land and the cosmos situate them with a critical double-gaze (*Kab'awil)* to the past and the future at once, as protectors of land and water, and as a revered sources of life in the universe, however life manifests.

Section 1: Femicide/Femi(ni)cide in El Salvador

I explore the definitions of femicide (Lagarde y de Los Ríos 2006) and femi(ni)cide (Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos (CIDH) 2009) to establish the connections between femicide/femi(ni)cide and colonialism (García-del Moral et al 2023) in a Central American context and situate the alarming number and vicious nature of 'public' murders and disappearances of women and girls by men in El Salvador. I examine the psychology of *machismo* and *hembrismo* proposed by the late social psychologist Ignacio Martín Baró (qted. in Gaborit 2003) to understand the centrality of Spanish patriarchal ideologies at the local level and the lasting implications of the violent racialized and sexualized nature of European colonization in Mesoamerica (Musalo 2018). I borrow sociologist Cecilia Menjívar's theorizings on the instrumentality of violence and terror in El Salvador (2000; 2005) to elucidate about the socio-historical continuities of colonization through the experiences of Indigenous women in El Salvador during the 1932 Matanza, the 1980s war, and the 'new forms of war' during the post war period.

I borrow María Lugones's theorizing on the colonial/modern gender system or coloniality of gender (2007) to shed light on the nuanced relationship between race, gender, sexuality, and power, highlighting specifically her interest in the indifference of men who have been racialized themselves to the violences inflicted upon the racialized, gendered, and sexualized bodies of women and their struggles to resist and survive. To amplify Lugones's theories, I borrow Lorena Sosa's intersectional approach to analyzing colonialism (Crenshaw (1989) qted. in Sosa 2023), and Lorena Fuentes colonial socio-spatial scripts (2023) to make meaning of Carla Ayala's circumstances surrounding her death, based on the information provided in newspaper reports. I argue that the heinous killing of a policewoman by her fellow policemen and the ensuing disappearance of her body function as a signifier of the unrestrained excesses of femi(ni)cide in El Salvador and I propose that the systematic disavowals of a female body's right to full personhood reveal intimate connections with the Spanish colonial logics of deathworlds, for they are written on the territory and on the bodies of women.

Section 2: *Nanahuatzin*, the Nawa-Pipil Myth of Creation

I turn to the only written account of *Nanahuatzin*, the Nawa-Pipil myth of creation, known in the West as *La mujer en fragmentos* (The woman in fragments), first gathered by German anthropologist Leonhard Schultze-Jena in 1930 in the *Itzalku* region of *Kuhskatan*. I utilize the literary and philosophical interpretations of *Nanahuatzin* done by linguistic anthropologist Rafael Lara-Martínez (2010) to shed light on the centrality of the human body in the production of knowledge in the Nawat-Pipil language. From this premise, Lara-Martínez highlights that the lived experience manifest into agricultural and astronomical knowledges to explain the first appearance of maize and the connections between the cosmos.

I borrow Ruud Van Akkeren's (2006) theorizing about the significance and connections of the gourd in Mesoamerica through various mythopoetic stories of creation in the region. He proposes that the gourd was an important symbol in Mexica, Maya, and Nawa-Pipil oral traditions and it was linked to the first appearance of maize and agriculture in the preclassic period, which was expressed in the Mesoamerican tradition of the ball game (Ibid 36). Through the *testimonio* of Indigenous leaders *Tatjzin Tamachtiani* (the elder who knows) Fidel Flores and *Tajtzin Tamachtiani* Nicolás

Sánchez-Vides and ceremony, I make meaning of Indigenous epistemologies of ne g*itilana ne i yesiu ne tal* (sacred connections of the blood of the land) to propose that Nawa-Pipil mythopoetics continue to affirm a woman's body-as-territory and land, in a sacred relationship to the cosmos, as lifeworlds. By reclaiming body, territory, and life through *las historias de los más viejos* (the stories of the elders), the Nawat-Pipil language unsettles the violent logics of colonial deathworlds and helps us illuminate a path to recovering ourselves from the colonial experience.

Section 3: *Nusiwapiltzin* – Salvadoran Metatextualities from Below

I bring attention to *Nusihuatpiltzin*, a 2018 play performed in El Salvador by *Las Tres Prietas* (The Three Colored Women), an insurgent theater company founded by three young women of color who collaborate with Nawa-Pipil elders to co-write and perform their plays in Nawat-Pipil and Spanish, based on Indigenous oral/aural traditions and the current realities. I frame the 2018 performance of *Nusihuapiltzin* as a metatextual "gender- and genre" decolonial discourse from below through Gloria Chacón's notion of the Kab'awil (2018: 69, 70), which enables the re-telling of an ancient sacred story – *Nanahuatzin* -- to break the silence against the harsh socio-political and economic realities that Salvadoran families are facing today. I maintain that *Nusihuapiltzin* responds to femicide/femi(ni)cide by conjuring up Mesoamerican *Kab'awilian* strategies (Chacón 2018: 13-19) to critically examine the notion of womanhood as it transits through time and space on the bodies of Indigenous women, to reclaim a woman's body-as-territory and land, and its sacred relationship with the cosmos.

Through the *testimonio* of Nawa-Pipil women and men, and ceremony as methods, I document how Nawat-Pipil epistemologies of *ixmati* (Indigenous recognition of the other) and *Kab'awilian* strategies help us invoke and connect with multiple dimensions simultaneously, such as time and space, and different knowledge systems, "gender and genre", to decolonize our ways of being and understanding the world. These sacred ancestral understandings of the origins of life, as diverse as they may be in various Mesoamerican regions, continue to be foundational to Indigenous women's contemporary claims of body and territory. They, signal conditions of possibility for conceiving new worlds, where women and girls' futurities are uninterrupted by the violences of the West.

6. Theoretical Framework

6.1 Coloniality of Power

According to Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2000), globalization is the culmination of a process that began with the constitution of America through a Eurocentered colonial/modern capitalist new model of power (Ibid 533). One of two fundamental axes of power in this model is the idea of race and the other is the constitution of a new structure of control of labor, its resources, and products, which form the basis of capital and the world market (Ibid 534).

Race is a socio-historical construct of modernity first used during colonization to classify the colonized as inferior to the superiority of the European colonizers. Although race was invented in modernity, it was supported by the Catholic church through notions

of 'civilizing the savage[25]' and 'salvation[26]'. Later, race justified the constitution of European nationhood and the formation of new social identities – 'Indians'[27], Blacks, and Mestizos – redefining the colonized in hierarchies imposed by colonial domination. As an instrument of social control, race became more durable and stable than colonialism itself (Ibid 534).

From the very beginning of the colonization of America, Europeans associated labor exploitation with the dominated races because they considered them "inferior". Thus, the genocide of Indigenous peoples in America was mainly caused by Europeans using them as disposable manual labor and they were forced to work until death. This racist attitude towards Indigenous peoples prevails today (Ibid 539). Thus, the control of labor in the new model of global power in the Americas was constituted by European colonizers through the articulation of all forms of labor control around the capitalist wage-labor relation (Ibid 539).

In the eighteenth century, the racialized distribution of social identities was combined with a racialized distribution of labor exploitation in colonial capitalism. Whites controlled gold, silver, and other commodities produced by the unpaid labor of Indians, Blacks, and Mestizos. This positioned Whites to control worldwide commercial traffic, capital, labor, and the means of production globally (Ibid 537). Meanwhile, colonized peoples around the world were expropriated and repressed of their cultural knowledge and forced to assimilate into the dominant European culture and new world market. This led Europeans to develop traits of ethnocentrism and hegemony, which Quijano refers to as Eurocentrism (Ibid 538, 541, 542, 549). A more in-depth discussion of the coloniality of power will be done in Chapter 1 to shed light on how it impacts Nawat-Pipil communities in *Kushkatan*.

6.2 Coloniality of Migration

Sociologist Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez amplifies Quijano's theory of the coloniality of power to focus on her analysis of migration through the race and labor, as the axis of power that plays a key role in defining who can migrate and who cannot (2018). Her research on the European migration 'crisis' of 2015 reveals that the connections between the media, racial capitalism, and the asylum-migration policies of nation-states activate a specific conjuncture of racism that results in harsher migration controls to deny access to racialized subjects. Claiming that the refugee 'crisis' at the U.S. southwest border operates within the logics of "the coloniality of migration," she states that, migration becomes the unit of analysis that differentiates between an insider and an outsider, since the emergence of the modern nation-state in the nineteenth century (Ibid 34). This difference, she adds, evokes the logics of the coloniality of power (Quijano 2000), as it constructs racial hierarchies between insiders, who are members of the nation or 'citizens' and 'migrants' who are considered outsiders, aliens. Thus, the dichotomy between citizens and migrants is embedded in a racializing logic derived from social relations shaped by colonial power (Ibid).

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[25] From a Eurocentric perspective, 'dark' races are condemned as inferior for not being rational subjects. Consequently, they are objects of study, closer to or directly with nature, and therefore, dominable and exploitable (Quijano 2000: 555).

[26] Christianity is founded on the primacy of the soul above the body (Quijano 2000: 554).

[27] Quijano's term in this article (2000).

Gutiérrez Rodríguez situates the *asylum-migration nexus*[28] at the juncture of racial capitalism,[29] where it is expressed through the racial coding of migration policies, which reproduce a modern hierarchical order with racializing effects, reminiscent of European colonialism (Ibid 18, 34). The asylum-migration nexus, according to Gutiérrez Rodríguez, can be understood as a discourse used by policy makers to meet certain economic, political, or ideological objectives as an aspect of 'knowledge-power' relations in the Foucauldian sense, which is mainly expressed through legal rules that define migration categories (Foucault 1977: 27 qted. in Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018: 20). Gutiérrez-Rodríguez expands this argument by adding that the asylum-migration nexus functions as a politics of legitimation by managing the collateral damage resulting from global war, militarism, securing borders, and eroding the humanitarian aspect of asylum (2018: Ibid). A more in-depth analysis of the coloniality of migration will be done in Chapter 2, which is relevant to the contemporaneous Salvadoran migration experience.

6.3 Coloniality of Gender

Decolonial feminist and philosopher María Lugones theorizes about the *colonial/modern gender system* or *coloniality of gender* (2007) to amplify what we know about the intersections of race and gender in Quijano's theory of the *coloniality of power* (2000). Lugones builds on Quijano's theory of the coloniality of power, through an in-depth analysis of gender and its entanglements with race, which she posits, are co-constitutive of each other and cannot be separated in the project of modernity, as Europeans see race as gendered, gender as raced, and labor as both, raced and gendered (2007: 1-17).

She interrogates Quijano's Eurocentric and hegemonic framing of sex/gender, which she states, he bases on patriarchal and heterosexual dimorphism or the biological ordering of the sexes. She proposes that his theorizing is a means for continuing to subject and disempower colonized women and *Other* gendered minoritized peoples such as 2SLGBTQ+ communities. From her perspective, the coloniality of gender trespasses all aspects of a person's life, creating new social and geo-cultural subjectivities that are aimed to destroying Indigenous notions of body and territory, as well as sacred knowledges – including Indigenous conceptualizations of sex and gender[30] -- that existed

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[28] Alfonso Gonzales uses the term "asylum-detention nexus" (De Genova 2016) to contextualize the legal production of migrant illegality, detainability, and deportability in the U.S., based on the racialized and gendered body of Central American asylum-seekers that have continually presented in the Rio Grande Valley region, including the 2014 unaccompanied minors 'crisis' (2020: 336).

[29] The racist distribution of new social identities, combined with a corresponding racist distribution of work and exploitation, and control of productive resources and capital in America, manifested by the emergence of Europe as the central place of the colonial/modern capitalist power that became the privilege of whiteness (Quijano 2000: 217, 2018).

[30] Burr Cartwright Brundage (1979) research shows that for Mexicas "it was relatively easy for deities to shift their sex" (54), an idea supported by Inga Clendinnen (1991), who argues that gender roles and sexual identity was not stable among deities. For instance, *Xochiquetzal* was the deity of sexual love, artistry and delight, and threads "her" way through multiple sexual relationships with deities. But she was also *Macuilxochitl,* who is commonly taken to be male. Earth and water deities were androgynous and could be invoked in either gender identity (Ibid 167, 168).

prior to the imposition of the European modern/colonial gender system. Through the European colonial logics, Lugones interjects that the coloniality of gender orders and authorizes two opposed and hierarchical groups, where men are dominant/superior, and women subordinate/inferior (Ibid).

Lugones is particularly interested in understanding the *indifference* of men (who have been violently and systematically racialized as inferior themselves) to the violences inflicted on the bodies of racialized women and their struggles to resist them. She offers that a man's indifference to a woman's pain and subjection makes visible the instrumentality of the coloniality of gender to subject both -- women and men of color -- in all aspects of their lives, while supporting the hyper-masculinized constructions of authority, the relation between capital and labor, and the production of knowledge in Latin America (2007 1-16). A more in-depth analysis of how the coloniality of gender has impacted Nawa-Pipil communities, particularly women, will be done in Chapter 3.

7. Methods

7.1 Decolonial Methods

Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) theorizes that since Western research draws from "'an archive' of knowledge and systems, rules, and values which stretch beyond the boundaries of Western science" referred to as "The West", which functions as the standard criteria and model to compare and rank other societies against, Indigenous understandings of the world have been considered "shocking, abhorrent and barbaric" (Ibid 44-45). From this Eurocentric ideology, Indigenous knowledges have been the target of "destruction, retrieval, and reformulation" by the West, a practice that has had real material consequences for colonized peoples (Ibid). She adds that, confronting Western appropriations of non-European systems of knowledge has historically been a difficult task because academic debate takes place within the structures of power and the terms established by the West, which reproduce power itself in various explicit and implicit modalities and prevent meaningful change. Tuhiwai Smith proposes that the cultural archive of the world does not embody a unitary system of knowledge and it should be thought of as containing multiple traditions of knowledge and ways of knowing (Ibid). She cites the intellectual work of women of color and Indigenous peoples as an example of how colonized peoples have challenged and transformed Western appropriations of Black and Indigenous knowledges, which she affirms, offer a more radical epistemology from the margins that makes possible for new understandings and ideas to emerge (Ibid). It is within Tuhiwai Smith's theorizing about the cultural archive of the world that, as a woman of color from the Global South, I ground my knowledge production in the "shocking", the "abhorrent", and the "barbaric" knowledges of *mis abuelas y abuelos*[31] to diversify academia and contribute to knowledge production from and within the Indigenous canon in Central America.

7.2 Indigenous Methods

7.2a The Nawat-Pipil Language

When given permission by my elders, I center my ancestors' conceptions of the world that are embedded in the Nawat-Pipil language's grammar of the body, songs

[31] Term of endearment for our ancestors (including the sun, the moon, the stars, water, etc.) used in Kushkatan.

(*Metzas Nawa, Ne Wijwitzapanchin, Ne Nawat Suchikisa*), stories (*Miktan, Michcuicatl, Nanahuatzin,* and *Nusihuapiltzin*), and epistemologies. Among these, we find *yultaketzalis* (listening through the speaker's eyes)*, ilnamiki* (seeing the present with the eyes of the past)*, ojo de venado/deer's eye* (*cuauhixtic*: the state of always being acutely aware of one's surroundings and relying on instinct and speed to survive), *ixmati* (recognition of the other), *ne gitilana ne i yesiu ne tal* (the blood of the land), and k*'abawil* (the double gaze)*.* These embodied knowledges recover Indigenous histories from the geographies of the land and render the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples in *Kushkatan* visible and audible. *Te miki tay tupal* (*lo nuestro no muere*/what is ours does not die).

In addition, during the time I spent in Kushkatan, I immersed myself in the study of the Nawat-Pipil language with *Tajtzin Tamachtiani* Alexandro Tepas Lapa and *Tamachtiani* Elias Córdova Gil at the *Universidad Tecnológica de El Salvador* (UTEC) through the *Cátedra Indígena Náhuat,* where I earned a *diplomado* (certificate) in Intercultural Education. The program was directed by *la Doctora* Morena Guadalupe Magaña and *La Iniciativa Portadores del Náhuat* (IPN) de El Salvador. *Nantzin Tamachtiani* Fidelina Cortés or *Tajtzin Tamachtiani* Nicolás García, who are active maternal speakers from Witzapan would be present each week in the classroom to interact with students. I also took a Nahua Philosophies course offered through the School of Theology at the *Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas* (UCA), taught by U.S. visiting Professor Dr. Rafael Lara-Martínez. I enrolled in Nawat-Pipil courses taught by *Tamachtiani Alberto Cruz, Tamachtiani Josué Ramos, and Tamachtiani* Werner Hernández offered at the UCA. These courses were attended on a regular basis by Nahuahablantes (speakers) from Witzapan, such as N*antzin Anastasia López López and Nantzin Antonia Ramírez.*

Upon returning to the U.S., I engaged in the Nahuatl language (Huasteca Veracruzana), through virtual classes offered at the University of California, Berkeley and the University of Utah during the COVID-19 pandemic, with then Ph.D. candidate *Tlamachtihquetl* Abelardo de la Cruz de la Cruz, who identifies as *macehualli* (Indigenous).

Learning the Nawat-Pipil and Nahuatl languages at an intermediate level, has helped me uncover the connections between two Uto-Aztecan languages, which has made a significant difference in my engagement with my research topic and broadened my transnational network of Indigenous speakers and neo-hablantes (new speakers), who are also knowledge keepers andhave a wealth of cultural insights through the spoken word.

7.2b Conscientious Political Silence

I borrow a praxis of conscientious political silence from Nawa-Pipil elders as a discursive strategy to position Indigenous knowledge protection as a central tenet of Nawa-Pipil resistance and survivance tactics against the pernicious impact of assimilation/mestizaje and the continued exploitive, expropriative, and extractive logics of the West. When I do so, I will neither mention, nor discuss it.

In this context, conscientious political silence means for the Nawat-Pipil communities I collaborate with, that certain ancestral knowledges and cultural practices will not be shared with Western audiences because we have a covenant for this investigation, that is based on trust, reciprocity, affirming Indigenous notions of dignity,

justice, and respect, and centering what is important to the community. In this light, members of Nawat-Pipil communities that agreed to participate in this study shared concerns about being misrepresented by Western researchers, who have painted them in the past, as 'backwards', 'lacking an Indigenous political agenda', being 'communists', 'drunk and macheteros' (drunk, machete-wielding 'indians'), 'brujas y brujos' (witches, sorcerers), 'campesinos' (peasants), 'ignorant', or as 'tercos' (stubborn). The complexity of possible meanings in Western characterizations of Indigenous peoples in El Salvador, for Nawa-Pipil communities, was expressed in various ways by the cultural consultants and they ranged from anger to laughter, to tears and voicing feelings of reproach, shame, and fear. For instance, I witnessed an Indigenous elderly woman adamantly explain to a classroom filled with young people at the Universidad de El Salvador (UES), that being Indigenous was not synonymous with being communist or being subversive/terrorist. She repeated several times in a row, to students, "No somos comunistas, ni subversivos, ni terroristas" ("We are neither communists, nor subversives or terrorists") and expressed being "tired" of having to defend against these labels that have appeared in "book after book", asking students to understand that these labels carry a "death sentence" for her community, citing La Matanza of 1932 and the 1980s war as examples (Interviews San Salvador 2019). An elderly man and former *Alcalde del Común*[32], stated to me and another researcher in a rural setting, that while it is "not apparently an offensive term" being referred to as a "peasant" in "study after study", erases his cultural roots and renders him 'invisible', 'ahistorical', and "out of place" in his own land. "Sin mi identidad Indígena, ¿dígame, seño, que soy yo?" ("Without my Indigenous identity, tell me ms., what am I?"). He emphasized that the violence of this imposed label dispossessed him of his Indigenous identity and forced him to confront the colonial/modern imaginary of the Salvadoran nation-state, which he explains, locates Indigenous peoples as things of the past or as museum pieces to satiate Western nostalgia and their desire to cannibalize what is different. He said in a very calm and clear way, "No hermana, soy un Indígena de carne y huezo. Yo existo aquí, como tal" ("No sister, I am an Indigenous man of flesh and bone. Therefore, I exist here as such") (Interviews Itzalku, 2019). A woman from Witzapan stated feeling exhausted for being constantly asked to pose performing witchcraft rituals, simply because she is Indigenous. She explains that "La gente viene de lejos hasta aquí con sus cámaras por que dicen que las 'indias' de por aquí somos brujas y eso a mí me molesta" ("People come from afar, all the way here with their cameras because they say that 'Indian' women from here, are witches, and that bothers me") (Interviews Witzapan, 2019).

What several cultural consultants pointed out, was feeling frustrated by local and Western researchers, who extract information and ancestral knowledges from them, and they never return to the community with their manuscripts to be read and approved by Indigenous communities, prior to being published. To this extent, Tata Fidel Flores, a native from San Ramón in Centzunat, recounts that he has helped many people obtain their professional titles, locally and abroad, but that only a couple of them have come back to share their publications with the community. He adds that the academy and its exploitive practices are causing his community to feel exhausted, objectified, abused, and

[32] *Mayor of the Commons*, a colonial leadership role elected to represent Indigenous interests with the City of Itzalku (Field notes 2019).

even dehumanized because, he explains, “they come from the outside to take from us and we never see them again”. He adds that “now, many young people in the community are refusing to be seen and to engage with outsiders, because we deserve to be treated with respect and to be reciprocated for our labor”. He states:

> Yo te lo voy a decir honestamente, Violet, si yo platico contigo por dos, tres horas, eso quiere decir que yo no estoy trabajando en el campo. Y entonces, ¿de qué vamos a comer mi familia y yo? Es justo que se nos reconozca nuestra labor y tiempo. Nuestros conocimientos ancestrales, no tienen precio. ¿Si lo ves?
>
> I am going to say it honestly, to you. Violet, if I talk with you for two or three hours, that means that I am not working in the field. And then, what are my family and I going to eat? It is only fair that people acknowledge our labor and time. Our ancestral knowledges are priceless. Do you see it?

As a Salvadoran researcher, a woman of color associated with the West, my positionality was initially confusing to some people in El Salvador because it is rare. Most researchers of Indigeneity in El Salvador have been White males, and the few women that Indigenous communities are acquainted with, are White and foreign. From this perspective, seeing a Salvadoran woman researcher who is associated with the West, was a novelty for many. People were surprised that I did not speak Spanish with an accent and that I knew the local ways, the food, the traditions, etc. In this regard, some Salvadorans saw me as ‘local’ and simultaneously as ‘foreign’, especially because my funding source came from the U. S. Department of State, and this raised valid questions. Explaining that I grounded my research in my lived-experience as a Salvadoran immigrant living in the U. S., a woman of color, a border-thinker, who spent my formative years in El Salvador and survived the 1980s war helped local communities make meaning of my own socio-historical context and my research approach, to connect it with their own. From their perspective, ‘we spoke the same lingo’, meaning that they understood that I understood what it means to be Salvadoran in the twenty-first century. To this extent, Indigenous communities let down some of their apprehensions about being misrepresented through my research, but simultaneously they felt safe to raise their own concerns about my motivation for studying Indigenous communities, when in their eyes, there was so much gang violence and forced migration going on in their immediate surroundings, which they saw as more relevant to the West, than learning Nawat. Yet, in the realm of dominant discourses, our early conversations uncovered that I did not see Indigenous communities as ‘extinct’ or ‘in danger of disappearing’ or as ‘things of the past’. Instead, we both recognized each other’s humanity, our stories, our collective colonial histories, and our subjugation in the formation of knowledge production by the West.

In this context, the conscientious political silence that I talk about, is part of an Indigenous repertoire of methods and methodologies and praxes of resistance and survivance, based on respect for my interlocutors, who have asked that I bound my analysis to what was expressly permitted by them, given the limits of Western knowledge. Indigenous silence regarded as part of a political project, in which Nawa-

Pipil communities seek to constraint their engagement with the West, to protect their lived-experiences with colonialism, which are not always legible to them from where they stand. The *nanas* and the *tatas* often say that not everything that pertains to Indigenous communities has a Western translation or an equivalent to it in the enemy's language. What Nawa-Pipil communities choose to not reveal to the West and that is encoded in silence, is their right to alterity, which they preserve as a hidden, agentic text that is filled with moments of despair, resistance, organizing, envisioning, frustration, network-building, analysis, opinion, prayer, singing, healing, etc. and which in term, re-signifies their colonial difference[33] and relations of power with the nation-state.

In the language of conscientious political silence, I observe that Nawa-Pipil communities are everything but passive, and that their silence occupies a valuable discursive space in their political agenda, that they tell me, is passed down from the dead to the living, to claim specific rights. In these discursive spaces, silence allows for other sounds to emerge such as the chirping of birds, the flowing of water, the sonority of thunder, the sounds of leaves moving with the wind, rainfall, etc. which bear witness to the surroundings and its stories. Indigenous silence, the *tatas* and the *nanas* tell me, is an act of rebelliousness against the demands of the "professionals" and "esos antropólogos que aparacen por estos rumbos pidiendo información" ("those anthropologists that appear in these surroundings asking for information"). This rebellion includes coloniality, modernity, neoliberalism, and empire which they articulate, are responsible for Indigenous people's present state of marginalization and material condition. In this light, with regards to conscientious political silence, Audra Simpson's notion of ethnographic refusal (2007), reminds us that "in situating each subject within their own shifting historical context of the present, these refusals speak volumes, because they tell us when to stop".

7.3 Kab'awil (double gaze): Re-cognition, Re-flection, and Re-conciliation

7.3a Re-cognition

When appropriate, I rely on *re-cognition* by centering my socio-cultural wealth to make meaning of my surroundings. I define my socio-cultural wealth as an ancestral system of knowledges from the margins that I carry on my back to help dismantle Western myths that women of color [who speak with non-European accents] lack the ability to produce knowledge because we are deficient, and as such, we do not belong in the academy. From this stance, I define my socio-cultural wealth as the social fabric of my ancestors, weaved over millennia by those who came before me, from their experiences with mega-eruptions, earthquakes, floods, mass starvation, and multiple forced dislocations. Yet, with their sophisticated knowledges of medicine, engineering, astronomy, agriculture, literature, math, and more, they thrived and created advanced civilizations only to confront the prophecies of invasion, occupation, and colonization that brought sickness, slavery, indentured servitude, hangings, whippings, rape, murder,

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[33] Empire encourages by a need to describe the difference in new people/places. In this process, people became differentiated, their spaces and places possessed. "Culture" served a purpose of describing the difference (always against a norm of sameness) that was encountered in those and it involved an analysis of difference, which has serious implications for Indigenous peoples, especially to claim their own intellectual and material space and to exercise dominion over it (Simpson 2007: 78).

and war to us. My socio-cultural wealth is the totality of my ancestors' weavings that envelop my corporeal understandings of the world today and that situate me within it, facing forward toward the past -- *con ojo de venado* -- as a testimony of their and my survivance, a powerful continuum that offers me a unique trans-historical lens for being in and understanding the world. As I weave the threads of my story for my descendants' socio-cultural fabric, I draw from my archives of the 1980s (un)civil war to document what is like to live under siege, survive massacre, and be suspended in a state of permanent 'flight' and uncertainty -- always searching for a 'return' home -- since an early age. While on 'flight', I lean on my ancestors' reverence for our home in the cosmos, as a sacred space for making meaning of our everyday lives with humility.

Holding on to the memories of *mi abuelito* Toño y *mi abuelita Rafaela* -- my first storytellers under the night sky -- I embrace their praxis of storytelling, which helps me understand that *mis abuelos* were actively subverting the violences of the colonial experience by re-membering the past and passing on their knowledges. These affirmations empower me to keep my head up when settlers tell me otherwise, and to refuse to 'disappear' at their command because they insist that I do not belong here. What the West has called "shocking", "abhorrent", and "barbaric" that I have barely begun to mention above attests to an immense wealth of Indigenous science and socio-cultural understandings of the world that have kept us alive for millennia, even though we were not meant to survive the impossibilities of a never-ending war.

7.3b Re-flection

I use re-flection to generate new learnings with deliberation that – I re-cognize – from past experiences and deem 'familiar/(un)familiar'. When returning to my motherland to research my community 'from within', reflection is a powerful way of reckoning with emotions, which the West says can be limiting; so, I ground my work on my positionality as a researcher from within, to account for the emotional labor of framing my home, as 'the field' and the field as 'my home', *con ojo de venado*, where my traumatic experiences of the 1980s war can 're-cognize' and 're-live' danger, easily. Re-flection allows me to come to terms with a full-circle experience of having left a place and returned to it, without truly understanding in the moment, which I may never have left in the first place. It requires my emotional labor to engage in a deep exploration of temporality, spatiality, and relationality with more than human 'commoning' dimensions that collide in an instant, to make learning possible.

For instance, my meditations about a sense of place and emplacement generate a specific situational awareness that helps focus my power of observation and literally ground me in the epicenter of things as they happen: "The air is as humid as I recall it, and my memory fuses with reality the moment I step out of the plane. I feel its warmth immediately engulfing my face; We recognize each other. I've come home" (Fieldnotes on arrival day, May 2018). Additionally, being on the road emplaces me as part of the landscape: "The lively chatter and laughter of people in the streets, the roadway noise, the thunder, the smell of rain; it is all very familiar. *El color rojo de la flor de fuego sigue siendo tan brillante como el rojo de la sangre que abona la tierra en que crece este árbol* (the red tint of the Butterfly Tree continues to be as bright [red] as the blood that nourishes the land in which it grows); these are powerful emotive and sensorial experiences that overwhelm my systems, after being gone for 35 years, and they

challenge the boundness of my academic thinking, daring me to be free from it, to be present in the moment. Through re-flection, I re-cognize my need to 'unlearn' the practices of my discipline(s), to take note of those who speak to me in silence: "*The mango and the zapote* trees in my childhood home are still standing where I last saw, them 35 years ago, only they are now taller, and fuller. They recognize me, too. I approach them without hesitation. We embrace as good old childhood friends and a thousand memories run through my head". What would my field notes and observations say about that, which is unseen and unheard by my eye, by my ear, and by my heart? Can these practical and sometimes emotional approaches to research teach us different ways of knowing and understanding human and more-than-human experiences? My field notes also state that some things have changed beyond all re-cognition, despite my praxis of re-flection.

7.3c Re-conciliation

I embrace 're-conciliation' of the past and of the present, of who I was then -- when I lived there – and who I am now -- as I return – and, of the here/Global South and the there/Global North, to make meaning of my lived experiences in 'the field', 'my home'. I engage in re-conciliation of my privileges and oppressions in the context of living/not living in a colonized/colonizing space in the global South/North, where I encounter racism, classism, genderism, and other 'isms' every day, in different forms. Under these and other necessary ambiguities and uncertainties in my life, my *k'abawilian* (double gaze) strategies are driven by a mutual *compromiso* (commitment) toward social justice and co-creating a dignified life with and for Nawa-Pipil communities in *Kushkatan,* which I strive to achieve by engaging and centering the local perspectives of my Indigenous brothers and sisters, when appropriate and or permitted.

7.3d Nawa-Pipil Cosmovision and Ceremony

In this study, I humbly weave the four elements of Nawa-Pipil cosmovision (air, water, earth, fire) in each chapter, as taught to me by cultural consultants who are spiritual guides in *Kushkatan*. In chapter 1, I center *ejekat* (air) to reflect about the sacred energies that nourish life, ideas, imagination, unity, reparation, and renovation that keep the Nawat-Pipil speakers and their moribund language alive through the "divine blow" (Flores; Ramírez Interviews, 2019). In chapter 2, I center t*onantzin/tal* (Our Mother Earth) and *Tlaloc/Wetzi at* (water) to reflect on nature, its power, and its ethics of care toward all beings on the planet, movement, returning, tempest, and difficulties, to speak of Indigenous trans-territorial journeys and the trials of transiting through colonized terrains (Ibid). In Chapter 3, I center *tit*/fire and ceremony, to speak of the energy portal that rises to reveal ancestral wisdom, so we can live in harmony with each other and our environment. Fire has healing powers that surface from the offerings we give to our Mother Earth during ceremony. Fire and ceremony are key to talking about the sacred connections of a woman's body-as-territory, as land. Cosmovision and ceremony as methods ground *el saber y pensar* (knowledge and feelings) of the community and of this investigation, on what is relevant for them to emerge, so we can heal as a collective.

7 7.3e Testimonio

This investigation relies on the *testimonio* of Nawa-Pipil women and men to produce knowledges from within and from below, to assert Indigenous identity, recover silenced histories, articulate Indigenous knowledges, lived experiences, traditions, and

otherwise resist the silencing and invisibilization that they have endured for decades. Indigenous literature scholar, Arturo Arias (2007) states that while testimonio does not produce or reproduce reality, it produces a sensation of experiencing reality that amplifies a collective, communal account of a person's life (Ibid 87).

7.4 Critical Ethnographic Methods

I utilize semi-structured interviews written through an interdisciplinary approach and rely on field notes gathered from direct observation of everyday happenings and special events held by Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, when invited to attend. These perspectives were gathered during my 14-months of fieldwork in 2018-2019. During my time abroad, I endeavored to center Nawat-Pipil philosophies that ground the embodied experiences of human and non-human beings through their mother tongue, to make sense of ourselves, the world around us, and our connections to the cosmos. To this end, my critical ethnographic work was guided by epistemologies of *te miki tay tupal* ("*lo nuestro no muere*" or "what is ours does not die") and the aforementioned Nawa-Pipil epistemologies of survivance, mythopoetics, stories, songs, *testimonios*, cosmovision and ceremony that accompanied my academic inquiry while attempting to confront one of the most repressive histories in Latin America to deliberate about our current condition. As referenced above, my research was contextualized through Horacio Roque Ramírez's notion of *living everyday day death* (2010), and my observations of conditions of *desesperanza* in El Salvador, in 2018. Additionally, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of California, Merced, granted approval[34] of two Human Subjects' Protections Protocols I submitted via CAYUSE in 2018 and 2022, to conduct fieldwork in situ and remotely, respectively, for this investigation.

8. Data

This investigation utilizes primary and secondary qualitative data such as online newspaper articles, archival records, literary reviews, time immemorial Indigenous stories such as *Miktan (In the Depths of Water), Michcuicatl (Fish Song)*, and *Nanahuatzin (myth of creation);* a theater play, *Nusihuapiltzin (Our little one)*; the poem· Dear Little Ones"; three Indigenous songs: *Metzas Nawa, Ne Wijwitzapanchin,* and *Ne Nawat Suchikisa*; forty-five semi-structured interviews in Spanish, conducted with members of Nawa-Pipil communities in the field, and numerous fieldnotes and observations. In addition, I use archival photographs and recordings to formulate qualitative data from these audio/visual sources. The use of two Indigenous languages (Nawat-Pipil and Nahuatl) as sources of data themselves, and my translations from Spanish to English, of many secondary sources.

[34] UCM2018-136, dated 12/1/2018, sponsored by U. S. Fulbright and UCM2022-18, dated 8/30/2022, sponsored by UC Berkeley Center for Human Rights.

Chapter 1: Indigenous Soundworlds

1. Introduction

tik nawat

ne ikman takamet te mikit
te mikit ne ikman takamet
nakat
nakat ka ijiyu
ne kinutza ne taketzalis

Eric Doradea, 2016[35]

En Náhuat

Los más viejos no mueren
No mueren los más viejos
Se quedan
Se quedan en la voz
De quien habla su lengua

Eric Doradea, 2016

In Nawat

The eldest ones do not die
They do not die the eldest ones
They remain
They remain in the voice
Of those who speak their language[36]

Eric Doradea, 2016

"Nawat-Pipil[37] is an agonizing language," states Salvadoran linguist Dr. Jorge E. Lemus at the 2019 Nawat Linguistic Congress, organized and sponsored by the National Institute of Docent Formation[38] of the Ministry of Education of El Salvador. He pauses to look at the crowd and states with firm conviction that "it [Nawat] has now reached a

[35] *Tzunztekwani: Cabeza de Jaguar. Antología Poética* (FMLN 2016).
[36] My translation
[37] A variation of the *Nahuatl* language, spoken in Western El Salvador. In Spanish, it is spelled *Náhuat*; in English, *Nawat*; in Pipil, *Nawat.* Ethnologue Language Family Index and ISO classify the Nawat-Pipil language as *Pipil*. People in this ethnic category are known as *Nawa, Náhua(s), Nahua, repectively.* In this paper, I will use Nawat-Pipil to refer to language and Nawa-Pipil to refer to people.
[38] INFOD: Instituto Nacional de Formación Docente.

point of no return -- or what we know as *linguistic death*[39] -- which will certainly bring an end to centuries-old knowledges and also take away valuable opportunities for scholars to further study and understand its complex linguistic structures" (Lemus 2019). Of all the Indigenous languages[40] spoken in *Kushkatan*[41] prior to the first Spanish invasion in *Acaxual*[42] in 1524, only Nawat-Pipil is actively spoken today by fewer than two-hundred active maternal speakers, most of whom are elders who reside in a few scattered hamlets and remote mountain villages in Western El Salvador. Dr. Lemus, who heads the *Xutxikisa Nawat*/Cuna Náhuat[43] program in El Salvador and who has been immersed in this work for many years, looks at his audience, mostly teachers and government employees, before continuing to deliver his keynote address at the well-respected Central American Jesuit University, José Simeón Cañas (UCA). He closes with the following words: "When the speakers of a language are invisible, their language is the corpus of invisibility." Applause follows.

To *Nantzin Tamachtiani*[44]Antonia Ramírez, an Indigenous elder born in *Witzapan*,[45] *Centzunat*,[46] who is an active maternal speaker of Nawat-Pipil and who did not attend the linguistic congress at UCA, the precarity of her mother tongue is an embodied experience that she carries with her wherever she is. As an Indigenous woman, she explains, she is neither visible nor audible in Salvadoran society. Most importantly, she says that she has barely survived throughout her life. She adds, "*la lengua [Nawat-Pipil] tiene su energía* (*ijiu*[47]) *y por eso, para existir hay que hablar y nombrar las cosas*" (Interview May 2019). This is a Nawat-Pipil philosophy known as *yultaketzalis*,[48] or the act of *reclaiming life from the dead by reflecting on the past through and beyond the energies of the body.*[49] When *Nantzin* Antonia enunciates in a critically endangered Indigenous language, she unsettles the stability of Western knowledges about Nawat-Pipil and *Otherness*, thus becoming at once visible and audible to the world. By daring to be seen and to be heard, *Nantzin* Antonia reclaims what Arturo Arias refers to as *the*

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[39] Nawat-Pipil is currently classified as a critically endangered language by Ethnologue (2019).
[40] The languages of *Kushkatan* are the following: Lenca, Cacaopera, Pokoman, Mame, Chortí, and Chontal (Lemus 2003: 652).
[41] *Kushkatan or Kuskatan* means "place of jewels or collars" (Meza 2012: 187). In this study, I use the word *Kushkata*n to name the Nawa-Pipil territories, and El Salvador, to refer to the structures of power that govern the colonized and occupied land, founded in 1821.
[42] "*Acaxual*" means "nearby where the reedbed dies." *Acaxual* is known today as *Puerto de Acajutla*; in historical
documents, it is known as *Puerto de la Trinidad, San Luis Acajutla* and *Yacaxocal* (Meza 1956: 547).
[43] Nawat-Pipil Revitalization program in El Salvador led by Dr. Lemus dating back to 2004 (Lemus 2003: 107).
[44] Reverential title in Nawat-Pipil given to elderly women who produce knowledge. *Nantzin* means 'missus'. The word "*Tamachtiani*" means "the one who teaches" (Hernández 2019: 130).
[45] *Witzapan* means "Río de Espinas." It is also known as *Huitzapam, Huitzapan*, and *Santo Domingo de Guzmán* (Meza, 2012:558).
[46] Departamento de Sonsonate, Western El Salvador (Meza 2012: 543).
[47] King (2013: 40); In Nawat-Pipil *ijiu* refers to sacred energy (Flores. Interviews 2019).
[48] Lara-Martínez, Rafael (Lecture; Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas 2018).
[49] My translation: the centrality of embodied grammar in the [Nawat-Pipil] language (Lara-Martínez 2018).

ethics of alterity[50] (2017: 37) to confront the violences of modernity[51] and the legacies of a colonial past that are not over. Simultaneously, she recovers the past from the dead and/or death, when she declares:

> *¿En qué se ve que uno se murió? En que a uno ya le falta el aire*
> *y si no hay aire, uno ya no respira, ni habla. Por eso hay que hablar*
> *Náhuat, porque si lo dejamos de hablar, significa que ya nos morimos*
> *en el país. Por eso digo yo, que los que podemos hablar el Náhuat, tenemos*
> *que hablarlo más y enseñarle a otros para poder seguir siendo lo que somos, para no morir, pues.* (Ramírez 2019)
>
> How does it show that one already died? In that, one is already short of breath
> and then, one neither breathes nor speaks. For this reason, we must speak Nawat, because if we stop speaking it, it means that we already die in the country… That's why I say that those of us who can speak Nawat must speak it more often and teach it to others to be able to continue being what we are,
> to not die, in other words.[52] (Ramírez 2019)

There is no applause for *Nantzin* Antonia when she states her reality in public spaces, only a long pause. *Yultaketzalis* is based on the experience of the *collective-being-there* which implies the presence of the eyes of the one who listens with the heart, to help us understand death and silence as "one". She argues that both, death and silence are possible in the absence of air. Air is one of the sacred energies (*ijiu*) of the cosmos. Known as *Ejekat*[53] in Nawat-Pipil cosmovision, air represents nourishment of life, ideas, imagination, unity, reparation, renovation, duality of movement, destructive forces of men and nature and the "divine blow" (Flores 2019). Thus, when *Nantzin* Antonia speaks of her mother tongue, she affirms Nawat-Pipil as that, which is sacred and life-giving, omnipresent, regenerative, and alive. "*Mientras haya aire*…" ("As long as there is air…"),[54] she sighs and looks at me with a generous smile, saying hurriedly: "*Apréndalo para que se lo lleve dentro*," gesturing toward her chest. Her words mean "*learn it, so that you can take it within you,*" a reference to a Nawat-Pipil understanding of language as *the act of one person existing within the person who speaks* or *listening through the eyes of the speaker*.

In the present chapter, I explore the poetic and political implications of the sonority of Nawat-Pipil -- a moribund language -- according to experts, that Indigenous elder women from the municipality of *Witzapan* in Western *Kushkatan* embody every day and everywhere they go, to continually reframe their relationship with others, including the Salvadoran state. First, I will utilize Aníbal Quijano's concept of the

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[50] Western acknowledgement of the visibility of the "Other" as producer of knowledge (Arias 2017: 37).
[51] Rationality, science, technology (Quijano 2000: 544).
[52] My translation.
[53] In Nawat-Pipil, *ejekat* means "air" (Hernández 2018:47).
[54] My own translations from Spanish to English.

coloniality of power (2000) and its reverberations in Michel Foucault's notion of the biopolitical power of the state (1990), to trace how Nawa-Pipil voices have been attempted to be normalized by multicultural ideologies after being deemed irrational, out of tune, or deviant, and 'exterminated' in the 1932 Matanza; these theoretical frameworks will help me lay out (a) the historical, (b) socio-cultural and (c) political acoustic[55] memory of El Salvador that have created the conditions of precarity for the Nawat-Pipil language and its speakers, today.

Secondly, I will cite Robin James's theorizing on the sonic episteme and acoustic resonance in the neoliberal state (2019), to complicate how the contemporaneous sonic production of Nawat-Pipil women resonates within, through and beyond the biopolitical and neoliberal acoustics of modern-day El Salvador, to create a space of alterity and intellectual sovereignty for Indigenous women. For the purposes of this study, by biopolitical, James refers to the Foucauldian sense of governing life and killing off bio-threats to the nation; by neoliberalism she means the general idea that society works best when people and institutions align with the market principles[56]. I use the concepts of 'sound' as used by James, to theorize about the human experience or more specifically, what is being heard by non-Indigenous people about Indigenous people and what is being said by Indigenous people in El Salvador; and, the notion of 'soundings'[57] to make meaning of how Nawa-Pipil women situate their mother-tongue in and out specific relations of domination in 'multicultural' El Salvador.

Third, I will use critical ethnographic, Indigenous, and Kab'awilian[58] strategies (Indigenous double gaze) to center *yultaketzalis,* a Nawat-Pipil epistemology, as a method to make meaning of three Indigenous *a cappella* songs: *Metzas Nawat* (*La india pipil* or The Pipil Indian woman[59]), *Ne Wijwitzapanchin* (*Los mingueñitos* or The little People from Witzapan), and *Ne Nawat Suchikisa* (*El náhuat florece* or Nawat Flourishes), written and publicly performed by *Nantzin* Antonia Ramírez in the last four or five years.[60]

Lastly, in this chapter I explore the following questions: How do Nawat-Pipil women in *Witzapan, Kushkatan*, El Salvador, deploy *soundings* in their mother tongue to resist, reassert, confront, and survive the afterlives of racist patriarchal colonial

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[55] Acoustics: The math/ratios behind neoliberalism and biopolitics that reduce everything to probability and normalized distribution to manage and predict aleatory events, life. In other words, social relations become rational or *ratio-ized* when they align and we can recognize them as normal; or irrational when they cannot be expressed as ratios. In other words, probability and the law of acoustics share a common logos (James 2019: 7, 8, 9, 49). By the political acoustics of the nation, I mean what is recognizable and has been normalized.

[56] See Spence, Lester (2015) qtd. in James (2019: 8).

[57] An alternative way to tune into modes of existence that white supremacist patriarchy deems out of transmission and analysis; an 'incomprehensible expression' in the Black feminist tradition of code-switching, that interferes with the reproduction of white supremacist patriarchal social order (Devonya Havis qtd. In James 2019: 75).

[58] This concept will be discussed in-depth in Chapter 3. See Chacón's notion of Indigenous Cosmolectics (2018).

[59] This is specific language-use and emphasis given by the author-composer to reclaim her identity and confront racialized violence.

[60] The first two songs are *Nantzin* Antonia's unpublished sonic archives, entrusted to me for the purposes of this study.

capitalism, state violence, and perpetual war? How does *Nantzin* Antonia's Nawat-Pipil songs re-articulate conditions of possibility and spaces of alterity for listening to *the Othe*r and generating contemporaneous understandings of Indigenous identities and existence today? And what do the echoes of the past in *Kushkatan* teach us today -- through the aurality of a dying language -- about Indigenous futures in El Salvador?

To answer these questions, I argue that through Indigenous soundings and song, Nawa-Pipil women create alternative sovereign spaces that foreground Indigenous ontologies and *sound worlds* through the action of *one person existing within the person who speaks* or the action of *listening through the speaker's eyes*, using *yultaketzalis,* as method. I claim that these sovereign spaces resist the limitations imposed by the biopolitics of the state and the logics of neoliberalism, which seek to resonate "difference"[61] and re-center European colonial ideals of race and gender in the contemporary socio-cultural, poetic, and political imaginaries of the Salvadoran nation. Despite the precarity of the Nawat-Pipil language today, Nawa-Pipil women embody Indigenous ontologies and *sound worlds* to continue to re-affirm Native presence and survivance in the *Kuhskatan* territories and beyond.

In the first section of this chapter, I will discuss the state of the Nawat-Pipil language in El Salvador, the characteristics of the Nawat-Pipil language, the centrality of the body in the Nawat-Pipil language, the concept of *yultaketzalis,* and why -- through Indigenous epistemologies -- it is critical to exist momentarily outside of the colonial architecture and center a new discursive to say things differently in spaces designed to watch and listen to the Other, with [settler] "hunger"[62], where our 'difference' is always cannibalized.

In the second section of this chapter, I will describe the municipality of *Witzapan*, one of the originary Nawat-Pipil settlements in *Kushkatan* and simultaneously, one of the last few places in the country where Nawat-Pipil is spoken today. Bu doing so, I explore the reasons why Nawat-Pipil continues to flourish in this space.

In the third section of this chapter, I will present information about Nawat-Pipil artist, *Nantzin* Antonia Ramírez, who is the author, composer, and performer of the songs that I will analyze. Two of her songs are part of a rich, unpublished sonic archive, a sovereign space for thinking Nawa-Pipil that she shared with me, which is filled with her voice, her *sentir y pensar* (her feeling and thinking), her laughter, her sadness, her protest against the colonial/modern system that oppresses her very existence every day, and most importantly, her Indigenous presence in a colonized landscape that re-affirms her survivance. I will rely on critical ethnographic and my (un)disciplined methods, my positionality as an Indigenous descendant from *Kushkatan*, and my Nawat-Pipil language skills, to amplify a trans-territorial space of alterity, where the cultural production of *Nantzin* Antonia Ramírez can sound off and be out of bounds with the limits imposed by what experts call a 'moribund language' or an archive of the past. I do so, to critically see and hear through *yultaketzalis,* the sonority of her political and poetic discourses that expose the multiple and sedimented layers and implications of what for decades has been

[61] See Robin James' concept of Affective Resonance (2012).
[62] See Dylan Robinson's *Hungry Listening* (2020).

deemed as 'absent'[63] or as 'noise' by the biopolitical and neoliberal acoustics of 'multiculturalism' and renewed folklorist movement in modern-contemporary El Salvador.

[63] According to Spivak, the subaltern's oppositional practice is "non-narrativizable", meaning that its practices are
incomprehensible within the dominant political, economic, and social discourses of society (Spivak, 1990: 144).

Section 1: The Nawat-Pipil Language

Nawa Migrations

Kathryn E. Sampeck (2015), traces the arrival of Nawat-Pipil[64] speakers in El Salvador, around 1200 C.E. (Ibid 469, 472). Archaeological evidence indicates that they settled in the Río Ceniza valley of modern-day of Western El Salvador and founded the polity of Itzalku[65], at around the same time as Nahuatl speakers established themselves in and around the Valley of *Mexco* (Kauffman and Justeson 2007: 217 qted. in Sampeck 2015: 474). Nawa-Pipil people are believed to have migrated south from Veracruz and the Valley of *Anahuac* through *Xoconochco*, *Tehuantepec*, *Mictlan* and *Izcuintlan* to the *Itzalku*[66] region in Western *Kushkatan* (Lemus 2016: 50-53).

Most evidence used to support Nawa-Pipil migrations to the isthmus of Central America are archaeological, based on non-Maya material findings of the Late Classic period. These include sculptures and vessels in the ceramic tradition found in modern-day *Izcuintlan, Cuauhtemallan* (c. 700-900 C.E.), and in *Ishmitechan*[67] (c. 600-900 C. E), in modern-day Ahuachapán, in Southwestern El Salvador (Bogs 1976: 43), in *Goazapa*[68], and in *Cihuatan*[69] (Bruhns & Amaroli 2007: 1; Kelley 1988: 178;) in the Classic and Late Classic periods, which coincide with the southbound Nawa-Pipil migrations established by historians and linguists (Amaroli 1984; Braswell 1996; Perrot-Minnot 2006).

Historical accounts of southbound Nawa-Pipil migrations are less common given the lack of Nawa codices or petroglyphs, and the destruction of Indigenous records by colonizers during the invasion and occupation of Kushkatan. For that reason, they rely on the colonizers' gaze to narrate the past (Lemus 2015: 51-57). For instance, the chronicles of Hernán Cortés' (1524), show evidence of several Nawa settlements in Maya zones, such as in the Salamá Valley, San Agustín Acasaguastlán, and Asunción Mitá (Earnest 1999: 298-300 in Sampeck 2015: 472). In the same year, when Pedro de Alvarado arrived in the Río Ceniza valley, he described meeting a large, well-equipped Nawa-Pipil army in the Itzalku region and farthest East, in the polity of *Kushkatan* (Ibid 472).

The *Epístola Proemial* (1541), by Friar Toribio de Benavente y Motolinía (1482-1569), captures information about Nawa migrations from the Valley of Central Mexco to the Central American isthmus, referring to the great drought of 1451-1454 C.E., which attests to environmental causality, among other causes, that affected the collapse of the Toltec empire (Price 1976: 20). Book 6 of *Monarquía Indiana* (1615), written by Fray Huan de Torquemada (1562 – 1624), documented the different ethnic groups in Mesoamerica. Based on interviews he conducted with the *Pipil-Nicarao* (who settled in modern-day Nicaragua) about their origins, he reported that they came from where the

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[64] A variation from the Nahuatl of Central Mexico (Campbell 1985 in Sampeck 2015: 472).
[65] Now Izalco, Department of *Centzunat*: Means "place of the obsidian houses" (Meza 2012: 558).
[66] Municipality of *Cara Sucia*, Department of Ahuachapán; it means "place of dirty face" (Werner 2019: 57).
[66] City of *Guazapa*, located in San Salvador; it means "river that dries" (Meza 2012: 451).
[66] City of *Aguilares,* San Salvador; it means place of women, place of *Cihuacoat*. Also known as Sihuatan (Meza 2012: 443).

sun sets, seven or eight 'man lives' earlier. Based on modern calculations about the longevity of 'old' men's lives at that time[70], Torquemada estimated that each 'old man's' life cycle was around 104 years or around two cycles of 52[71] years. Thus, Torquemada's calculations about the arrival of the first Nawa-Pipil peoples to Central America date back 728 to 832 years prior to the Spanish invasion, roughly coinciding with Nawa southbound migrations' estimates of the post-Classic period (Lemus 2016: 52).

Book 2, chapter II, of the second volume of *Recordación Florida* (1699), by Don Francisco Antonio Fuentes y Guzmán (1643-1700), refers to the existence of a Pipil manuscript, similar to the *Anales de los Cakchiqueles* (Lemus 2015:51). According to Sempeck (2015), Fuentes y Guzmán describes four pictorial Nawa documents from this manuscript, and he drew portions of three of them, which conform to tribute records and annal histories (Ibid 477). Two of Fuentes y Guzmán's drawings illustrate tribute documents referred to, as long *pergaminos* (parchment) or codex of *amatl*[72], which are emaples of the Nawa counting system and unique lolographic systems that demonstrates that *Pipil* economy was monetized (Ibid 480-481). Another document Fuentes y Guzmán described is a *madero* (wood carving) that could be a victory chronicle that had possibly originated in Nicaragua, and it was likely designed as a cover for a screenfold codex. This piece was described as carved with calendrical inscriptions of a year's count using a period-ending glyph most similar to works associated with the *Coixtlahuaca* Valley in Modern-day Oaxaca. This wood carving had information about dynastic succession, conquests, and commodities (Ibid 484; Fowler 1989: 40).

While Sampeck points out that there are alterations, clerical errors, omissions, grammatical modifications, rearrangements, and embellishments in Fuentes y Guzmán's work to make the *Pipil* texts legible to the West, his manuscript shows that the *Pipil* in the Mesoamerican isthmus, were a lettered polity. Sampeck's research shows that the Nawat-Pipil language practiced graphic pluralism (by combining *Mixtec* and *Aztec* styles of writing) and possibly syllabic writing, and that they followed traditions that connected them to other Nawas to consolidate local claims. Additionally, Nawat-Pipil graphemes[73] referred to the Mesoamerican calendrical system, tribute rolls, histories, ritual protocols, and symbols associated with counting cacao and the use of unique notational systems such as the *tzontli* and *xiquipil*, emphasize the use of currency and payment of tribute in currency. The use of money classifies the Nawa-Pipil as having an advanced political economy. According to Sampeck, by their system of writing, the Nawa-Pipil inscribed a highly sophisticated identity in the Nawa world for themselves, that can be hardly regarded as 'childish.' Nawa-Pipils, like other Nawas, wrote to reinforce power and record sovereignty. They conformed to Nawat canons, showing that what was not written was invoked in accordance with oral tradition, such as speeches, songs, and stories (Sampeck 2019: 481, 489, 490).

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[70] Thompson (1948) and Jiménez (1959) in Lemus (2013: 52).
[71] *Xiuhmolpilli*, a cycle of 52 years and *huehuetiliztli*, 104 years (Lemus 2013:52).
[72] Bark tree paper
[73] A letter or group of letters representing a sound.

New linguistic evidence related to agricultural vocabulary in Mesoamerica show that the Proto-Uto-Aztecan language family[74] developed around the time when maize was first domesticated (7500-4500 B.C.E), followed by a northward expansion of this population (Hill 2001: 913-934 in Olko and Sullivan 2013: 182). As a result of population movements, shifts, and influences branching in many directions in central *Mexco,* at different times, it has been proposed that the first group of Nahuatl speakers in central Mexico and further south, including the Toltecs, were the ancestors of today's users of the Nawat variants of *La Huasteca*, *Sierra de Puebla*, Isthmus, and *Pipil* (Ibid 183).

Nawa southbound migrations have been linguistically validated in a modern-day glotto-chronological study that sheds light on the lexical diversity and the implications of Nahuatl, *Nawal, and Nawat*[75] dissolutions to reconstruct the linguistic past (Luckenbach & Levy 1980: 460). In this study, Luckenbach and Levy used a lexicostatistical technique for developing a chronological framework to determine the linguistic and geographical separation of Nahuatl-speaking groups, based on the degree of lexical similarity that exists between them, at a point in time. They relied on over four centuries of linguistic data (Ibid 455). The results of the study showed that the Nawat-Pipil language had the best sampled event (111 values collected from the settlements of *Itzalku* and *Witzapan* in Western El Salvador), and that the dates of Nawat-Pipil language separation from Nahuatl, were the second historical divergence occurring in this language family, following the period when Teotihuacan began to lose control. This divergence date correlates with the historical dating methods of Nawa-Pipil migrations, of roughly 700-850 C.E. While glottochronological findings function as approximations, archaeological and historical sources have validated and determined the period of time when Nawa migrations from central *Mexco* to the isthmus took place (Thompson 1948: 11; Lemus 2015: 54, 55).

Given the Nawat-Pipil language spatial and temporal separation from Mexica languages prior to and during the European invasion and occupation, it is believed that the language evolved at a slower pace becoming archaic, which explains why its grammatical features have a closer resemblance to proto-Uto Aztecan/proto-Nahuatl (Lemus 2016: 66). Indigenous languages scholar, Sergio Romero (2019), shows in Figure 1 below, *The Dialects of Nahuan* (Hansen 2014). This research highlights that Nahuatl belongs to a southern Uto-Aztecan subgroup known as "Aztecan", "Nahuan", or "Nawan" (Canger 1988; Kaufman 2001; Hansen 2014). Nawat-Pipil is a variation of Eastern Nahuan that is spoken mostly in Western El Salvador, and it is considered independent from other varieties in Mexico (Romero 2019: 2).

[74] From the southwest of the United States to Nicaragua (Lemus 2016: 70).
[75] Terms used by the authors of the study referring to the language.

Figure 1: *The Dialects of Nahuan* (Aztecan) (Hansen 2014 in qted. Romero 2019).

A) Pochutec

B) Western Nahuan

Western Periphery

(Michoacán/Durango/Nayarit/Jalisco/Western Mexico State)

Central Nahuan

(Mexico City/Morelos/Eastern Mexico State/Tlaxcala/Southern Puebla/Sierra Norte de Puebla, Guatemala[76])

C) Eastern Nahuan

Huastecan

Eastern Huastecan

Western Huastecan (stronger Western influence)

Sierra de Puebla

(Cuetzalan, Zacapoaxtla, Tlatlauhquitepec)

Isthmian

Isthmus

Tabasco

Chiapas/Guatemala

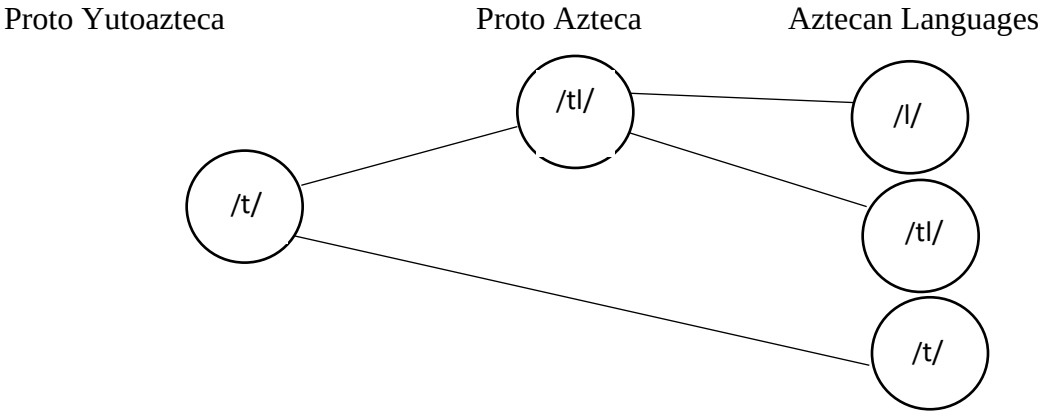
El Salvador

Romero proposes that the Nawat-Pipil language remains largely unattested in the colonial corpus but that its existence supports the idea of linguistic and ethnic diversity in Central America (Ibid).

[76] Guatemala does not appear in Hansen's geographies of [Central] Nawan. It has been added here by Romero (2019).

Figure 2 below (Lemus 2015), illustrates the phonological[77] changes over time, that support the archaic status of the Nawat-Pipil language spoken in *Kushkatan*, where the suffix proto Yutoazteca *-t* changed to *-tl* or *-tli*, but it remained *-t* or *-ti* in *Pipil*, and *-l* in the Aztecan languages, giving rise to the */tl/ ~ /t/ ~ /l/* contrast in this language family. According to Lemus, if *t* is the historical phonetic variant most widely used to determine the evolution of the Nawat-Pipil language within the Yutoaztecan family, it is possible to affirm that *t* is one of the most archaic variants of Yutoaztecan languages. In this light, it can be said that Nawat-Pipil is one of the oldest variants of proto-Nahuan (Lemus 2016: 53, 54).

Figure 2: Evolutionary process of the Nawat-Pipil Language (Lemus 2015: 54)



In El Salvador today, Nawa communities speak Castilian as a first language and only a few regional variants[78] of the Nawat-Pipil language are spoken in a handful of pre-colonial Indigenous settlements[79] in Western El Salvador. However, they identify with their Indigenous roots and some of them continue to practice their Indigenous traditions and cosmovision.

Figure 3: Nawat-Pipil Variants by Region based on allophones (Lemus 2015: 55).

Word	**Variant 1**	**Variant 2**	**Translation**
Kumal	[gumal]	[kumal]	comal/clay grill
Takat	[tayat]	[takat]	hombre/man
Nikneki	[nik'neyi]	[nik'neki]	lo quiero/I want it
Nikmanki	[nik'mangi]	[nk'manki]	lo cocí/I cooked it (el maiz/the corn)

[77] */t/ ~/tl/ ~/l/* (Lockhart 1992: 336-339; Lemus 2013: 53).

[78] According to Lyle Campbell (1985), there are two main regional variants of the Nawat-Pipil language in El Salvador, whose main difference are the allophones /k/ and /g, y/. Despite the variation in sound, allophones do not change the meaning of words (Lemus 2015: 55).

[79] *Witzapan* (most spoken, variant 1), *Nawitzalku, Calhuco, Itzalku, Huisnawa* (variant 2) in the Department of *Centzunat* and possibly *Tacupan* in the Department of *Achuachpan* (Lemus 2015: 55' Meza 2012:81, 57).

Despite the Nawat-Pipil language's vast socio-historical and linguistic potential for uncovering valuable information today, scholars rarely recognize it as a corpus of study or know of the existence of a few pre-conquest texts that attest to the significant Mesoamerican diversity, and advanced literary identity and power of this polity (Sampeck 2019: 469).

Today, the political acoustics that reverberate among scholarly circles affirm that there are currently fewer than two-hundred active maternal Nahua speakers, mostly elderly and ill, who are all bilingual in the oral[80] tradition (Castilian and Nawat-Pipil), and for whom code-switching or *soundings* between Nawat-Pipil and Castilian languages is the norm (Field notes and observations 2018, 2019). The level of proficiency of Nawat-Pipil varies according to each speaker. Nawat-Pipil is not used for official business but in conversation with one another, ceremonies, and public commemorations in mostly five Indigenous settlements in Western El Salvador: *Witzapan, Nawitzalku, Itzalku, Cuisnawat,* and *Tacuba*.[81] These geographical locations denote variations in the speech patterns of the Nawat-Pipil language. Lemus (2016) notes that in 1970, when Lyle Campbell recorded his trilingual dictionary (1985), he noted that Nawat-Pipil was full of [Spanish] borrowed words (Ibid 66).

According to Lemus (2016), Nawat-Pipil, an Uto-Aztecan language, has a phonemic inventory of 14 consonants and 4 vowels, as well as some sounds that only appear in words borrowed from Spanish. Most words are paroxytones, meaning that they are accented on the penultimate syllable. Words in Nawat-Pipil tend to have a rich morphologic structure and a single word can form an entire sentence. The principal feature of the language is that after each morphemic concatenation, morphemes retain their original meaning which is then added to new words. This linguistic feature classifies Nawat-Pipil as a polysynthetic agglutinant language, for its ability to unite several morphemes in one word (Ibid 67-69). Lemus offers the following example:

Ama	+	t	+	ita	=	*amaita*
Papel		sufijo		verbo ver	=	"*ver el papel*"
Paper		suffix		verb to see	=	"to see the paper"

Although, Lemus maintains that Nawat-Pipil is currently classified as a critically endangered language by experts, he points out that its speakers have successfully maintained it alive under very precarious conditions, giving scholars a unique opportunity to understand Indigenous identity, worldviews, and cosmovision through their language (Ibid 2016: 66-68). For instance, Salvadoran linguist Rafael Lara-Martínez posits in a lecture titled: *Yul(ta)ketzalis*[82]*: Reflexión sobre el pasado* (Remembering: Reflection

[80] Most active maternal Nawat-Pipil speakers in *Witzapan* cannot read or write Castilian [or Nawat-Pipil] beyond second or third grade level of education (Field interviews and observation, April 2019).
[81] Renamed by colonizers as Santo Domingo de Guzmán, Nahuizalco, Izalco, Cuisnahuat, and Tacuba, respectively.
[82] As it will be discussed ahead, in Nawat-Pipil, *yul* means heart *and taketza* means to speak. *Yultaketzalis* translates as to think or reflect from the heart. Y*ultaketzalis* can also be understood as a reflection of epistemologies from the heart or to produce knowledge from the heart through the "mother tongue" (Lara Martínez 2022).

About the Past), dated April 3, 2021, that the Nawat-Pipil language has several key grammatical traits, which guide its recollection of the past. Among the most prominent traits of the language are included word-sentence or omni-predication, head-marking language and descriptive principle, serialism, narrative repetition, and body parts as ontological concepts. For the purposes of this study, I will focus on embodiment practices of the Nawat-Pipil language, specifically on the epistemology of *Yul(ta)ketzalis.*

From these syntactic perspectives, Lara-Martínez observes that in Nawat-Pipil, *history* is enclosed inside a notional triad whose sides are knowledge (*-mati*), eye-witness account (*-ix-mati*, visual knowledge), and belief (*-yul-mati*, cordial/heart knowledge). This triad, he says, guides the recovery of the past as an embodied experience of death. To think about the past, he states, Nawa people speak of something that no longer exists, similar to making a reference to the future, which highlights a space, an emptiness between what is present and what is absent (Ibid). Most importantly, Lara-Martínez explains that in the mythopoetics[83] of the Nawat-Pipil language, the past tells us about the lives of the dead, which forces us to visualize death in others while we ignore it in our own lives. He refers to this as the fundamental paradox of the language, which is expressed in the premise that there is no history without a descent to "that, which is under," known as *Mictlan*[84] in Nawa cosmology. In this light, the status of the Nawat-Pipil language may be thought of as something that 'already no longer exists', but that simultaneously 'will always exist' in the Nawa conception of *deathworlds*. For this reason, reflecting on the status of the Nawat-Pipil language from a *Yul(ta)ketzalis* epistemological perspective, urges us to confront and recover the past from the dead, to critically understand the present and imagine the future (Ibid).

In the Nawat-Pipil language, the centrality of the body helps us understand how body parts recover a symbolic meaning to relate to the world and the cosmos. According to Lara-Martínez (2012), the use of body parts as ontologies in the Nawat-Pipil language refers to the use of metaphor, which he argues, does not reduce the language to an assemblage of logic (*logo*s). Logic, he states, disguises the figurative meaning of words under a mathematical formula. Instead, in Nawat-Pipil each body part has an emblematic meaning that explains its cultural nature as the basis for abstract thinking. For instance, the number five (*makwil*) in Nawat-Pipil explains its arithmetic function. Numbers take root in the body from the fingers (*mapipil*) or "children/sons" (*pipil*) of the "hand" (*ma*); they extend when the hand opens in the same manner as each of the five points of Venus (*sital*) -- the morning star – which becomes visible at dawn when women prepare the corn dough (*nextamali*) to make tortillas (*tamal*). Similarly, Lara-Martínez points out that the hand (*ma*) disaggregates its progeny (*mapipil*), and metaphorically expresses the need for help ("*echame una mano*"/ "give me a hand"; "*dame una mano de maíz*" / "give me five corn on the cob") with multiple symbolic phrases that validate its basic biological content

[83] Related to understanding ideas for their connection to stories such as myths and poesies (Oxford Encyclopedia). https://oxfordre.com/education/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.001.0001/acrefore-9780190264093-e-1077

[84] During *Quetzalcoatl*'s descent to *Mictlan* at the dawning of the Fifth Sun, humanity was restored to life from the bones of those who died in prior eras. Bones are like seeds. Everything that dies is buried into the Earth. From there, new life emerges (Sahagún 1970).

to express ancestral knowledges that range from arithmetic to agriculture, to astronomy and the sacred (2012: xii).

Furthermore, Lara-Martínez explains that Nawat-Pipil relies on *-ix*, "ojo/*semilla*" (eye/ seed), *-yul*, "*corazón*" (heart), and *-el*, "*entraña*" (womb) to help us recollect the past. Additionally, *ketza/ketzal* means to rise or illuminate. Thus, resting on the principle of *taketzal* or *horcón* (pitchfork) or *hablar una lengua* (to speak a language), as a support for holding up the walls and roofs of human dwellings, I t rises or illuminates the universe of the [Nawat-Pipil] language through *taketzalis*. In this cultural effigy, the eye/*el ojo* (*-ix*) and the heart/*el corazón* (*-yul*), *el hígado*/the liver (*-el tapach*[85]), act as reflexive faculties that elaborate a hermeneutics or philosophy of the abstract, from the concreteness of the body (Ibid). For instance, if Homo erectus:

a. *ni-mu-ketza* (me paro/I rise)
b. *ni-k-ketza* (lo paro/I rise it up)
c. *ni-(k)-ta-ketza* (hablo/I speak)
d. *nik(i)-ix-(kej)ketza* (lo concibo/I conceive of it)
e. *ni-yul-ta-ketza* (lo pienso/I think about it)

Where *-ix = ojo* (eye)/grano (seed) = vision + *yul = corazón* (heart)/*energía vital* (vital energy). Then, *yul(ta)ketzalis* is a reflection of the past through and beyond the body. Similarly, the *xinach* (from *xinachti* or *shinachti*, which can be interpreted as internal female genitals such as the womb; plant seed; semen; verb, to fertilize; noun, breed), is tasked with collecting the archives of the past for the process of historiography. This visceral encounter with the past -- *(eltapach/elkawa) re-cuerdo*/re-membrance or (re) *vuelta*/turn de lo cordial/of the cordial (*-yul*) -- opposes the loss of everything that is endearing and/or upsetting. Thus, according to Lara-Martínez, the transparency of the main concepts of re-collecting history takes place within the deepest structures of the human body, in the confines of the liver (*el tapach*), which ensure futurity:

a. *ni-k-naamiki* yo-lo/*a-encontrar* (I-it-find)
b. *ni-k-el-naamiki* yo-lo/*a-hígado/interior-encontrar; lo/a-recuerdo*; *lo/a-encuentro-entrañable* (I-it-inner-find)
c. *ni-k-kaawa* yo-lo/*a-dejar/cesar* (I-it-stop/cease)
d. *ni-k-el-kaawa* yo-lo/*a-hígado/interior-dejar/cesar; lo/a olvido; lo/a dejo/pierdo entrañable(mente)* (I-it-inner stop/cease)

Lara-Martínez states that *yul(ta)ketzalis* involves a triad of concepts that inserts the abstract world into the interiority of the body through notions of "saber (information)/to know with the eye", "*conocer* (to be acquainted with people and places)/cognition" and "*creer*/believe." This triad affects historiography as a narrative (*-ina/decir)* of what happens (*-panu/lo que pasa*), according to the experience of the one who "is-there-collecting it, in its interiority" (of the liver), and that "re-cognizes the collective experience" to "tell-what-happens." With regards to testimony, Lara-Martínez proposes that it is about a collective experience prior to all transcription, literary elaboration, and written testimony. To *re-co-nocer*/re-cog-nize implies the collective presence (co/con) before the eyes of the other: *-ix-pan*, "*-ojo-locativo*/locating-eye" of a fact, which in English is literally translated as "eye-witness account." Lastly, this triad

[85] According to Lara-Martínez, the space between re-membering and forgetting is signified by the particle *el* (*el-tapach, el- kawat*) (2012).

highlights *the cordial* of every re-gard/re-heart/re-*yul,* and it underlies it as a necessary guideline in the process of recollection of the past. For instance, he notes that:

a. -mati -ix-mati -yul-mati

b. saber-co-nocer/ojo-saber/saber visual o creer /corazón-saber, saber cordial

c. knowledge eyewitness account/eye knowledge cordial/heart knowledge

In this fundamental Nawat-Pipil philosophy, its grammatical and narrative parameters are not only directed by a profoundly logical structure, but also by the centrality of the human body to understand and express the world. The human body as an entity of abstraction in the Nawat-Pipil language ensures that the human [being] exists and has the possibility of understanding the world. For this reason, the mythopoetics of the Nawat-Pipil language reclaim the body as the primary site of production and documentation of history, designating the presence of DNA and of "the bones of the dead," as seeds, keepers, birthers, and creators of knowledge and of the past. According to this knowledge *(-yul-mati*), the experience of *Mictlan* or descending to that, which is below of every Indigenous subject, precedes all historiographic testimony to recover history from the dead and it renovates the promise of Indigenous futurities and alterities, where *one person can exist within the person who speaks* or *listen through the speaker's eyes* (Ibid).

Section 2: El Salvador's Socio-historical Context: Spanish Invasion and Occupation: Ethnocide, and (Un)civil War

Without a doubt, the existing historical accounts of the encounter and conquest in Mesoamerica, were gathered from the perspective of the Spanish colonizing forces in the way of letters, reports, and legal documentation. Most Indigenous perspectives of the Spanish invasion and occupation depended on information collected through interviews by ecclesiasts and colonial administrators/chroniclers, such as Torquemada, Motolinía, de Las Casas, who in some way, interpreted Indigenous experiences through their eyes (Lemus 2019: 57). While the majority of pre-encounter coda were burned by Franciscan missionaries, who considered them heresy, the surviving manuscripts that most closely represent the invasion and occupation of Kushkatan include the Manuscript of Glasgow[86], *the Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, and the Annals of the Kaqchikels. Of these, the Manuscript of Glasgow has 156 illustrations that depict the conquest of *Mexco* and other parts of Mesoamerica, including various scenes about Kushkatan. The *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* also reproduces similar scenes (Lemus 2015: 58).

In the summer of 1524, Pedro de Alvarado arrived in the Río Ceniza valley, in Kushkatan accompanied by 100 men in horseback, 150 laborers, and about 600 Tlaxcalteca soldiers. In Alvarado's second letter of narration, to Hernán Cortez, he described meeting large, well-equipped armies of Nawa-Pipil in the Itzalku region and farthest east, in the polity of Kushkatan[87] (Ibid 472). He recorded that the first battle with Nawa armies took place in *Acaxual*, recalling:

> … Me partí a otro pueblo que se dice *Acaxual* donde bate la mar del sur[88]…
> … vi los campos llenos de gente de él, con sus plumajes y divisas, y con
> sus armas ofensivas y defensivas, en mitad de un llano que me estaban
> esperando y llegué de ellos hasta un tiro de ballesta, y allí me estuve quedo
> hasta que acabó de llegar mi gente… Cuando me vi retraído un cuarto de legua…
> dí vuelta sobre ellos con toda la gente, y rompimos por ellos;
> y fue tan grande el destrozo que en ellos hicimos, que en poco tiempo no había
> ninguno… y en cayendo, la gente de pie los mataba a todos… (Lemus 2015: 58).
>
> … I left to another town called *Acaxual* where the south seas beat…
> I saw the fields filled with his people, with its plumages and badges and with
> their offensive and defensive weapons, in the middle of a plain where they were
> waiting for me and I approached them as close to a crossbow shot, and there I
> waited
> until my people finished arriving… When I found myself retracted a quarter of a
> league...

[86] Codice Tlaxcalteca, 1585, currently in the Museum of Glasgow, Ireland.
[87] Located in what is now known as *Antiguo Cuscatlán*, in the Metropolitan Area of San Salvador.
[88] In Chapter 2, I make a reference to Manlio Argueta's historical novel *Cuzcatlán: Donde bate la mar del sur* (1987), which addresses the silenced histories of violence of the indigo plantations in El Salvador that killed thousands of Indigenous men and women. Argueta's novel is an indictment of the brutality of the Spanish invasion and occupation of Kushkatan in 1524, which he does not regard as a historical event but a structure of power that is not over.

> I turned around upon them with all the people, and we went after them; and it was so big the damage we inflicted upon them, that in no time, there were none standing… and when falling, my people on foot, would kill them all[89]…

Five days later, Alvarado recorded returning to *Tlacochcalco*[90], where a second battle took place, and more Nawa people were massacred:

> …Los Españoles no habían acometido…. Y bueno rompieron por los indios, y desbaratándolos, y fueron siguiendo al alcance por el pueblo más de una legua, y aquí se hizo muy gran matanza y castigo; y como los pueblos de adelante vieron que en campo los desbaratábamos, determinaron de alzarse y nos dejaron los pueblos… (Lemus 2015: 59).

> …The Spaniards had not rushed… And well, they went after the indios, and tearing them apart, and they followed them to reach their settlements over a league, and here we did a big slaughtering and punishment; and because the villages ahead saw that we would tear them apart in the field, they decided to withdraw, and they left us their villages[91]…

Alvarado narrates in the same letter, that after these massacres in *Acaxual and Tlacochcalco*, he proceeded to the polity of *Cuxcatlan*, prepared to invade the land and kill more Indigenous peoples, but the Nawa-Pipil withdrew and received the invaders without armed resistance: "…y llegando que llegué a esta ciudad de Cuxcatlán, hallé muchos della, que me recibieron, y todo el pueblo alzado; y mientras nos aposentábamos, no quedó hombre dellos en el pueblo, que todos se fueron a las sierras" ("…and when I arrived to this city of Kushktan, I found many of them, who received me, and the entire town rose up; and while we settled in, there was no one left in town, all of them fled to the mountains"[92] (Lemus 2015: 60).

Bartolomé de las Casas, in his Brevísima Relación de la Destrucción de las Indias (Brief Story of the Destruction of the Indies) (André Saint Lu 1991 qted. in Lemus 2015: 60), states:

> De infinitas obras horribles que en este reino hizo este infelice mal aventurado y tirano y sus hermanos[93]… y en la ciudad de Cuscatlán que era la cabeza de la provincia, le hicieron grandísimo recebimiento, y sobre treinta mil indios le estaban esperando con gallinas y comida…
> …Y desde que vido que eran cobre, dijo a los españoles:

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[89] My translation
[90] Tacuscalco, Centzunat.
[91] My translation
[92] My translation
[93] Jorge Lemus explains that Las Casas is referring to Pedro de Alvarado, Gonzalo Gómez y Jorge de Alvarado (Lemus 2019: 60).

> "Dá al diablo tal tierra; vámonos pues que no hay oro; y cada uno de los indios que tiene, que le sirven, échelos en cadena y mandaré herrárselos por esclavos." Hácenlo así y hiérranlos con el hierro del rey por esclavos a todos los que pudieron atar… (Lemus 2015: 60)
>
> Of infinite horrible works that in this kingdom the unhappy unfortunate and tyrant and his brothers… and in the city of Kushkatlan, which was the head of the province, they gave him a great welcoming, and over thirty thousand indians were waiting for him with chickens and food…
> … And since he saw that they were made of copper[94], he told his men: "To hell with this land; let's go because there is no gold; and each one of the indians that you have, that serve you, chain them and I will send for them to be branded as slaves." Do it this way and brand them with the king's iron as slaves, all of them that you can tie…"[95]

During the Spanish incursion of Kushkatan, the invaders encountered several other Indigenous groups such as Chortis in modern-day *Sihuatehuacan*[96] and *Xalatenango*[97]; Pokomames near the Río *Paxaca*[98] in *Achuachapan*[99] bordering with modern-day *Cuauhtemallan* and *Sihuatehuacan*; Lencas and Ulúas of *Chibcha* and *Misumalpa* origins east of the Río *Lempa*; *Cacaoperas* in the northeast Morazán region; and *Chorotegas* or *Mangues* southeast the Gulf of Fonseca. All these Indigenous groups and their languages have now disappeared, except the Lencas and Cacaoperas, who maintain a minoritized ethnic status in El Salvador but continue to have a living presence on the land (Lemus 2015: 47).

Through excerpts of Spanish narratives of 'conquest'[100], we can perceive the European colonizers' level of barbarism and depravation against the Nawat-Pipil, during their first encounters in Kushkatan. On August 5, 1526, Alvarado returned to Kushkatan with his brother Diego, to name and found the Villa of San Salvador, now known as San Salvador. Each year on this anniversary, Salvadorans celebrate *las fiestas patronales de El Salvador del Mundo*[101]. These celebrations historically exhibited *el Pendón Real* (the royal banner) of the Spanish empire, which year after year on this date, was paraded in the streets of San Salvador, along with a bloody sword[102], for men and women to renew their loyalty to the monarch through, which was practiced through the first decade of the

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[94] De Las Casas is referring the copper hatches that Nawa people gave Alvarado when he asked for gold (2015: 60).
[95] My translation
[96] Departamento de Santa Ana, in Nawat-Pipil means "sacred place of women" (Tepas Lapas 2022)
[97] Departamento de Chalatenango. In Nawat-Pipil means "place walled by waters and sands" (Meza 2012: 131).
[98] Río Paz (Lemus 2019: 58)
[99] Departamento de Ahuachapán, in Nawat-Pipil means "home of the oaks" (Meza 2012:57)
[100] Nawa-Pipil leaders refuse to use the term conquest and instead, refer to it as invasion and occupation (Field notes 2018-19)
[101] Annual festivities in El Salvador
[102] Barberena (1996)

nineteenth century (Parducci 2007: 42). These festivities link the Spanish invasion and occupation of Kushkatan with Catholic fervor, which has been regarded by critical scholars as a zone of contact[103], where dominant and dominated groups grappled with by relations of power.

The official historical narrative of El Salvador does not account for other significant Indigenous liberation social movements, except for the 1833 *Nonualcos* in central El Salvador led by *Tata* Anastacio Aquino[104] and the *Izalcos* in Western El Salvador (known as La Matanza of 1932) (Lemus 2019: 61). Nawa-Pipil communities dispute this version of Salvadoran history asserting that there have been dozens, if not hundreds, of Indigenous uprisings in Kushkatan throughout the colonial period and thereafter, that have been erased from the historical memory of the nation. Virginia Tilley (2005) documents that in El Salvador there has been a long history of Indigenous uprisings, listing at least 43 revolts that occurred between 1771 and 1918 (Tilley 2005: 123-127).

While the physical violences of the European encounter were constant and numerous, they were not the only ones. For instance, Spanish administrators forced the Nawa-Pipil communities to pay tribute per head of household to the Crown, through production of *cacao* in the Itzalku region, which was documented as being one of the strongest ones in Mesoamerica (Ardón Mejía 1993: 166). The weaponization of disease such as syphilis, measles, chicken pox and typhoid, along with extremely unsanitary conditions in the cacao fields where indigenous people were forced to work long hours to keep up with the sharp increases in taxes over time, the physical abuse of the criollos against the Nawa-Pipil, the lack of any legal protection for Indigenous peoples, and the importation of non-domestic cattle that ambulated freely through the landscape devouring the subsistence crops of Indigenous peoples caused mass starvation and subjugated them to a life of indentured servitude. (Smith 1997: 92).

These conditions contributed to the humanization of Nawa-Pipil communities in Kushkatan. For instance, in the village of *Ateotl*,[105] 1532 tax records show that, each family had to pay 30 *xiquipiles*, but in 1548, they were expected to pay 60 *xiquipiles;* this was a one hundred percent tax-increase in a period of 16 years (Lemus 2019:62). As the Nawa-Pipil population in Kushkatan decreased to an all-time low of twenty percent in 1590, historical documents written by de Torquemada and de Las Casas, show that colonizers began to import Indigenous men from Guatemala to compensate for the severe

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[103] See Mary-Louise Pratt's *Ojos Imperiales* (1997). She argues that a zone of contact is a social space where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths.

[104] In January 1833, an Indigenous social movement took place in the Santiago *Nonualco* region in central El Salvador, led by Anastasio Aquino who attempted to liberate his people from the abuse and exploitation in indigo plantations at the hands of landed elites. The *Nonualcos* occupied the town of *Zacatecoluca* and nearby towns and municipalities for over two months. Aquino was captured and decapitated in April of the same year, deterred the uprising. See Julio Alberto Domínguez Sosa, Ensayo histórico sobre las tribús Nonualcas y su caudillo Anastasio Aquino (San Salvador: Ministerio de Education, 164), 44-47, Ensayo histórico 78-95 y Ensayo histórico, 94-95. See Browning, El Salvador, 140-41; See also Julio César Calderón, Episodios nacionales: Anastasio Aquino y el porqué de su rebelión en 1833 en Santiago Nonualco (San Salvador: Imprenta Moreno, 1957). These sources have been cited by Thomas Kincaid (1970).

[105] Ateos, Department of La Libertad, it means "sacred water" (Meza 2012: 226).

depopulation they caused in Kushkatan. Tomás López Medel, an auditor in Western Kushkatan reported that during that time in *Achuachapan*, women spoke *mam*[106] and their partners spoke Nawa-Pipil (Lardé 1926). By 1892, historian Santiago I. Barberena (1966), documented most people in Kushkatan were monolingual and that by the end of the nineteenth century, the Nawat-Pipil language had been completely replaced by Spanish for all business transactions in the new republic.

The Salvadoran independence from Spain in 1821, gave rise to the nation and to a new national identity and the need for new economies. The liberal elites that opposed colonial administrators in the fight for independence deepened the social transformations of the time, with the introduction and rise of coffee production in the region (Paige 1999: 14). Control over property became a priori that encouraged European migrations and foreign investments, developed ports and railways and forcibly recruited Nawa-Pipil communities to work, by legislating the dispossession of their land, which created a new class of wealthy landowners and condemned indigenous communities to live under conditions of perpetual impoverishment. The best lands for cultivating coffee are the highlands of the *Apanahecat*[107] mountain range where the largest Nawa-Pipil resettlements in Western Kushkatan formed after they were initially dislocated from the low-lying prairies being used by settlers for sugar cane cultivation and as the first sites of colonial development (Dym 2012: 10). Justification to legally displace and dispossess Indigenous communities from the land came in the form of letters and reports, such as a document written in 1878, by the local government of *Sihuatehuacan* (Ciudad de Santa Ana) in which officials state that "the land is very fertile and apt for coffee cultivation, but unfortunately, the indians only grow corn, rice, beans and yucca" (Browning 1975: 319).

> La existencia de tierras bajo la propiedad de las Comunidades impide el desarrollo agrícola, estorba la circulación de la riqueza y debilita los lazos familiares y la independencia del individuo. Su existencia contraría los principios económicos y sociales que la República ha adoptado. (Acuerdo Legislativo, D. O., 26 feb. 1881).
>
> The existence of lands under the propriety of the Communities prevents agricultural development, hinders wealth circulation, and it weakens familial ties and the independence of an individual. Its existence counters the economic and social principles that the Republic has adopted. (Legislative Agreement, D. O. February 26, 1881).

The legal removal of Nawa-Pipil communities from their territories created a new class of 'dispossession' and a new class of 'the dispossessed' at the end of the nineteenth century in Kuskatan. Indigenous peoples were forced to rent land to live in, from those who took it from them and then, Indigenous peoples had to work the land of the new owners for meager wages, to pay for said rent. In this way, their wages and their means of

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[106] Mayan language spoken in the Western highlands of Guatemala and Chiapas, Mexico (Canger 1959: vii).

[107] The Apaneca mountain range is in Ahuachapan and it means "place where the winds abound" (Meza 2012: 60).

production assured wealth only for the land landowners. A consequence of these legislative violences, was that the advanced understandings of, and the relationships with the land of Indigenous communities, which they regarded as a source of life that is always accessible to all, began to deteriorate. This was especially difficult given that pre-contact practices of land tenancy among Nawa communities supported the idea that individuals and families would work and care for the land for long periods of time without identifying an owner; thus, under this vision of being in the world, land was always accessible to everyone in the community (Lockhart 1999: 205). The new *colono* economies that resulted from colonial reorganizations of space and privatization of the land in Kushkatan, following independence from Spain, ended communal lands at the end of the nineteenth century, ensuring that Indigenous communities would be left more vulnerable and dispossessed than ever. As much as forty percent of the arable land had been communal land in Kushkatan, prior to the legislative changes in 1882-1883, and as much as fifty to sixty percent of the population depended on it to survive (Menjívar 1980: 148).

The privatization of the land in El Salvador raised new concerns for the political and economic interests of the criollos. Rural police (1884), and mounted police (1889), were established in Western El Salvador[108] as the antecedent to the National Guard[109], to suppress rural revolts. The government recruited mainly among Indigenous and mestizo men, soon after communal lands were appropriated from Indigenous communities and privatized. Their initial mission was to enforce vagrancy laws and compelling those who were dispossessed to work the land for the new owners. By the turn of the century, coffee represented 76% of domestic exports. In 1907, agrarian laws were appointing rural justices of the peace to legitimize forcing displaced Indigenous peoples to work in coffee plantations, making land ownership a cornerstone of class inequality and a source of power for the landed oligarchs (Pérez Pineda 2018: 31)

Meanwhile, the first Salvadoran Constitution published in 1824, restricted the right to citizenship to those who were 21 years of age or older, could read and write, and owned property (Title 2, Article 5). Most of these requisites were out of reach for Nawa-Pipil communities, who were forced to live in statelessness conditions. Forty years later, the 1864 constitutional amendments added literary degree, marriage, and the ability to buy real state and spend more than five thousand *colones*[110] as requirements for citizenship, which continued to exclude Indigenous communities (Article 6). Throughout these decades, Roman Catholicism was the only religion that was officially recognized and considered truthful and worthy of government protections; this perspective resulted in criminalizing[111] Indigenous cosmovision and spiritual practices (Title 1, Article 3,

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[108] Santa Ana, Sonsonate, y Ahuachapán (Pérez Pineda 2018: 32).

[109] The Salvadoran National Guard was established in 1912, as a special body of the rural police to maintain public order among Indigenous communities (Pérez Pineda 2018: 23). With the signing of the 1992 Peace accords, the National Guard was dismantled because of its egregious record of human rights violations, especially during the 1980s war.

[110] National currency denomination prior to the adoption of dollarization in 2001.

[111] As an example, my mother relates a childhood memory of seeing her uncle José, a resident of El Nance, a hamlet in *El Departamento de la Libertad*, being hung by his feet from a tree by national guardsmen, for having chicha in his home. Chicha is an Indigenous fermented drink made of maize, pineapple, and brown

1824; Title 2, Article 5, 1864). By 1880, constitutional amendments added military service as a condition for citizenship, and the ability to provide a good life for the self/family (Title 3, Article 4). This set of new constitutional amendments highlighted the recognition of citizen rights, based on work, property, and public order (Article 14), making it explicit that 'work' was a mandatory obligation of citizens (Article 41). In 1883, constitutional amendments such as Article 45, impressed that all constitutional rights would be suspended for vagrants and drunks, imposing the full weight of the law and of moral standards, upon anyone dispossessed, to force them to dedicate their lives in service of the landed elites. These examples of legal violences created between the 1880s and the 1920s, established new conditions of acute class polarization based on the expropriation of communal lands that took place in 1881-8182. These conditions resulted in a resentful, displaced peasantry who had no other choice but to become the 'proletariazed' agricultural labor force for the coffee oligarchs, an unparalleled economic system not seen anywhere else in the region (Paige 1999: 105). Without the benefits of full citizenship, Nawa-Pipil communities have lived on the margins of the nation, as liminal subjects, undeserving of legal recognition[112] and legal protection, or what Lisa Marie Cacho refers to as *social death* or *being dead to others* (2012: 8).

In this context, Nawa-Pipil communities faced new repression during and in the aftermath of the worldwide economic crisis that began with the market crash of 1929, which signaled impending economic and political losses to the coffee oligarchs in El Salvador (Paige 1999: 22-23). Lauría-Santiago and Gould (2004), describe the untenable working conditions for Indigenous women and men in the large-scale coffee plantations of Western El Salvador. The workers, who are described mostly as Nawa-Pipil and mestizo campesinos[113], were already struggling to survive, from season to season, with barely any means to support their families. Paige (1999) describes the agricultural work force during this time, as two thirds of the total population increase in the nation, living and working in the coffee growing regions and depending on harvest labor of coffee for subsistence, resembling a new class of enslaved workers. As coffee oligarchs prepared for the impending financial crisis, during the harvest of 1931-1932, agricultural workers faced fifty percent wage cuts and massive reductions in employment (Ibid 107). These harsh economic realities stood in stark contrast with the wealth of coffee oligarchs, who despite the ongoing crisis, continued to benefit from the colonial spatial re-organization

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sugar that is used in ceremonies. There are countless stories similar to this, where Indigenous peoples are persecuted for practicing their cosmovision in rural areas.

[112] On June 12, 2014, the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador, under the leftist government of the former Salvadoran President Salvador Sánchez Cerén, adopted a constitutional amendment (Article 63), to recognize the existence of Indigenous peoples, proclaiming: "The Republic of El Salvador recognizes indigenous peoples and will adopt the necessary policies to develop and maintain their cultural and ethnic identities, cosmovision, values and spirituality" (Lemus 2019: 17). Cacho (2012) offers that to extend legal recognition to bodies already seen as ineligible for those rights, is to talk about the 'sacrifice' of those in positions of power, who make it official that they are willing to share in their privileges and power with the Other (Ibid 8). Thus, the transformation of Nawa-Pipil communities from not having to having full legal personhood in the nation, after nearly 200 years of legal exclusion, is not a viable solution to their claims for self-determination and it does nothing to rectify the violences of racialized labor, exploitation, unspeakable violences, and abject poverty that they have had to endure during 500 years of the worst excesses of imperialism, colonialism, and war.

[113] Peasants

practices, urbanism, and land privatization policies and practices that had made coffee, the number one export of the nation (Anderson 1982: 75). This dichotomy also resulted in the geographic containment of Nawa-Pipil communities who were forced to live in remote and rugged terrains regions far from the peripheries of most towns and cities, which resulted in an existence relegated to oblivion (Dym 2012: 11).

In this historical moment, workers began to organize to protest the inhumane and substandard working conditions they endured at the coffee plantations. At the same time, the Great Depression of 1932 caused a severe economic downturn in El Salvador, as coffee prices dropped globally, leaving workers without any resources to survive (Paige 1999: 107; Ching 1988: 202). On January 22, 1932, Communist Party leader Agustín Farabundo Martí, university students Mario Zapata and Alfonso Luna, working in support of *Itzalku* Indigenous leader *Tajztin*[114] Feliciano Ama, *Tajtzin* Francisco Sánchez and others, attempted to liberate from their oppressors, several Indigenous towns in the mountains of Western Kushkatan that became enclosed by coffee plantations at the turn of the century, including *Tlacopan*[115], *Xuayua*[116], *Nawitzalku*[117], *Itzalku*[118] and *Teutepegua*.[119] Military dictator, General Maximiliano Hernández-Martinez was quick to respond with a full counteroffensive that killed between 7,000 to 50,000 Nawa-Pipil - mostly men and boys - in a matter of two to three weeks. Their bodies were buried in several unmarked mass graves, that to this day remain unmarked (Ching 1998: 52). Sulfur pits were dug to dispose of the bodies and as mass graves proved insufficient, unburied corpses were left for dogs, pigs, and vultures to feed on (Paige 1999: 103).

These series of massacres are known as *La Matanza* of 1932, or the slaughtering, and are described by sociologist Paul Almeida (2011), as "one of the largest episodes of state repression witnessed in the Americas in the twentieth century" (Ibid 11); estimates about the magnitude of this ethnocide suggest that one to three percent of the population in Kushkatan were killed (Tilley 2005: 26). Having Indigenous features, carrying a machete, dressing in the traditional Nawa-Pipil dress,[120] and speaking Nawat-Pipil became exteriorities in the imaginary of a modern mestizo-nation that symbolized that, which needed to be killed, eliminated, and disappeared (Chapin 1981: 1). For Instance, Eric Ching (1998), documents that survivors of *La Matanza* stopped wearing *huipiles, refajos* and *caites* and speaking Nawa-Pipil in public. The aftermath of this ethnocide perpetuated the myth in the nation, that all Indigenous peoples in El Salvador were killed (200). Meanwhile, Nawa-Pipil communities have continued to resist and survive, countering official state narratives of 'communism', 'armed insurrection', 'rebellion', and 'uprising' that obscure their histories of colonial violences, imperialisms, and war that they have endured.

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[114] Title of respect for older men, it means "Mister" (Hernández 2019: 298).
[115] Tacuba, Departament of Ahuachapán, it means "ball court" (Meza 2012:81).
[116] Juayúa, Department of Sonsonate, it means "Sacred waters" (Meza 2012: 559).
[117] Nahuizalco, Department of Sonsonate, it means "Four Izalcos" (Meza 2012: 561).
[118] Izalco, Department of Sonsonate, it means "Place of the obsidian homes" (Meza 2012: 558).
[119] Teotepeque, Department of La Libertad, it means "Sacred Mountain" (Meza 2012: 252).
[120] *Wipil, kacti, kweyat, salas, shunpe, kushtal* or *huipil, caites* (sandals), *refajo, pants, hats, sack* (Hernández 2019).

According to Bermúdez (2017), the mass killings of thousands of Indigenous peoples had a significant impact on the country's social, political, economic, and cultural legacies, particularly for Indigenous women who survived and their children, as they were subjected to living in fear for decades. Most importantly, Bermúdez's scholarship points out to the dearth of information about the Indigenous women in this historical moment. The work of feminist philosopher, María Lugones (2014), posits that indigenous women's bodies are intertwined with the control over territory, arguing that the coloniality[121] of gender is a regime that orders lives, sexualities, bodies, spiritualities, and beings into hierarchical structures violently imposed on racialized bodies through colonization and genocide (Icaza 2014: 5). In this light, I offer that surviving the 1932 *Matanza*, was one significant traumatic episode in the Nawa-Pipil histories of violence that does not encompass the totality of the colonial violences perpetuated against them.

In the aftermath of *La Matanza*, linguistic anthropologist Rafael Lara-Martínez offers that El Salvador underwent an intense nationalistic period, which he refers to as a period of "weapons and letters," when the nation - threatened by the ghost of communism - openly promoted the notion of 'racial difference (2011: 1). While preceding *La Matanza* of 1932, I offer that the Eurocentric work of Swedish anthropologist Carl V. Hartman in Kuskatan (1896-1989), focused on photographing the naked bodies of Nawa-Pipil women and men in the *Itzalku* and *Nawitzalku* regions, around 1897. In his notes, Hartman referred to the Nawa-Pipil as the "Aztecs of El Salvador" and used this term to qualify his 'scientific' anthropomorphic findings about the Indigenous peoples of Kuskatan. To obtain these photographs, Hartman worked side by side with the Salvadoran Minister of War, who ordered Nawa-Pipil women and men to pose naked for Hartman (Bermúdez 2017). The role of Western scholars in promulgating misconceptions about the racial difference of the *Other*, through sexualized scientific racism data obtained at gun point, validated the gaze and desire of hetero cis white patriarchal domination to primitivize, demonize, dehumanize, and therefore, eliminate Indigenous bodies, to cleanse the territories from any Indigenous presence[122] (Wolfe 2006: 387-409). For those who survived *La Matanza*, they were subjected into a violent process of forced systematic assimilation through the politics of *blanqueamiento* or '*Mestizaje*' project, and through an intense cultural remaking of the nation (Lara-Martínez 2011: 3).

These historical moments mediated Indigenous identity in El Salvador, by a referent from the colonial past that conferred civilization to the uncivilized, the barbaric, and the savage one. Thus, the notion of exterminating Indigenous bodies, according to Rafael Lara-Martínez' research (2017), was the first condition for development of the modern nation-state (I highlighted the legal erasure of Indigenous bodies through the formation of citizenship at the turn of the nineteenth century in El Salvador). Further, the intellectual thinking of the time, centered on notions of progress and simultaneously, on

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[121] Coloniality refers to the logic, culture, and structure of the modern world-system (Maldonado-Torres 2017: 117).

[122] Indigenous scholar Patrick Wolfe (2006) states that the primary motive for eliminating Indigenous peoples is not race, ethnicity, religion, or degree of civilization, but access to territory. Thus, elimination of Indigenous peoples is an organizing principle of settler-colonial societies that not only strives for the dissolution of native societies, but it also erects a new colonial society on the expropriated land base.

eliminating what was backward and what prevented progress: “Because of its racial purity, in Costa Rica there are white little towns, clean and smiling. And in the faces, voices, and the looks of things, in everything, even quietness and peace germinate because of the temperament […] that sought it, with conviction.” These are the words of famous Salvadoran literary figure, Alberto Masferrer (1931), who according to R. Lara-Martínez (2017), echo the sentiment of the Salvadoran intellectual collectivity at the time, that the ‘absence of indians’ is ideal for civilizing the nation (Ibid 131, 132).

The Salvadoran cultural re-making following *La Matanza* of 1932, was led by military dictator General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, who not only directed *La Matanza* of 1932, but also enlisted the faithful visits and the support of international intellectuals and artists of the time, such as José de Vasconcelos, Gabriela Mistral, and national celebrities such as Salarrué, Francisco Gavidia, Claudia Lars, Julio Enrique Ávila, José Mejía Vides, etc. to promote his indigenismo and folklorism policies that hid the unspeakable violences of his administration through silence, indifference, and literary rupture from the truth (R. Lara-Martínez 2011: 16-18, 28, 70-71). This painful chapter in Salvadoran history is undeniably related to the violent legacies of European colonialism, imperialism, and war that manifest through the positionality of researchers in Western academia, who produce knowledge, use, and abuse theoretical (mis)understandings about *the Other* and *Othering* in very harmful ways (Chow and Zhou 1993: 30). Despite the silence and literary rupture of the intellectual community about the truth of the 1932 national tragedy, there are strong and powerful Indigenous presences in the land, that refuse to disappear.

While the events of 1932 did not result in the democratization of Salvadoran society, and repressive conditions worsened for Indigenous communities in its aftermath, *La Matanza* opened a possibility for Salvadorans to think about transitioning to a different society. The five decades that followed the 1932 *Matanza*, were characterized by uninterrupted military dictatorships, who protected the coffee elites and oligarchy. During this 13-year of state siege and severe repression by the military government, Indigenous communities were invisibilized and erased from the imaginary of the nation. From the 1930s - 1940s, *El Martinato*’s administration focused on dismembering the civil organizations that emerged in the 1920s, to suppress dissent (Almeida 2008: 52). Between the 1940s and the 1960s, government suppression continued, although there were some economic and labor reforms implemented by the military government, and minor sporadic attempts by urban workers to organize without significant success; during this time, there is a dearth of information about Indigenous communities or their organizing efforts; however, civil society’s attempts to organize in the aftermath of ethnocide, although small, were creating openings in the liberalization of the military regime. These attempts were important to build and sustain a larger movement of popular contention in the future (Ibid 53).

By the 1960s, when world coffee prices dropped and the power of the Salvadoran landed elites was affected again -- politically, and economically -- the largest outpour of popular dissent since *La Matanza* of 1932, took place. Again, not much is documented about Indigenous communities in the literature, during those years. Almeida states that organizers who survived the 1932 *Matanza,* went into exile or quietly retreated to the interior of the country (Ibid 68). The political changes that took place within the military

regime in that decade, allowed for protests and free elections to take place; meanwhile records show that civic organizations, including the Communist Party of El Salvador, had continued to organize underground, since 1936, and they remained clandestine for years. Thus, survivors of the 1932 massacres played a critical role in passing down their organizing skills to new generations of activists who would lead the protests in the 1960s and 1970s and wage the revolution (Ibid 60-69).

In the 1960s, the government's liberalizing efforts to provide institutional access to the labor sector by adopting labor laws, the educational sector by investing in schools and legalizing teachers' unions, and the church sector by encouraging the formation of peasant cooperatives, supported greater civic autonomy and encouraged dissent. It is during this time, that the state encouraged the rural sector[123] to work with the church, by promoting the social doctrine of Vatican II[124] (1962-1965) and Medellín (1968)[125] (Ibid 71). These unprecedented government actions helped rural communities overcome the distrust and fear they had since *La Matanza* of 1932. Soon, the government, the church, and international agencies were training and encouraging selected rural communities to form cooperatives (Ibid 76). However, literature reviews of this period, show little to no mention of Indigenous communities -- referring only to 'rural sector', 'campesinos' (peasants), or farm workers -- a sign that the invisibilization tactics deployed by *El Martinato* were working. The institutional access granted by the government to these four sectors and the notion of free elections helped establish new civic organizations that would later play a key role in the 1970s and the 1980s war (Ibid 79). During this time, the archdiocese of San Salvador helped trained youth groups to work in rural areas with 'peasants' and published several reports supporting land redistribution and 'peasant' unionization. Priests and pastoral teams organized 'peasants' in *Comunidades Cristianas de Base* (CCB or Christian Base Communities) that performed traditional religious practices and discussed the bible through new interpretations, such as *liberation theology*[126] to address the unequal conditions for the poor created by capitalism in Latin America (Ibid 85; Dussel 2003: 16).

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was an increased level of peaceful popular contention taking place against the government, from all sectors, that later developed into a full wave of protests. Some of the forms of contention in which rural workers

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[123] By rural sector, Almeida means campesinos (peasants). In El Salvador, most farm workers are Indigenous or Indigenous descendants who, for fear of government reprisal, hid their identity (Fieldnotes 2019).

[124] In 1959, Pope John XXIII, announced the creation of the Second Vatican Council and assembled between 2,000 and 2,500 bishops and thousands of observers, auditors, sisters, laymen and laywomen to four sessions at St. Peter's Basilica between 1962 and 1965. He called for cultural changes in the church, in the aftermath of World War II. These meetings resulted in 16 documents that laid the foundation for the church as we know it today (Teicher 2012).

[125] The Second Episcopal Conference of Latin America was a bishops' conference held in 1968 in Medellín, Colombia, as a follow-up to the Second Vatican Council. The conference sought to create a transformation in Latin America by centering the needs of the poor and the oppressed in Latin American society, instead of centering the needs of the European church (Valiente 2012).

[126] See Enrique Dussel's theorizing about liberation theology through his understandings of the liberation *of* theology and of the poor because he believes that they are in their condition of exclusion, privation, penury because of historical determinants. He proposes that the historical conditions of Mesoamerican Indigenous peoples are determined by the geopolitics of global and imperialistic capitalism (2003 16).

participated included land seizures, marches, and joining teachers' strikes (ibid 89, 95). The number of rural families who were landless at the time grew from 12 to 29 per cent in 1971, at the same time when they were also experiencing a decrease in wages (Ibid 99). Given the 1969, 100-hours war between El Salvador and Honduras[127], migration to the north, was not an option for peasants since the borders closed, following the killing and displacement of several thousand Salvadoran refugees by the Honduran army and the Salvadoran army's incursion of Honduran territories. During this period of regime liberalization, there were increasing numbers of Salvadorans participating in collective action, which the military government tried to stop by closing civic spaces where people could mobilize. The result of these changes was a transition from peaceful civic mobilization by liberalization, to civic mobilization by intimidation that became radicalized over time (Ibid 103). In this way, holdover organizations that had evolved from prior decades after being dismembered by *El Martinato* in the 1930s, provided the structural foundation needed for waging a revolutionary war in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Ibid 107).

By the mid-1970s, the Salvadoran military government began to openly deploy repressive tactics, as popular pressure for land reform increased. An estimated 50-60,000 'peasants' were participating in CCBs in rural areas, and their newsletter *Justicia y Paz* (Justice and Peace) was circulating six to eight thousand copies per issue, via local parishes and 'peasant' training centers. The newsletter highlighted the state's responsibility for social problems such as inflation, political persecution, the lack of land access, and the [human] rights of 'peasants', using vernacular that they could understand and caricatures to make the messages legible to a low-literacy audience. At the same time, the church started to publicly denounce state repression and social problems such as inflation, which was a significant departure for this conservative institution (Ibid 111-113).

Simultaneously, the 1970s global recession impacted local economies and these international pressures along with fraudulent elections in various localities, intensified the frustration of Salvadoran families. Rural families openly expressed feeling tired of deceptive government practices during protests, related to failed land reform efforts, minimum wage laws, gas prices, excessive rent, inflation prices, etc. (Ibid 114-117). The government responded to popular manifestations of contention, with acts of repression that escalated in frequency and severity, which instead of stopping mass protests, had a radicalizing effect on the masses (Ibid 120). Almeida's research shows that this historical process of radicalization in El Salvador, is an example of a "threat-induced wave of discontent driven by government repression" that pushed popular organizing to new levels of action (134). Church-organized 'peasants' emerged as a strong oppositional coalition against the government for the first time, since the *1932 Matanza* (135). The

[127] According to Thomas P. Anderson (1981) the 100-hours war took place in late June of 1969, after a prolonged diplomatic conflict related to the expulsion of and atrocities committed against Salvadoran migrants who had been living in Honduras illegally to work in the banana plantations with the United Fruit Company or to live as 'squatters' cultivating the land. Many of the undocumented Salvadoran migrants in Honduras were Indigenous people who fled El Salvador after the extinction of ejidos in the early 1880s and the violences of the 1932 *Matanza* (71-128).

escalating levels of violence nationwide created a climate of "acute political crisis, which finally spilled over into outright civil war in early 1981" (Ibid).

The (un)civil war in El Salvador, lasted 12 years and killed over 75,000 Salvadorans, thousands more are still missing or suffer from debilitating medical conditions and injuries, and one third of the nation was forcibly displaced abroad. Only a fraction of those who fled received refugee status. Yet, these statistics fail to convey the high human cost of the low-intensity warfare tactics and scorch-earth operations deployed by government troops with U.S. training, technical assistance/advice, and financing by the U.S. during the Carter and Reagan[128] administrations (Booth et al 2015: 147).

The signing of the 1992 Chapultepec Peace Accords brought hope to the nation and many changes, but it did not change the living conditions of most, including Indigenous communities, who are now telling their stories of resistance and survivance about a war that never ends. They also report that there is little to no reconciliation in the peace process, as most crimes of war have gone without redress.

[128] Military aid and advice, and economic aid during is estimated at $9.5 million the Carter years. The Reagan administration increased military aid to El Salvador to $533 million, boosting in-situ technical assistance and training to troops and in the School of the Americas. Over the twelve years of war, the U.S. spent about $6 billion in military and civilian aid (Booth et al 2015: 147).

Section 3: *Witzapan*

Witzapan was originally, a Nawa-Pipil settlement nestled in the southwest foothills of the *Apaneca-Illamatepec*[129] mountain range in Western *Kushkatan*, in what is known as the "Indigenous zone" (Lara Martínez 2006 [130] and 2012: 20). A small, rural municipality of approximately twenty-eight square kilometers located in the Department of *Centzunat*, *Witzapan* is approximately seventy kilometers southwest of San Salvador, bordering with the municipalities of Santa Catarina *Masahuat* in the north, San Antonio del Monte and the City of *Centzunat* in the east, the port of *Acaxual* in the south, and San Pedro *Puxtla* and *Guaymango* in the West. Given the many rivers[131] and strong rainy season in this region, *Witzapan* enjoys a hot and humid climate, and it is known for its lush vegetation and waterfalls. *Witzapan* is one of the poorest municipalities in *Centzunat* and is divided into four main rural *cantones* or hamlets: *El Carrizal, El Caulote, El Zarzal, and El Zope*. The urban municipality measures approximately 0.9 square kilometers and has two neighborhoods divided by two main streets: *El Rosario* in the south (known as "el barrio de abajo"/the neighborhood below), and *El Calvario* in the north ("el barrio de arriba"/the neighborhood above) – where the lowest income population, including most Indigenous people, are concentrated. *Witzapan*'s administrative center is in the urban part of the municipality where the city hall, school, church, health unit, and a small plaza with a few open air eateries and public restrooms are located, in the classic layout of a colonial town. It is in the urban part of *Witzapan* where I conducted my fieldwork for this study, in 2019. Of the estimated 6,270 inhabitants[132] in *Witzapan* in 1992, scholars estimate that the Nawa-Pipil population constitutes more than 88 percent of the inhabitants and of these, only two percent speak Nawat-Pipil. The remaining speak Castilian today (Lara Martínez 2006: 27, 29).

Witzapan's economy is described by Western definitions, as subsistence agriculture, a term that anthropologist Stefano Varese disavows, referring to Indigenous agricultural practices as "social economies" (Talk. Global Latinidades Conference, UC Merced 2022), given that the cultivation of the land is carried out collectively, mostly by men – for the sole purpose of feeding their families -- using hand tools such as *machetes, cumas,* and *chuzos* (ancestral agricultural tools, used for chopping trees, branches, grasses, and to dig holes in the ground to plant seeds) to sow staple foods such as corn, beans, and squash (an ancestral agricultural practice known as *mil or milpa* in Nawat-Pipil), and other seasonal vegetables.

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[129] *Witzapan*'s elevation is approximately 1800 meters above sea level (Lara Martínez 2006: 27)

[130] Clarification of sources: Lara Martínez refers to Carlos, an anthropologist at the University of El Salvador (UES); Lara-Martínez refers to Rafael, a linguist, Professor Emeritus at New Mexico Tech University in the U.S.

[131] *Ríos Sucio, Sihuapan, Sunzacuapa, Talzapuyo, La Barranca*, and Santo Domingo (Lara Martínez 2006: 27)

[132] Dirección General de Estadística de El Salvador (September 1992). Current population estimates for *Witzapan.*7,929 (June 2020). www.citypopulation.de/en/elsalvador/admin/sonsonate/0315__santo_domingo_de_guzm%C3%A1n/ Accessed May 2021.

In El Salvador, since Indigenous communal lands were legally appropriated and privatized by criollos[133] in the early 1880s, to grow coffee for exportation, only around 28 percent of Indigenous people[134] cultivate their own small plots of land to survive. Most Indigenous people must rent plots of land to grow the food they eat (Lara Martínez 2006: 29, 41-43). Clay pottery is the second largest economic activity in *Witzapan,* which is done by women, using red or black clay and sand, which they obtain from local rivers, to create clay grills and pots (*kumit*), and other cooking utensils using their bare hands. Women sell these artisanal products in the neighboring cities at very low prices, given the amount of labor that it takes to make them and transport them safely. Neither the *mil* or *milpa*, nor clay pottery generate adequate means for *Witzapan*'s natives to live a comfortable life. Yet, according to Lara Martínez, these activities are a form of Indigenous resistance that confronts the hegemonic tendency of capitalism to absorb everyone in Salvadoran society, into the market's demands. Thus, he argues that by maintaining some of their cultural traditions, *Witzapan* natives also exercise their self-determination, with which they create their own spaces of alterity, although I may add, with significant material consequences that result in grave inequalities in their lives. As such, the lack of market appreciation for social economies and artisan labor for Indigenous communities that reside in *Witzapan*, make this region, one of the poorest in the nation (Ibid 50-53). The elders state that in recent years, most young people are migrating to the cities or even to the United States in search of better opportunities and that this movement has exacerbated their economic condition because as they age and can no longer work in the fields, they have no one to turn to, for support. Many are experiencing sickness and hunger, every day, and have no one to depend on for their survivance.

According to the last national census conducted in El Salvador in 2007, Indigenous people account for less than two per cent of the nation's population. It is important to note that this census has been the subject of intense criticism and rejection by the international community for its problematic instrument design, which used biological ideas of race as a category for reporting its findings. Other population sources of data state that *Witzapan*'s population is estimated at 7,055 inhabitants of which 51.8 percent are women and 48.2 percent are men, living in 1,563 households. One in four residents are between the ages of 5 and 19 years of age. The majority (67.7 percent) of *Witzapan*'s residents live in rural areas, whereas the rest of the population (32.2 percent) lives in the urban part of the municipality (Dirección General de Estadística y Censos de El Salvador). The last national census that recorded the number of Indigenous peoples in El Salvador is the 1930 census, prior to the 1932 Matanza (Tilley 2005: 170). The latest national census was scheduled to take place in 2022, but it did not take place. Based on surveys[135] conducted by Lara Martínez in the year 2,000, it is estimated that approximately 87.9% of *Witzapan*'s population is Indigenous and of these, about only 2 percent are believed to be active maternal speakers Nawat-Pipil (Ibid 2006: 25-28).

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[133] American-born creole elites (Tilley 2005: 108).

[134] This figure may not be up to date. The percentage of Indigenous people who own land may be lower today.

[135] 150 surveys conducted through the local clinic in 2000 (Lara Martínez 2006: 25, 28).

Prior to European contact, it is believed that *Witzapan* formed part of the *Tecpan-Itzalku* Nawa-Pipil state and later became part of the *señorío de Kushkatan* (Kushkatan lordship), to consolidate the powerful cacao[136] economy of the region (Fowler 1995: 168). After the Spanish invasion and occupation of *Kushkatan* in 1524, *Witzapan* was subordinated to the Dominican order in 1572, and renamed Santo Domingo *Huitzapan* or Witzapan. It was also relocated a few kilometers away from its original northern site and assigned to the Parish of Nawitzalku and the city hall of *Centzunat* (Lardé y Larín 1957: 447). Following independence from Spain, *Witzapan* belonged briefly to the Republic of *Goathemala*[137] (from 1821 to 1823), but it was soon transferred to the Republic of El Salvador. Thus, the earliest historic chronologies about *Witzapan* date back to the 1770s, when Archbishop Pedro Cortés y Larraz visited it. Its chronologies appear in documents that pertain to the dioceses of Goathemala (Cortés y Larraz 2000: 64).

According to the dioceses records, Cortés y Larraz first described *Witzapan (Huitzapam*), as a region inhabited by sixty-four Indigenous families and a total of 146 individuals, noting that the town lacked a school (Lara Martínez 2006: 32). About the *Nawitzalku* parish, Cortés y Larraz wrote in his reflections: "…*la gente anda tan vergonzosamente desnuda que apenas entré al pueblo me espanté y me llené de confusión*…" ("people walk so shamefully naked that as soon as I entered the town, I was horrified and full of confusion…"), adding "…*tampoco en esta parroquia hay neófitos ni bárbaros… la gente es sumamente dócil*…" ("…neither are there in this parish neophytes nor barbarians… people are extremely docile…"), and "*El idioma materno es el mexicano… y cuasi todos entienden y hablan el castellano*…" ("the Mother tongue here is Mexican… and almost everyone understands and speaks Castilian…"), noting that vices such as alcoholism, were deeply rooted and constituted the reason why Natives were absent in Christian celebrations and mass (Cortés y Larraz 2000: 64-67).

By 1859, statistical reports of the Republic of El Salvador documented that *Witzapan* was populated by 614 people, most of them Indigenous, inhabiting 128 dwellings. Most dwellings were made of straw and only six of 128 homes had Spanish tile roofs, which included the church, the school, the town council's hall, and the convent. Men worked predominantly in agriculture, while women worked with textiles and tobacco. Men are described in these reports as wearing white muslin *cotones* (pants) and shirts, while women only wore purple *refajos* (traditional wraparound skirts), a cloth on their heads, and they tied their hair with ribbons. This statistical report also shows that the majority of *Witzapan*'s inhabitants did not understand Castilian and they only spoke Nawat-Pipil, as they maintained distance from ladinos[138]. This historical fact remained unchanged until the beginning of the twentieth century. Scholars consider the marginalization of *Witzapan* as a reason why it is one of the last few places in El Salvador where Nawat-Pipil is still spoken, and why this municipality has become a focus for the Nawat-Pipil language and cultural revitalization (Lara Martínez 2006: 32).

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[136] In 1732, Witzapan had sixty-nine orchards of cacao or approximately 2,408 trees (Lardé y Larín 1977: 323).

[137] Nowadays Guatemala.

[138] According to Virginia Tilley (2005), in El Salvador, this term is used to designate an "assimilated Indian" or someone who has adopted Spanish dress and customs and no longer participates in Indigenous life (109).

Santiago Barberena's *Monografías departamentales* (written in 1898 and published in 1998) indicate that by 1910, *Witzapan* had 1,500 inhabitants and its economy depended on subsistence agriculture, such as the cultivation of corn, rice, beans, cacao, and rubber. These statistical records point out that because of its low sea level elevation, *Witzapan* was not an adequate place for the cultivation of coffee. Additionally, the region's relatively low population, remoteness, and difficult access[139] explain why the liberal reforms at the end of the nineteenth century did not appropriate the two communal lands[140] of *El Barrial* and *La Sabana*, and why ladinos did not relocate to the area sooner (Lara Martínez 2006: 32). Further, *Witzapan*'s lack of direct connections with coffee plantations and economy prior to and during the Indigenous social movement of January 22, 1932, suggests that Nawa-Pipil peoples from the town neither participated in it, nor government troops considered this region as having any strategic importance, which spared them from falling victims of the many brutal massacres that took place in the neighboring towns and villages during this time (Ibid 32, 33; Gould and Lauría-Santiago 2004: 214).

While mass executions during the 1932 Matanza in Western El Salvador were perpetrated by the National Guard and the Salvadoran Army, *patrulleros* and *informantes* (civilian patrols and informants) actively participated in it by accusing those who they felt, had in any way taken part in the 'communist insurrection', ensuring their death. The soundings of official anticommunist ideologies by civilian patrols against Indigenous communities reformulated the colonial project of domination in the region, justifying the Salvadoran government's attempts to eliminate "all communists and its allies," which included, mostly Nawa-Pipil men who had demanded land rights (Alvarenga 1996: 9, 10).

Although government troops did not reach *Witzapan*, the news of the 1932 Matanza had direct consequences on its inhabitants: Indigenous people reported living in a state of fear and being affected by changes that took place following the state-sponsored massacres and a subsequent heightened era of militarized repression. For instance, civilian patrols were coerced[141] by the Salvadoran government to participate in the exercise of repression in rural zones, generating terror among the population (Ibid, 175, 179, 180). Residents of *Witzapan* confirm that civilian patrols were organized in the municipality since the 1930s and continued to operate through the civil war (1980-1992), ensuring order in the everyday activities of the community through a culture of hypervigilance and accusations that heightened fear and, at the same time, resistance (Lara Martínez 2006: 33). While civilian patrols were not formally a part of the state and did not receive compensation for their services, they had the power to exercise violence publicly and extrajudicially against other civilians, including inflicting physical punishment against those who they felt, were deemed at the fault of violating the law.

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[139] Route 246 was paved after 2003, and it is a narrow, winding road over rolling hills, and cliffs on both sides in
some sections of the road. Prior to these improvements, the road to *Witzapan* was made of dirt, for horses.

[140] On February 26, 1881, according to the Official Diary of the Nation, the Salvadoran government appropriated communal lands and ejidos (Browning 1975: 388).

[141] Civilian patrols were given fines and jail time if they refused to collaborate with the government and they were not paid to serve (Alvarenga 2006: 208, 2016).

The exercise of extrajudicial violence by civilian patrols would be internalized by those who served in this capacity, as they realized that they enjoyed power, which could be used for personal gain. As civilian patrols were systematized, they became part of the power dynamics exhibited by the state and they functioned to reify a project of domination through a particular ethics and culture of violence (Alvarenga 1996: 204, 208). Pressured by the despotism of civilian patrols, Indigenous women in *Witzapan* reported being forced to change their traditional dress soon after the 1932 Matanza:

> All Indigenous peoples, especially the women walked naked; it did not matter that they were older, with their breasts . . . there was an order that told women to wear blouses…and, yes, this is how they began to civilize young women… when they were growing up, they did not wear the *refajo* (traditional skirt) anymore, then, I saw that the little town was changing. (Lara Martínez 2006: 34).

Another informant stated feeling pressured to not speak their language: "Before, all of us women spoke in Nawat-Pipil, even the little ones, but now, they don't want to, anymore, they are embarrassed…". Both examples illustrate the asymmetric relations of power at play in *Witzapan*, based on a dynamic of domination and subordination, as everything that is Indigenous is considered inferior and backwards, such as wearing *refajos*. In the case of Indigenous languages, Salvadorans were forced to internalize that Nawat-Pipil was only spoken by those who were inferior. In this process of forced assimilation of Nawat-Pipil communities of Witzapan into the dominant culture, in the aftermath of 1932, speaking Spanish meant becoming part of the dominant group, and most importantly, it was also a strategy of survivance that meant the difference between life and death. Thus, the 1932 state-sponsored massacres attempted to institute a project of modernity by eliminating that, which was "backward" and "primitive," and that posed a [communist] threat to the nation (Tilley 2005: 167; Lara Martínez 2006: 34, 35). It also ensured that for those who survived the ethnocide, terror would function as a powerful weapon to silence any vestiges of the past, which the nation viewed as "noise." Thus, the state's attempts to muzzle the Nawat-Pipil language through widespread terror following the 1932 Matanza, could be characterized as a biopolitical technology to control Indigenous' behavior in favor of the interests of the dominant group.

Other changes that took place in *Witzapan* in the first half of the twentieth century included invalidating its Indigenous-led governance. According to Lara Martínez, prior to the 1932 Matanza, local governments were in Indigenous hands and governance encompassed a form of public administration mixed with religious[142] administration, known as the *cofradía* system, which was established in the sixteenth century (Ibid 35, 71). These organizations were constituted by Indigenous communities to venerate a saint and encompassed the community's compromise to care for the church, the image, and property of the saint, and to organize its annual festivities. In the case of *Witzapan*, there were many *cofradías* before the 1970s that were active for the past 200 years[143]: Santo Domingo, *Santísimo Sacramento, Inmaculada Concepción, San Isidro Labrador, San*

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[142] Since the Spanish invasion and occupation in 1524, Nawa-Pipil communities in *Witzapan* had practiced Catholicism, until the mid-1980s, when evangelical churches arrived (Lara Martínez 2006: 67, 68).

[143] Documented by Archbishop Pedro Cortés y Larraz in 1770 (Montes 1977 qted. in Lara Martínez 2006: 72-74).

José, San Pedro, Virgen del Rosario, Virgen de Guadalupe, San Sebastián, San Antonio del Monte, Ánimas, Santa Cruz, San Juan, Niño Dios, Cristo de Esquipulas, and *Semana Santa* (Holy Week): *Santo Entierro, Jesús Nazareno, Virgen María* and *Resurrección* (Ibid 74).

The hybridization process that resulted from the fusion of European Catholic practices and Nawa-Pipil cosmovision was possible because originally, *cofradías* enjoyed significant autonomy to develop their own cultural traditions. As ladinos began to relocate into *Witzapan,* they accumulated political and economic power, instituting a process of modernization that separated these two systems and implemented a system of political parties that ended the political-religious character of *cofradías* by the mid-1940s, although they have continued to have influence among its followers (Lara Martínez 2006: 73, 107). Although religious affiliations in *Wiztapan* are changing rapidly among residents and estimates suggest that since the 1980s, the majority of *Witzapan* inhabitants are evangelical (90 percent), and only a small portion remain Catholic (10 percent), the *cofradías* remain a powerful Nawa-Pipil cultural tradition (Lara Martínez 2006:108).

According to *Witzapan* oral tradition, the 1932 Matanza was averted because the Saint Patron of the municipality, Santo Domingo, appeared in a horse to the soldiers that were headed in the direction of the town to kill Indigenous peoples and he prevented the massacre from happening by creating a flood. The elders say:

> *Ne Tuteku ka ikajku kituktij, temuk ne ijiyu ka ikajku pal te kinmikiat ne chantakawmet. Panut ne kan mukwepet: nemi se tapetat, ne kiskij se way takat ijpak se kawax kitalijtuk iwan kwajkwach ken se tatuktiani mas, iwan iespada. Keman kitat ka wizet ne takamet iwan tepusti, yaja kichiwki se wey at pal te panu, kunij mukezket, kinhilwij: "¿Kan anyawit?" "tiawit tikmiktiat ne tutechanchanej Wizapan." "¿Ah, tejkia? – kinhilwij – ¿anmejemet anyawit techmiktiat? Kunij nin te akaj yawi panu". Kitatet ne wey at wan ne muijkatiwit. "Ne kaj kineki panu… te akaj anmejemet yawi naka, muchi niu nikutuna anmuzuntekun". Ne Tudeboto katka, pero kaj nemi ka ikajku. Ne tajtakamet mukwepet. Keman, kimatki ka nemit wejka, puliwik wan kiwikaket ka ikajku. (Ken ijtuk senpa wan tajtaketzat tik Witzapan takwiluyani* Cruz Torres et al. 2018: 32).

> *Por mandato de Dios, bajó el ángel del cielo para evitar que el Ejército matara a los indios. Sucedió a la vuelta: hay un peñón, ahí se apareció un gran jinete vestido de general, con su espada. Cuando vio que venía el Ejército, tendió una laguna, entonces se detuvieron, les dijo: '¿Para dónde van?'. 'A matar a los indios de Santo Domingo'. '¿Ah, de veras?' − Les dijo − '¿ustedes los van a matar? Entonces de aquí nadie se mueve'. Vieron la laguna y quedaron parados. 'El que se atreva a pasar... no va a quedar ninguno de ustedes, todos serán*

> *decapitados'. Era Santo Domingo de Guzmán, pero el que está en el cielo. Los hombres se fueron de regreso. Cuando sintió que estaban lejos, desapareció y se lo llevaron al cielo ...*
> (Historia Náhuat-Pipil recopilada por Cruz Torres et al. 2018: 32).
>
> By God's order, from the heavens the angel descended to prevent the army from killing the Indians. It happened around the corner: there is a rock, over there, a great horse rider dressed as a general appeared, with his sword. When he saw that the army was coming, he created a flood. Then, they stopped. He asked them: 'Where are you going?' 'To kill the Indians from Santo Domingo'. 'Oh, is that right?' – he told them – You are going to kill them? Then, from here nobody moves.' The soldiers saw the flood and they stood still. 'The one who dares to pass… there will be none of you left, all of you will be decapitated'. It was Santo Domingo de Guzmán himself, but the one who is in heaven. The men turned around and left. When he felt that they were far away, he disappeared, and they took him to heaven…
> (Nawat-Pipil story compiled by Cruz Torres et al. 2018: 32).

As told by the town's elders to this day, *Witzapan* was spared from the brutal killings that took place in the neighboring towns during 1932 because of a 'divine intervention', a story they relay through the Nawat-Pipil language. In this manner, memories about 1932 are passed down intergenerationally without necessarily speaking directly of La Matanza of 1932. Rather, these traumatic stories are told by the elders using religious context and iconography, which was not necessarily sanctioned at the time, in as much as speaking of the actual events. This story was told to me, by *Nantzin* Antonia, who repeated it several times on different dates, stating: "*Como le digo, nosotros estamos aquí, por la gracia de Dios, por eso yo no sé más del 32*." ("like I tell you, we are here by God's grace, that is why I do not know anything else about [19]32").

It is only after the 1940s that political organizations in El Salvador began to emerge, following the 1932 Matanza, taking advantage of small openings in the military regime's liberalization and engaging in sporadic acts of unrest and civil disobedience[144] to demand better living conditions. While these early efforts failed to sustain a major wave of contention until the 1960s, the events of 1932 remained the ideological referents that propelled the masses to continue to organize for political change in the 1970s and 1980s (Almeida 2008: 53). As military authoritarianism ruled the country through the 1970s, it continued to delegate its disciplinary technologies of power to civilian patrols. They operated mostly in the rural areas and defined its enemies as subversives and terrorists, based on anti-communist ideologies imposed by the West. These power dynamics shaped the sanguinary ways in which the 1980s war would be fought in the next decade (Saravia 2017: 70-75).

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[144] The 1944 *huelga de brazos caídos* (a sit-down strike) was successful in ousting the military dictator responsible for the 1932 Matanza (Almeida 2008: 54).

As the 1970s world economic crisis affected the Salvadoran economy, political repression escalated, given that inflation caused by a sudden drop in unemployment and increases in gas and food prices, causing civil unrest. The loss of communal lands or *ejidos* available for rent in the *fincas* and *haciendas*, along with the limited number of permanent jobs in the coffee plantations, and the growth of the population increased the precarity for Indigenous peoples, who depended on subsistence agriculture to survive. These conditions displaced many Indigenous families to the cities, where they were forced to live in shantytowns along with those who had been recently displaced by the 1969 Honduran war (Flores 1998: 130).

Aware of these conditions and seeking to avert a popular uprising, the United States had begun to implement social engineering programs in rural areas, including in *Witzapan*. Organizations such as the International Agency for Development (USAID), *La Unión Comunal Salvadoreña* (UCS or Salvadoran Communal Union[145]), along with many other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and evangelical churches were created to recruit large numbers of Indigenous peoples to influence the social and political life in rural areas (Lara Martínez 2006: 38). Simultaneously, leftist militant groups such as *Las Ligas Populares 28 de Febrero* (*LP-28* or Popular Leagues of February 28[146]) arrived in *Witzapan* in the 1980s, followed by the *Bloque Popular Revolucionario* (*BPR* or Popular Revolutionary Block), and *Las Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación* (FAL or Armed Liberation Forces), to raise their consciousness, recruit, and organize Indigenous communities and students (Lara Martínez 2006: 36).

According to a recent podcast by Radio *Sensunat*, on the early hours of February 26, 1980, the Salvadoran military's Detachment #6, surrounded and occupied the municipality of *Witzapan* and placed it under a state of siege or martial law.[147] Within days, more than one hundred residents who were members of the UCS were massacred in *El Calvario* neighborhood. The government organized two civilian patrols in each neighborhood (*El Calvario* and *El Rosario*), and one or two more civilian patrols per cantón, for a total of about twelve civilian patrols of 12 members each in the town (Lara Martínez 2006: 37, 38). "*Invadieron nuestro municipio, para tomarse nuestra población y asesinaron a todas las personas... Todas las personas que estaban haciendo trabajo comunitario eran vistas como subversivas*" ("They invaded our municipality and took our residents by force and assassinated all persons… all persons that were doing community organizing work were seen as subversives"), recalls a woman member of the Santo Domingo *Comité de Familiares de Víctimas* (Committee of the Relatives of Victims). A male witness declared: "*Que nos pagaran un poquito más, porque era muy poco lo que pagaban por el trabajo que nosotros hacíamos en el campo*" ("What we wanted is for them to pay us a little more, because it was too little what they were paying us for our work in the fields") (Roca, 2020). The leaders of UCS in *Witzapan* were members of *La*

[145] A cooperative whose aim was to obtain loans for small agro-producers (Gould and Lauría-Santiago 2008: 330).

[146] LP-28 took its name in commemoration of over one-hundred people who were massacred by the Salvadoran military on February 28, while protesting the 1977 electoral fraud, in El Parque Libertad, San Salvador (Almeida 2008: 158).

[147] Salvadoran legislation that severely restricts civil rights: freedom of movement and residence, freedom of thought and expression, inviolability of correspondence, and the right of assembly (Amnesty International Report 1988: 111).

Asociación Nacional Indígena Salvadoreña (ANIS or National Association of Indigenous Peoples) and had learned important organizing strategies related to the defense of the land and Indigenous rights (Lara Martínez, 2006: 36). According to *Witzapan* residents, this is a period in the history of the town that they remember with great sadness: "Here, many young Nawat-Pipil speakers and their families died", they say, recalling the senseless killings (Lara Martínez 2006: 35).

Similarly, ANIS, which was established in 1975, in *Centzunat,* with many residents from *Witzapan*, was the first ethnic organization that emerged in Western El Salvador, after the 1932 Matanza. ANIS centered its struggles on the defense of Indigenous rights, specifically land ownership and the protection of cultural traditions, including the language. A few years later, during the 1980s Agrarian Reform, they were able to negotiate some land[148] with the government. By 1982, members of ANIS were receiving anonymous death threats related to a land dispute with a neighbor. In the morning of February 22, 1983, 74 members of ANIS were taken by force from their homes and their cooperative's land, in *Las Hojas*, by 200 members of the Salvadoran military and civilian patrols, who wore balaclava-style face masks during the operative to hide their identities. The bodies of the executed victims were found shot point blank, with their thumbs tied together at the front or back of their bodies, at the *Cuyuapa* River and in the area. On July 18, 1988, after several judicial attempts to bring to justice, those responsible for the Las Hojas massacre, the Salvadoran Supreme Court found that those who participated in it were protected under the country's amnesty laws. By 1989, government troops occupied ANIS' headquarters in *Centzunat* and its leaders and relatives began to suffer persecution. Without a doubt, the 1980s twelve-year war, left a continuity line in the exercise of state-sponsored violence against Indigenous communities in El Salvador, that points directly to the 1932 Matanza, and to a prior culture of violence that existed against racialized groups, which emanated from the colonial experience (Saravia 2017: 70). Currently, residents of *Witzapan* are organized in boards that oversee *La Sabana* and *El Barrial* communal lands; there is also *La Asociación de Desarrollo Comunal* (ADESCO or Communal Development Association) that oversees issues related to water, and ethnic associations, similarly to the work of ANIS.

State repression against organized movements peaked in El Salvador from 1980 to 1983 and it continued until the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992. During the first three years of war, 30,000 to 40,000 had been killed by the military and death squads, effecting a "reign of terror" or a "second *matanza*" in the territories of *Kushkatan*, where one percent of the population was killed by the state, for the second time in the twentieth century (Almeida 2008: 179, 182). By the time the (un)civil war was over, more than 77,000 people had been killed, with half of them being classified as 'peasants' or 'campesinos' – a word used frequently to refer to people who work the land, but that it erases Indigenous ethnic identity -- hundreds of thousands more fled the country, like myself and my family, and thousands were forcibly disappeared (Menjívar 2005: 103).

With pressure from the international community, El Salvador endeavored to reconstruct the nation through a political and socio-cultural transformation that evaded

[148] In San Ramón, Santa Marta, and Las Hojas (Lara Martínez 2006: 95).

responding to the atrocities committed during the war and the 1932 Matanza, erasing the state-sponsored violence against Indigenous communities, all over (DeLugan 2021: 18). However, during the postwar years, the neoliberal policies adopted in El Salvador have attempted to recognize the existence of Indigenous peoples in an attempt to soften its international image. In 2014, the Salvadoran state ratified Article 63 of The Constitution, declaring, for the first time in the history of the nation, that Indigenous peoples existed in El Salvador, and they were subjects of rights. A few years later, *Witzapan* adopted a municipal ordinance titled "*Ordenanza municipal sobre derechos de la comunidad Indígena de* Santo Domingo de Guzmán" ("Municipal ordinance about the rights of the Indigenous Community of *Witzapan*"), published in the Official Diary of the nation, volume 415, number 108, dated June 13 of 2017, whose purpose is stated (2016), as follows:

> *Promover el desarrollo integral en lo económico, social, cultural, y la participación efectiva en el ejercicio de los derechos civiles y políticos de la comunidad indígena del municipio de Santo Domingo de Guzmán, lo que incluye la protección y preservación de su propia cultura, de su tierra y territorio, y especialmente de los recursos naturales renovables y no renovables, que constituyen el entorno ecológico de dicha comunidad*. (Guzmán et al 2020: 161).
>
> To promote the integrated economic, social, and cultural development and the effective participation and exercise of civil and political rights of the Indigenous community in Witzapan, which includes the protection and preservation of their own culture, land, territory, and especially of the renewable and non-renewable natural resources that constitute the ecologic environment of said community. (Guzmán et al 2020: 161).

Slow changes are taking place in El Salvador that are impacting the municipality of *Witzpan*, such as the language revitalization program led by Dr. Lemus of the Universidad Don Bosco. Similar efforts have been led by the Collectivo *Tzuntejekat* (*cabeza de viento* or air head/dazed collective), a group of young *neohablantes* (new speakers) that has been working for over two decades to preserve the language and foster awareness and education about the conditions of its speakers[149]. Additionally, the Ministries of Culture, Education, and Tourism are working to promote national strategies that support the development of public policy related to Indigenous rights, identity, and culture through neoliberal notions of tourism that folklorize, extract, and exploit Indigenous peoples, traditions, and their cosmovision while simultaneously erasing the histories of state-sponsored violence they have endured. Public commemoration of tragic events such as La Matanza of 1932, the 1980 massacre of *Witzapan* families, and the 1983 massacres of *Las Hoja*s are also observed, but justice continues to evade its victims/surviving families. While the nation reckons with the past, the Nawa-Pipil elders in *Witzapan* continue to live under precarious conditions, as most suffer from chronic

[149] My field notes and observation 2018, 2019.

conditions and live alone, unable to work the land or make clay grills, and without any other sources of income. When asked about the changes taking place, many elders, such as Fidel Flores of San Ramón[150], respond that these changes are nothing but "*palabras muertas*" (lip service). The use of this phrase among Nawa-Pipil in El Salvador, points out a Nawat-Pipil conception of the world, where the words that come out of the interiority of the body, are alive because they possess a life force or sacred energy known as *ijiu.* For this reason, in the aurality and orality of the Nawat-Pipil language, an uttered word is regarded as living, as sacred. The use of the phrase "*palabras muertas*" by Indigenous peoples, denotes a strong sense of condemnation.

[150] Interviews 2019.

Section 4: *Nantzin* Antonia

Nantzin Antonia Ramírez, or "*la Nantzin*" as I know her, identifies herself as a Nawa-Pipil elder, born and raised in *Witzapan*. She is one of the last active maternal Nawat-Pipil speakers in *Kushkatan* who is keeping the language alive. At the time of my interviews with her, she is in her 70s, and lives alone[151] in her single *bajareque* (mud wall) home, atop a hill, which sits under a large mango tree surrounded by abundant greenery. Inside her home, it is dark and cool, and its dirt floor is impeccably swept. The only light that comes in is through the half-way opened, teal-colored door and a few cracks on the *duralita*[152] roof. A few chickens roam outside, in her patio. At the end of the small corridor there is a mud pit that holds a large, blackened clay *kumal* (grill), with a few chips on the edges. There are remnants of firewood and ashes under it. Sitting on a small wooden bench on her corridor, *Nantzin* Antonia explains to me that her home has been damaged by constant seismic activity and heavy rains over the years, and that "*las paredes y el techo ya se van a caer*" or "the walls and ceiling are already in danger of falling," pointing up to the cracks with her hand. She points out that she does not have anyone to help her fix her home (Notes and observations from the field, 2018-2019).

Nantzin Antonia tells me that as a young woman, she made clay *kujkumal* (grills) for a living and recalls in vivid detail having to walk barefooted through rugged mountain terrain every week, with a heavy *kakash* (frame) on her back, secured to her forehead by a *mekapal* (cord), to sell the *kujkumal (plural of kumal or comales,* clay grills*)* in the city or at the beach. She states that now, at her age, she can barely walk from injuries that she sustained from a lifetime of very hard work. She states: "*Yo aprendí a hacer los comalitos de mi madrecita. Ella fue la que me enseñó a mí, desde chiquita cómo trabajar el barro. Y de eso yo he vivido toda mi vida, pero hoy que ya me puse vieja, pues ya no puedo hacer ese trabajo*" (I learned from my dear mother how to make little grills, she was the one who taught me - since I was a little girl - how to work the clay. And from that, I have made a living all my life, but now that I got old, well, I cannot longer do this kind of work). Like most Nawa-Pipil elders in *Witzapan, Nantzin* Antonia does not have any sources of income and struggles every day to buy food and medications.

Next to her mud house, there is a newly built two-room house that has electricity and running water. It is made of cement blocks, aluminum roof, and has a freshly mopped, red-tile floor. Over the door, there is a small plaque that reminds visitors that the home was built and donated by USAID. There is a small dining table that *Nantzin* Antonia has neatly arranged against the window. There are two pictures of *Nantzin* Antonia's mother hanging on the wall. As she sees me come up the hill, she gestures eagerly for me to enter, explaining that after the most recent earthquake, the Americans helped her rebuild her home but that she does not like it. *Nantzin* Antonia is a very frank person and in her direct fashion, she states: "*este lugarcito es como un infierno, Nantzin Violeta. Sudo día y noche y casi no puedo dormir del calor*" ("this little place is like hell, Ms. Violeta. I sweat day and night, and I can barely sleep here, it's too hot"). She adds: "*Ellos no entienden que las casas de antes eran mejores para nosotros*" ("they don't

[151] As of 2023, Nantzin Antonia lives with relatives in Witzapan, who care for her.
[152] Cardboard-reinforced cement corrugated roofing used widely in El Salvador, which resembles roof tiles.

understand that the homes from the past, were better for us"). Outside of this home, there is a *pila* or water fountain, where her neighbors come to bathe and/or to collect drinking water. Despite the simplicity and abject poverty in which she lives, *Nantzin* Antonia is very generous with her neighbors. She says that she spends her days talking and singing in Nawat-Pipil with whomever listens to her and when she received food or clothing donations, she shares it with her neighbors, stating "*yo solo me quedo con lo que necesito para la semana*" (I only keep what I need for the week).

In *Witzapan* and in the Nawat-Pipil circles in El Salvador, *Nantzin* Antonia is well known to many, as the Pipil woman who authored, composed, and performed "*Ne Nawat Suchikisa*" (2017), a song also known in El Salvador as "*El náhuat florece*" or "Nawat Fluorishes", which became famous after it was performed by Spanish Composer Sonia Megías[153] in 2017, at a national concert in San Salvador by the same name. The song can be heard online and has been taught to school age children everywhere. The lyrics of *Ne Nawat Suchikisa* are painted on a colorful mural near the school in downtown *Witzapan.* For many, *Nantzin* Antonia's song has become the national anthem of Indigenous language revitalization efforts in El Salvador.

On the day I visit her, the town's streets are quiet. Only the sounds of scattered raindrops falling through the branches of *Nantzin* Antonia's impressively tall mango tree fill the space. She walks me to the *bajareque* house and sits on a small wooden bench, wearing her long salt and pepper hair tied up on a bun. Ignoring her flip flops to the side, her bare feet touch the ground, toes curl up. Next to her, a small basket of bright yellow mangos freshly washed brings sweet childhood memories to my mind about roaming freely through the mountains in *Tamanique* with my brother Julio. That was before the war of the 1980s broke out and we were forced to migrate to the Unites States. *Nantzin* Antonia interrupts my thoughts and states: "*Vaya, Nantzin Violeta, le voy a cantar Metzas Nawat, pero cómase uno*" ("Well, Ms. Violeta, I am going to sing you *Metzas Nawat*, but you must eat one"), pointing to the mangos. I reach out for the basket and pick one. "*Se, ume, yey… uno, dos tres*…", ("One, two three..."), she counts motioning with her fingers, as her chest fills with air and her projecting voice escapes the interiority of her body, giving life to a melody that she sings loud and with great pride and conviction. I take a bite… it is sweet and delicious. Chickens cluck nearby and a woman with a basket on her head and two children by her side rush quietly through rain puddles on the narrow road below *Nantzin* Antonia's house. They disappear in the distance as *Nantzin* Antonia uses her hands to motion the ending of her song. She looks at me in the eye and asks me: "*¿Sabe lo que acabo de cantarle?*" ("Do you know what I have just finished singing to you?"). I ask her to tell me about her song and she repeats the lyrics of her song, by singing in both, Nawat-Pipil and Spanish:

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[153] See Megías' internet site at: www.soniamegias.es/en/ and www://soniamegias.es/en/music/ne-nawat-shuchikisa/
Accessed May 2021 and March 2023.

metzas nawat

naja ni metzas nawat
ka naja ni takwika nawat (2)
yajika tesu aka nechneki
ka tesu nikpiya datka (2)

naja ni chilwiya pipil
ka naja ni takwika nawat
yajika tesu aka nechneki
ka tesu nicpiya datka

naja ni takwika nawat
ka naja ni metzas nawat

La india[154] pipil

yo soy la india pipil
que me gusta cantar en Náhuat (2)
por eso nadie me quiere
porque no tengo nada (2)

por eso yo no valgo nada
porque me gusta cantar en Náhuat
por eso nadie me quiere
por eso no tengo nada (2)

me gusta cantar en Náhuat
pyo soy la india iipil

The Pipil Indian[155]

I am the Pipil Indian
I like to sing in Nawat (2)
that is why nobody likes me
because I have nothing (2)

that is why I am worth nothing
because I like to sing in Nawat
that is why nobody likes me
because I have nothing (2)

[154] Nantzin Antonia' s intentional choice of word.
[155] My translation.

I like to sing in Nawat
I am the Pipil Indian

"*Aquí hay mucha discriminación*" ("Here, there is a lot of discrimination"), *Nantzin* Antonia affirms. "*A mí, en este país me ven de menos y antes, yo no hablaba mi lengua en público, pero hoy si, a mí ya no me importa nada. Yo soy India Pipil, soy natural*" ("Here in this country, I am looked as if I were a lesser being, and before, I did not speak my language in public, but now I do. Nothing matters to me, anymore. I am a Pipil Indian, I am a native"), she claims with pride.

Metzas Nawat is a brief *a cappella* song of ten lines -- some of which are repeated -- conveying in simple words, a powerful affirmation of Indigenous identity and existence in *Kushkatan. Metzas Nawat* is originally a contemporary song composed and performed in the Nawat-Pipil oral tradition by *Witzapan* artist *Nantzin* Antonia Ramírez, in the last three or four years. For this reason, it has never been transliterated from Nawat-Pipil into paper and/or translated into other languages for publication. The breaks and pauses of the written verses I submit above in *Metzas Nawat,* are a function of the performer's natural breaks and pauses when singing the song and of the listener's attempts to capture the performers' natural symmetry breaks between words and silences. Needless to say, my analysis of *Metzas Nawat,* is not a music composition analysis but rather, a critical analysis of its discourse.

In the first line, *Nantzin* Antonia testifies -- using the first person -- *naja ni metzas nawat* that she is a person of Nawa-Pipil origins, asserting her Indigenous identity at the outset of her singing. By doing this, she immediately confronts the racial prejudice of Salvadoran society, who frequently deploy pejorative Castilian terms and phrases to each other, such as "*india/indio*" to mock and look down upon persons of Indigenous origin, and/or most often, to subject other mestizos to a 'lower' status in the social hierarchies of the nation's imaginary. According to Aníbal Quijano (2000), the idea of race is central to the coloniality of power, which during colonial times, produced social identities and hierarchies of domination for the purpose of labor control and exploitation (Ibid 534). In El Salvador, racial formation stemmed from the colonial experience and positioned Indigenous peoples at the bottom of the newly established social hierarchies of domination. As such, the use of a commonly used Salvadoran phrase "*no seas india(o)*"/ "don't be an Indian" has a longstanding political pejorative meaning. This phrase is a very common racializing assertion that Salvadorans of all ages and backgrounds use as an insult to denigrate others, relying on its historical meaning: the inferior status of Indigenous peoples versus the superior status of Europeans, criollos, ladinos, mestizos, and Afro-descendants, which Tilly remind us, came from the Spanish caste system (2005: 106-10). Many Salvadorans claim that they use this phrase as a 'joke' without any intention of offending anyone and vehemently deny being racist or actively engaging in racist practices, stating that "we are a homogenous mestizo nation" and as such, racism cannot exist.

Nantzin Antonia, who is keenly aware of the impact of racialized language in her life, remembers being called 'India' many times, especially when traveling by bus to the cities: "*Yo para qué les voy a decir nada, si yo soy natural, soy Indígena*" ("Me, why would I tell them anything, if I am a natural, I am Indigenous"), looking me in the eye

with conviction. She recalls that her first experiences with racism date back to her childhood years and she associates them with her only two years of grade school: "*Yo solo fui a segundo grado y no aprendí mucho, porque aquí solo se enseñaba hasta allí, y le preguntaba a mi madrecita, por qué hablaban de otro modo, y ella me dijo 'es que somos indígenas'. Así supe yo que no éramos como los otros, pero en Witzapan casi todos eran como yo. Yo crecí hablando Náhuat. Entonces, yo tenía como siete o [sic] ocho años*" ("I only went to second grade, and I did not learn a lot at school because here, they only taught two grades, and I would ask my dear Mother, why do they speak differently, and she told me 'it's because we are Indigenous'. That is how I knew that we were not like the others, but in *Witzapan*, almost everyone was like me. I grew up speaking Nawat. At the time, I was seven or eight years old.)

Her song's second line, *ka naja ni takwika nawat,* states that she likes to sing in Nawat-Pipil, a powerful declaration that centers *Nantzin* Antonia's Mother tongue and that directly confronts to the violences of the past, specifically, the Matanza of 1932, when anything that resembled or sounded Indigenous, was considered a biological threat to the nation-state that had to be eliminated (Foucault 2003: 255). *Nantzin* Antonia's declaration is of great significance because researchers of the 1932 Matanza have documented that in the aftermath of ethnocide, the Nawat-Pipil language ceased from being spoken in public spheres and it was only spoken in the intimacy of the home, mostly by Indigenous women who survived la Matanza and passed the language down to their children. Thus, the 1932 state-sponsored Indigenous massacres imposed a violent process of racial homogenization and forced assimilation that attempted to invisibilize and silence the surviving Nawa-Pipil communities for decades. For those who survived ethnocide in El Salvador, the brutal killings of thousands of Indigenous men and boys also ensured that Indigenous communities would be excluded from social and political participation and that their language would become endangered (Ibid 563, 564, 567).

The fear of being killed by the state for being Indigenous and the trauma of having survived an ethnocide of unprecedented magnitude in the entire Western hemisphere led the Nawat-Pipil language to be silenced at gunpoint, while the nation bolstered in its official narratives that progress was now possible because "all *indios* had been killed" (Bermúdez 2017). Additional technologies of power adopted by the Salvadoran state prior to the 1932 Matanza authorized the statistical erasure of Indigenous peoples from the 1930 census, allowing military dictators to layout the cultural re-making of the nation with the help of the intellectual community, which further invisibilized Nawa-Pipil communities and silenced their language, reducing then to artifacts of the past. Thus, decades later, when *Nantzin* Antonia openly declares that she likes to sing in Nawat, she affirms her mother tongue as living and exercises her right to speak it, thus creating sovereign spaces for linguistic justice to begin to heal the wounds of the past, for her and her community. Publicly enunciating her love for her language in her mother tongue would have cost *Nantzin* Antonia her life a few years back. In the present moment, daring to speak in Nawat-Pipil -- a critically endangered Indigenous language -- is a radical decolonial act that honors and affirms Indigenous existence in *Kushkatan*, as it gives life to the millenary sounds that have been unheard beyond the *Witzapan* landscape and that reverberate the collective experiences of violence, resistance, and survivance of *los abuelos y abuelas* (ancestors). More research

needs to be done to understand the processes by which the 1932 Matanza unchained the processes of linguicide and linguicism[156] in the aftermath of ethnocide, in modern-day El Salvador, and how these social phenomena have impacted, not only the Nawat-Pipil language in El Salvador, but most importantly its speakers, and modern days reverberations of the nation about its Indigenous past.

In the third line of the song, *Nantzin* Antonia pronounces *yajika tesu aka nechneki* ("that is why nobody likes me"), thus evidencing the prejudice of Salvadoran society that rejects her personhood and humanity based on colonial notions of racial difference and her human right to speak an Indigenous language, which many still consider as "backward" and "unmarketable" in a globalized economy. In this statement, *Nantzin* Antonia announces her political will to speak her mother tongue, stating her public refusal to be silenced and unheard, contesting the verbal and/or visual biopolitical mechanisms of the state that shift to sound and resonance, to avoid reproducing the dominant groups' values (James 2012: 3). Tuhiwai-Smith describes these intentional namings of the world according to Indigenous world views, as Indigenous methods and praxes of asserting humanity and the necessary conditions toward self-determination (2012: 120, 121, 128). As a member of a politically (un)represented ethnic group in El Salvador that has been invisibilized and silenced for decades by the state, *Nantzin* Antonia is highly aware that the biopolitical and neoliberal forms of governing imposed to Nawa-Pipil communities in *Kushkatan*, have attempted to 'normalize' her racial difference through a violent process of homogenization and/or forced assimilation. By reducing her existence to virtually 'inexistence' and by having declared her and her language as 'extinct' a few decades back, and most recently as 'in danger of extinction', these attempts by the Salvadoran nation-state to make Indigenous life 'predictable and manageable' over time, have been *rationalized* to bring back in line that, which is 'not normal'. Thus, the project of mestizaje[157] in El Salvador can also be understood as an attempt to normalize the deviances associated with Indigeneity and everything that is barbaric and primitive, uncivilized, to a range that the nation considers 'tolerable'. According to James, what cannot be forced to fit within the nation's ideal of what is desirable, will be then eliminated, invisibilized, and unheard to avoid the deterioration of the human species and the project of modernity (Ibid 9, 11, 12).

With these understandings, I cite Marta Elena Casaús Arzú's theories of mestizaje in El Salvador (2014), which according to James, are tools to govern that can function to "normalize deviance" in a biopolitical system as a way of controlling Indigenous life for its perceived deviancy, and or to 'tune out' the the 'noise' associated with Indigenous soundings about surviving the 1932 Matanza. Casaús Arzú argues that the indispensable myth of mestizaje as a tool for control in the years for nation-building in El Salvador

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[156] See Skutnabb Kangas & Phillipson (1996, 1998).

[157] According to Virginia Tilley, in El Salvador, the reverberations emanating from the 1932 Matanza, offer that "everyone is mestizo" and "there are no Indians" (2005: 7-9). Post-ethnocidal discourses suggests that the influence of José Vasconcelos' visit to El Salvador on November 15, 1930, consisted of "redeeming the Indian" based on *indigenismo mexicano* in *La Raza Cósmica* (1925), which was celebrated by the politics of *el Martinato* and the intellectuals of the time, but never became a mainstream ideology (Lara-Martínez 2013: 8,9, 16, 20, 33).

(1880-1930), failed. Instead, she proposes that the predominance of racial positivism[158] among European intellectual elites[159] between the 1900s and 1930s, influenced the Central American national imaginaries, which relied on eugenics[160] -- *el blanqueamiento* or whitening of the nation -- to foster the formation of a 'white' nation, based on hegemonic ideologies that believed that mixing with [inferior] races -- mestizaje itself -- was repugnant. Therefore, hiding, denying, and exterminating Indigenous and African populations in El Salvador, was the only solution to imagining national belonging, which normalized and rationalized what was considered outside of the [statistical] norm, through eugenics.

Although Casaús Arzú explains that racial positivism impeded the creation of a homogenous national identity in El Salvador, she states that it simultaneously eliminated the '*indian*' from plain sight, given that when the nation's founders were thinking about creating a homogeneous nation, what they had in mind was the deployment of a eugenic project – *el blanqueamiento de la nación* (the whitening of the nation) -- through the integration of *ladinization*[161] into mainstream society, a racializing project that with the support of the intellectual elites of the times and other state tactics, including state-sponsored violence, lasted through the 1940s (Ibid 77, 83).

Specifically, racial positivism and other theories of racial degeneration[162] became the hegemonic discourse among Salvadoran intellectuals[163] of the time (1900-1930), to

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[158] Todorov (1991: 135, 144), argues that scientific racism is the fruit of positivism (See De Pauw, Buffon, Taine, Gobineau, Le Bon, Renan), which dismisses non-European cultures by relating skin color to savagery-civilization and associates these to the "weather". Thus, positivism centers European whiteness as the ideal for nation-building and governance in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Casaús Arzú 2014: 79, 80).

[159] See the books: *La Enfermedad de Centroamérica* de Salvador Mendieta (1934), *Pueblo Enfermo* de Alcides Arguedas (1909), and *Enfermedades Sociales* de Manuel Ugarte (1906) (Casaús Arzú 2014: 82).

[160] See Francis Galton (1883) and the idea that *eugenics* is the only way to improve race (Casaús Arzú 2014: 81).

[161] See Taracena (2004) and Euraque, Gould and Hale (2004) (Casaús Arzú 2014: 83). As a territory with many Indigenous ethnic groups living in proximity, *Kushkatan,* underwent significant changes during colonial times, including the re-organization of space and the production of social hierarchies based on phenotypical differences, which became co-constitutive of hierarchical relations of dominance of the model of colonial rule. In other words, race and racial identity were established as instruments of social classification and dominion during colonial times (Quijano 2000: 534). The Spanish caste system created spatial segregation and social discrimination among peninsulares and criollos, who were at the top of this social structure, the mestizos, ladinos, and mulatos, who were in the middle, and Indigenous peoples who were at the bottom, but had some legal protections from *Las Leyes de Indias*. In Central America, with the wars of independence in the nineteenth century, this rigid structure of power became even more complex, as the middle and lower castes – *the mestizos, ladinos, and mulatos* and Indigenous peoples – 'disappeared' to became citizens, with some measure of 'equality' granted by the law. This process of racial homogenization or *ladinization* was foundational to the nation-building project in Central America, as it aimed to build a community of citizens who were 'free' and 'equal' before the law (Casaús Arzú 2014: 78).

[162] See Morel's *Tratado de las degeneraciones* (1857), and B. A. Magnan and P. M. Legrain's works (1895), who incorporated Darwin's idea of the struggle for life to capture a more scientific appeal (Casaús Arzú 2014: 104).

[163] See David J. Guzmán, Francisco Galindo, and Santiago Barberena's works, who expressed views on "disappearing the Indian" to turn him into a *mestizo* to '*mejorar la raza*' (improve the race) (Casaús Arzú 2014: 87).

normalize European standards, a project that has had durable effects on the social polarization of anti-Black and anti-Indigenous discourses used to classify people in El Salvador[164], today, as seen in the failed 2007 national census. By constructing Indigenous and Black, as genetically and culturally inferior during colonial times, what has been produced, is the persistence of the Salvadoran politics *of mejorar la raza* (betterment of the race), which are also deeply rooted in Salvadoran histories of Indigenous ethnocide and denials of Black identity (Casaús Arzú, 2014: 83). As such, Casaús Arzú offers that the massacres and ethnocides that have occurred against Nawat-Pipil communities in Western El Salvador and other Indigenous communities in the Salvadoran territories, in the twentieth century, can be partly explained by the Salvadoran nation-building project that is based on eugenics, an ideology sounded by many intellectuals, including David J. Guzmán, who expresses the following thoughts, about the 'Indian' (Ibid 78):

> *Es un ser pasivo en el estado civil y social de nuestra Sociedad á pesar de estar plenamente rehabilitado por las leyes de la República. Es necesario que el espíritu realmente liberal y humanitario de nuestras instituciones penetre por todos lados en el hogar del indigena, Instruyéndo, sacándole de la apatía, y si es posible haciéndole desaparecer gradualmente en la masa de civilización actual que es por una parte la suerte reservada á los vestigios espirantes (sic) de otras civilizaciones ya muertas y por otra la gloriosa misión encomendada al apoyo paternal de los gobiernos liberales e ilustrados.* (Guzmán, 1883).
>
> He is a passive being in the civil and social status of our society despite being fully rehabilitated by the laws of the Republic. It is necessary that the truly liberal and humanitarian spirit of our institutions penetrate all places in the Indigenous home, instructing him, removing him from apathy, and if possible, making him disappear gradually in the mass of the current civilization that is in a way, the fortune reserved for the aspiring vestiges of other civilizations already dead, and in some other way, the glorious mission entrusted to the paternal support of liberal governments and the illustrated. (Guzmán 1883)[165].

In this manner, European ideas about exterminating the Indian because of his backwardness became accepted among the political and intellectual elites of El Salvador, which justified the development of the coffee plantation in Western El Salvador and the birth of powerful coffee economies in the hands of foreigners[166] and ladinos, based on the

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[164] See Soto Quirós (2011), Casaús Arzú (2007), Gudmundson (2010), Putnam, Chambers and Caulfield (2005) and Putnam (2010).

[165] My translation 2022.

[166] In the Salvadoran press and constitutions during the nation-building years, there is a visible call for European immigration on the part of the state and an offer of land and facilities, given that Europeans are considered a superior race that is genetically superior and vital (Casaús Arzú 2005: 110).

exploitation of Indigenous labor and the taking of their communal lands in the early 1880s. These liberal reforms resulted in the displacement and dispossession of Indigenous communities and ensued over 45 Indigenous uprisings during this time, leading eventually to the 1932 Matanza, when racism against Indigenous communities in El Salvador intensified (Tilley, 2005 and Gould and Lauría Santiago, 2008 qted. In Casaús Arzú 2014: 87). Gould and Lauría Santiago (164) state that racism toward Indigenous peoples increased with them being demonized and portrayed as dirty, degenerate, drunken, and an impediment to progress. Later, Indigenous people were portrayed as ignorant, retarded, incapable; and in the 1930s, the narrative changed to "*los indios bárbaros y comunistas deben ser exterminados*" (barbaric and communist Indians should be exterminated") (Casaús Arzú 2014: 93). Recent studies by Gould (2008), Alvarenga (1996), and Ching and Tilley (1998), have concluded that the Matanza of 1932, was the result of a clash that occurred at the intersections of class and ethnicity, where Indigenous peoples were massacred by government troops, with ample evidence that there was planning and an intention to exterminate Indigenous peoples on the part of the government, as the orders given to soldiers were: "*Cuando capturen a un sospechoso, mátenlo si es indio, y si es ladino, tráiganlo para ser interrogado*" ("when you capture a suspect, kill him if he is Indian, and if he is ladino, bring him to be interrogated") (Casaús Arzú 2014: 94).

Given that Indigenous people were already considered racially inferior, becoming 'communists' blended class hatred with racial hatred against them, resulting in the gruesome and despotic killing of thousands of Indigenous people, in a matter of weeks (Ibid 94). It is from this historical moment that Salvadorans start constructing the myth of a mestizo nation, denying that an ethnocide ever took place, and adding a Catholic-derived patronizing narrative that explains that in 1932, "innocents paid for the sins of others", whose land struggles led the communist to take advantage of "*los pobres inditos*" (the poor little Indians) (Ibid). When *Nantzin* Antonia hears narratives about Indigenous peoples being labeled communists or associated with communism, she becomes immediately very upset and forcefully corrects the record, by stating inequivocally "*Somos Indios. No somos comunistas*" (My field notes and observations, April 2019).

After the 1932 Matanza, Indigenous peoples simultaneously disappeared from the political and cultural spheres of the nation and by sheer terror, they are forced to stop displaying any cultural markers of their Indigeneity, such as wearing hu*ipil* and *kweyat* (embroidered women's shirt and traditional wraparound skirt), *kutun* and *kakti* (men shirts and sandals), speaking Nawat-Pipil in public, and gathering for ceremony in open spaces – including commemorating the 1932 massacres – which, according to anthropologist Robin DeLugan and other scholars, accelerated cultural loss and the process of forced assimilation (2021: 21) .

Ching and Tilley offer data that supports their contention that as early as 1925, the Salvadoran state suppressed all ethnic/racial categories in the national census, and after 1932, the category of Indian disappeared altogether from state documents (1998: 135). It was not until 2007, with the advent of neoliberal policies and multiculturalism in the post war years, that the Salvadoran state re-incorporated the Indigenous category in the national census. Yet, census findings were dismissed by the United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD) for severely undercounting the

Indigenous population and bringing back memories of colonial policies and practices that sought to eliminate the "*indian*" (DeLugan 2021: 23).

It is with the influences of racial positivism and eugenics, the suppression of ethnic/racial categories on the national census, and the physical extermination of thousands of Nawa-Pipil, that the invisibilization of Indigenous communities and the myth of El Salvador being a mestizo nation were created (Casaús Arzú 2014: 95). In this darkness, Michel Foucault explains the killing of a biopolitical threat, as a consequence of racism in his seminal theory of biopolitics[167], and what James brilliantly nuances through her argument about the sonic episteme[168], biopolitics, and neoliberalism. Most importantly, it is what *Nantzin* Antonia – an elder Indigenous woman who is seating in a small wooden bench under her mango tree in *Witzapan* -- vigorously confronts and refutes with her loud singing in Nawat. From her subalternized, gendered positioning, the acoustics of her voice fill the space and she firmly proclaims her existence in the land, reaffirming her humanity and recovering in minutes, her "Indianness" and the sovereignty and self-determination that the invading and occupying European forces and generations of ladino descendants, military dictators, and intellectuals have attempted to eliminate for centuries.

The fourth line of *metzas nawat* states *ka tesu nikpiya datka* or "because I have nothing", incorporating into her singing, her abject material condition and state of marginal existence in El Salvador. *Nantzin* Antonia decries the fact that Salvadoran society does not value her as a human being because of who she is, and her lack of material wealth, which I connect to the structures of power of the racial capitalist system established during colonial times[169]. With sadness in her eyes, she denounces her grave state of dispossession from her cultural traditions, land, water, food, healthcare, education, and a dignified place in Salvadoran society, challenging neoliberalism's assertions that we are all equal because all differences are now included and valued under the idea of 'multiculturalism' (James 2019: 12). In this line, *Nantzin* Antonia challenges what James calls the biopolitical "domestication of noise," which is the nation-state's belief of turning a former problem into a resource, imposing 'order' into what has been ruled as 'irrational' and 'disorderly'. By refusing her story to be untold or unheard, *Nantzin* Antonia also refuses for her 'noise' to be 'domesticated' and 'silenced', thus challenging the state's notion of equality, as a legal right that has been achieved in El Salvador and refusing for her Indigenous existence to be countable, measurable in numbers, and comparable to that of other groups. Her politics of refusal reject the neoliberal idea shared by many Salvadorans, that "things are getting better". In other words, *Nantzin* Antonia refuses for her Indigeneity to be assimilated by the Salvadoran status quo under neoliberal notions of equality.

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[167] "Racism is the indispensable precondition that allows someone to be killed. Once the state functions in the biopower mode, racism alone can justify the murderous function of the state" (Foucault 2003: 256).
[168] Society is made to embody statistical norms expressed as frequency ratios, which forces social relations to become rationalized or better yet, *ratio-ized* to normalize that, which is intolerable and deviant, and outside of the norm, as a technology of biopower to manage populations (James 2019: 8, 10).
[169] Quijano's theory of global capitalism and colonial power argues that race and the division of labor were structurally linked and mutually reinforce each other, allowing for Indian slaves – after slavery was declared illegal -- to be confined to perpetual serfdom (2000: 536).

In other words, *Nantzin* Antonia's song reminds us that Indigenous existence in El Salvador cannot be homogenized and normalized under the acoustics of multiculturalism. Of particular importance here, is how *Nantzin* Antonia's racialized and gendered identity directly counters the socio-historical and hierarchical European ideals that Salvadoran society values, such as having lighter skin pigmentation or being "*chele*"[170] and being educated. According to Quijano (2000), these colonial racial formations are durable and cannot be dis-articulated from the coloniality of power that produced them and the nation-state, which also created the severe levels of inequality and exclusion that Indigenous communities have been experiencing for centuries in El Salvador (Ibid 557). Even under the homogenizing illusion that in El Salvador we have moved toward a post-identity[171] in the aftermath of revolutionary wars and neoliberal peace agreements, Indigenous peoples are not in the same human spectrum. Salvadoran history has taught us that some ethnic/racial groups have not been rendered fully human (Ibid 573). *Nantzin* Antonia's song does not let us forget that racial and gender differences (and other differences) are highly recognizable in El Salvador today.

In fact, *Nantzin* Antonia's words have far-reaching implications, as state-sponsored violence, oppression and marginalization are not unique to Indigenous communities in El Salvador. Scholars have been documenting for some time, that Indigenous mobilization in Latin America in recent years, stems from the nation-state's deliberate exclusions to the safeguards of citizenship and the benefits of socioeconomic development (Radcliffe 2007: 386). At the same time, national security experts speculate that "territorial claims by irredentist indigenous groups could set the stage for armed insurgency and political violence", a statement that attributes politically damaging agendas to ethnic groups, including linking Indigenous activists to Islamic Fundamentalists and portraying them as the new "axis of evil"[172]. These contemporaneous hegemonic narratives continue demonizing politically organized Indigenous actors by referring to them as "terrorists", "enemies of the state", and stating that they "… entail a risk to regional security. . .", which results in negative material outcomes for Indigenous communities, as well as attributing a subversive status to ethnic populations (Latin America 2020 2004: 5 qtd. in Radcliffe 2007: 386, 387).

The fifth line, *naja ni chilwiya pipil*, means "I am not worth anything." *Nantzin* Antonia continues to tell us about the status of her material inequality and subjection in life. James (2019) maintains that inequality and domination exclude people from

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[170] A Salvadoran slang term used to refer to people light skin people or what Hugo De Burgos refers to as the myth of beauty standards in Salvadoran society, today (2010: 1, 4, 6, 8, 10, 13).

[171] El Salvador's current President, Nayib Bukele, 37, relies on "millennial authoritarianism, a distinctive political strategy that combines traditional populist appeals, classic authoritarian behavior, and a youthful and modern personal brand built primarily via social media" to "capitalize on anti-establishment sentiments" of the post war generations (Meléndez-Sánchez 21). In an interview given during this presidential campaign in 2018, Bukele spoke of being "not of the post war", but of a "new generation", which many believe has help him succeed in "generating a palpable sense of collective expectancy and pride: the country is finally getting its act together". He has referred to himself in his Twitter Bio as "the coolest dictator in the world." (Blitzer 2022).

[172] A metaphor used by President George W. Bush in his State of the Union address in 2002, to represent Iran, Iraq, and North Korea, after the 9/11 attacks. He used it to describe foreign governments that, allegedly sponsored terrorism and sought weapons of mass destruction, and considered themselves as enemies of the United States, to rally popular support for the War on Terror (Pyszczynski 2006: 527).

'personhood' through the state's biopolitical mechanisms that incorporate 'noise' and 'disorder' into the social spectrum to 'level the field' and give everyone an 'equal' chance of becoming 'normal' (14). In this equalizing field, James argues that any abnormality that occurs must be due to their fault or lack of effort, their choices and behaviors, as social exclusion is purportedly over.

From this perspective, in El Salvador, the myth of mestizaje has played a critical role in supporting the nation's creation of a homogenous [mestizo] nation since the nineteenth century (Tilly 2005: 192). This myth has facilitated the idea that its citizens are situated in the same spectrum and that identity-based exclusion is over. Anyone who cannot conform to the market logics, then becomes the exception. Therefore, anyone who does not resonate harmoniously under this conceptual framework, will be muted out (16). *Nantzin* Antonia's fifth line in *metzas nawat* signals that as an Indigenous woman who has not impacted positively the dominant metrics of the nation-state because of her poverty and marginalization, she will be discarded and made inaudible to the world. This is the moment when her lyrics are repeated to re-affirm that she is *la india pipil,* the Pipil Indian, because of her love for singing in Nawat-Pipil, her mother tongue, thus (re)claiming a 'return home' to *Kushkatan* from the confines of a colonized, invisible existence that refuses to see and hear her.

Nantzin Antonia fills in her lungs with air and ends her song with a powerful affirmation of her Indigenous existence, saying "I don't have anything, I don't care about it, I love to sing in Nawat." These few last lines define that the borders of her corporeality, which confine and make her Indigenous body undesirable and subsumed to abject poverty, while these borders are shattered through the sounds that escape from the interiority of her body by creating powerful soundings of Indigenous resistance and survivance, claiming place and identity for the world to hear.

As we sit in the corridor outside of her home watching the rain, *Nantzin* Antonia tells me again that she learned Nawat-Pipil from her mother, when she was in her womb. She recalls growing up very poor and barely having any clothes, much less a pair of shoes to walk around the town. She says: "*Yo aprendí todo lo que sé de mi madrecita, hasta cómo trabajar el barro y hacer los comalitos para ganarme la vida"* (I learned everything I know from my dear mother, including how to work the clay and make grills to earn my living). Rubbing her left knee with her hands, she shares that working the clay is very hard work that women in *Witzapan* do, and that at her age, she can no longer do it. "*Yo nací aquí en Witzapan*" ("I was born in Witzapan'), she says, scratching her face, "*y solo fui a primer y segundo grado* [sic]. *Y después a trabajar*. *No había más escuela por aquí*" (I only went to first and second grades. And then, to work. There was no more school around here"). "*Yo crecí descalza, hasta que tenía unos quince años y me pude comprar mis propias ginas*" (I grew up barefooted until I was about 15 years old, and I could afford to buy my own flip flops), she adds, lifting her feet from the wet floor and wiggling her toes. "*Tengo mucho dolor en los pies de andar por todos lados sin zapatos en las puras piedras*…" (I have a lot of pain in my feet from walking everywhere barefooted, over pure cobblestones…"). She gets up from her bench to stretch up and tells me that she is going to sing for me the song "*Ne Wijwitzapanchin*" or "*Los*

Mingueñitos"[173] ("The Dear People of Witzapan"), asking me if I am ready to hear this story. I nod and she sits back down and begins to count with her fingers, looking me in the eye… "*se, ume, yey… uno, dos, tres*…" ("one, two, three…"), a signal to start singing in Nawat. Her voice is strong and powerful, filling the air with Nawat-Pipil. Her eyes also join in the singing and even when her words are not as familiar to me, I see sadness and a deep pride in her eyes. And when she is about to finish her song, *Nantzin* Antonia gestures with both of her hands, palms down, making a slow outward lateral movement, and her voice quiets down at once. She smiles widely. Without pausing, she asks me if I want a *tortilla* from the neighbors' house or a *tamal de elote* (corn tamale) from the *vendedoras* (women who sell them) in the park. She says, "*Este pueblo es bien chiquito, solo tiene dos calles y el parque está allí nomás a la vueltecita. Vamos y le platico de esta canción*" (This town is very small, it only has two streets and the park is right there, around the corner. Let's go, and I'll tell you about this song"). We head down the street toward the park. *Nantzin* Antonia begins to tell me about her song, pointing out that it describes her life in *Witzapan.*

Ne wijwitzapanchin[174]

Tejemet tiwitzapanchin
ka tiwitzet ipal wejka
wan talwikat kujkumalchin
sujsul pejpetznachin ken ajatenpan

Tiwitzet iwan tumimil
kujkunaktuk iwan mekapal
tik ne wejweyat ujujti
tikwat tajtamal 'wan istat (2)

Shikua taja
ne kujkumalchin
wan tiutikinita sujsul gajgalanchin
pal ma tikinishka
ne tajtamalchin
wan tikinkwa iwan ayujwach

Kwak ne tayua witz
Ne tunal mukwachtalia chiltik
tiwitzet ne wijwitzapanchin
tiwitzet ka tuchan

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[173] *Mingueñito* is a diminutive of Domingo and *mingueñitos* is its plural form (as in "little Domingo/Domingos"); it refers to people who are originally from Santo Domingo de Guzmán. In Nawat-Pipil a diminutive or reverential form is used to denote respect. Thus, in *Witzapan*, to call someone a *mingueñito* refers to naming a person's place of origin (Santo Domingo de Guzmán) with respect and reverence (Field notes and observations 2018-2019).

[174] Corrections to spelling of the Nawat-Pipil lyrics by Tajtzin Juan Valentín Ramírez, Cultural Consultant from Witzpan, Kushkatan 2023.

kan tikwat tamal wan et (2)

Los mingueñitos

Somos unos mingueñitos
que venimos desde lejos
traemos los comalitos
bien lisitos como espejos

Venimos con nuestras cargas
colgadas de un mecapal
por nuestras veredas largas
comiendo tortilla con sal (2)

Cómpreme
los comalitos
y verá que buenos son
para echar
las tortillitas
y comerlas con alhuashte

Con el crepúsculo del día
El sol se viste de rubor
venimos los mingueñitos
venimos a nuestra casa
a comer tortilla con frijol (2)

The dear people from *Witzapan*

We are the peoples from *Witzapan*
we come from far away
we bring little clay grills
as smooth as mirrors

We come with our loads
hanging from a *mecapal*
through our long paths
eating tortilla with salt (2)

Buy my
little clay grills
and you will see
how good they are
to make little tortillas
and eat them with *alhuashte*

With twilight approaching
the sun blushes
we come back, the peoples from *Witzapan*
we come back to our homes
to eat tortilla with beans (2)

Ne Wijwitzapanchin is an *a cappella* song of nineteen lines that describes a day in the life of Nawa-Pipil women clay potters in *Witzapan, Kushkatan*. Similarly to *Metzas Nawat, Ne Wijwitzapanchin* is an original song composed and performed in the Nawat-Pipil oral tradition by the *Witzapan* artist *Nantzin* Antonia Ramírez, in the last three or four years. For this reason, it has never been transliterated from Nawa-Pipil words into paper, and/or translated into other languages for publication. The breaks and pauses of the written verses in *Ne Wijwitzapanchin* are a function of the performer's natural breaks and pauses when singing the song and of the listener's attempts to capture the performer's natural symmetry breaks between words and silences. Additionally, this is not a music composition analysis of *Ne Wijwitzapanchin* but rather, an effort to make meaning of contemporaneous Nawa-Pipil stories that are being sung by the *Witzapan* elders to speak about their daily lives.

In this light, I frame *Ne Wijwitzapanchin* as a countermapping project that gives Nawa-Pipil women a sense of cultural specificity and geographic belonging to the land, that honors and affirms Indigenous women's labors as rooted in their existence in the *Kushkatan* territories, making a 'return' home possible. *Wijwitzapanchin* is a reverential form of Nawat-Pipil used to speak with respect of a subject's place of origin, in this case the people from *Witzapan*, to describe their place of origin in a diminutive form. By naming her birthplace, *Witzapan*, in the title of the song and locating the Nawa-Pipil in the Salvadoran landscape, *Ne Wijwitzapanchin* functions as a spatial project that restores Indigenous peoples' rights to being in and belonging to the world and having a history. The song provides Nawa-Pipil women a landscape to sound off their echoes of the past that have been muted by the official narratives of the nation-state. In these sovereign linguistic spaces of being in and belonging to the world, Nawa-Pipil women rely on their mother tongue to confront the violences of the colonial past that are not over. Through racializing practices, the state has rendered them ahistorical and without a place; in other words, outside of the confines of humanity or less than human. The lasting consequences of multiple and sedimented historical dislocations imposed by colonizers and the nation-state, have resulted in a permanent state of deterritorialization of Nawa-Pipil peoples in *Kushkatan*, and have materialized in their centuries-long condition of abject poverty and hunger. It is in this counter-mapping project of the past/present, that elderly women in *Witzapan*, recover the original name of their settlement and relocate themselves geographically into the landscape, thus reasserting their humanity. It is also in this countermapping story, that Nawa-Pipil women amplify their voices to speak of being enfleshed and of the viscerality of hunger, which when it resonates, it has the potential of re-orienting our understandings of what it means to listen through someone else's eyes or the praxis of *yultaketzalis* (reflection of the past) and to the stories in the landscape.

The first four lines of *Ne Wijwitzapanchin* begin with these words "*Tejemeti tiwitzapanchin ka tiwitzet ipal wejka wan talwikat kujkumalchin sujsul pejpetznachin ken ajatenpan."* In these lines, Nantzin Antonia establishes herself as a representation of the

collective (we), by naming her original birthplace in her mother tongue and by relying on Nawa-Pipil ancestral memories and the discourses of nature/geo-graphies to recover her story. Using y*ultaketzalis*, she delivers a powerful countermapping approach to decolonizing Indigenous histories and territories in the Central American isthmus, thus unsettling the European construction of America in *Abya Yala* as a colonial/modern model of global power (Quijano 2000: 534). By refusing to name her birthplace by its Spanish colonial given name and, instead, centering the Nawat-Pipil language to re-cognize the landscape, *Ne Wijwitzapanchin* allows Nawa-Pipil women a 'return home', where conditions of possibility for a different life exist.

By relying on her mother tongue and the memory of the landscape, *Nantzin* Antonia recovers *Kushkatan*'s story prior to the Spanish invasion and occupation of 1524, and her story as a Nawa-Pipil clay potter in the territories, reclaiming, in this way, her geographical belonging to the land and reasserting her cultural traditions which are specific to the land. In this movement to the past, *Ne Wijwitzapanchin* challenges the new global structure for controlling gendered labor and exploiting racialized identities, appropriating resources and their distribution around the world market, which Quijano described as the colonization of people and places in America (Quijano 536, 537).

Lines five through eight state: "*tiwiztet iwan tumimil kujkunaktuk iwan mekapal tik ne wejweyat ujujti titakwat tajtamal 'wan istat"* Nantzin Antonia tells us that the original peoples of Witzapan come from afar, through distant paths, carrying clay grills for sale. She recounts the physical challenges for Nawa-Pipil women to transport heavy loads of clay grills on their backs in a *kakash* (frame), which is secured by a *mekapal* (cord) onto their foreheads, while walking through long, steep, and winding paths down to the cities, below the fog line. While trekking to sell their grills, she says, women eat tortilla with salt, to make it through the day, alluding to the state of dispossession and food insecurity of Indigenous communities, despite what she sums-up as "back-breaking" labor in a later conversation. Here, her words echo the transformation of non-European, non-capitalist economies into market economies, which, according to Quijano, depended on Indigenous dispossession of the land, resources, and products to ensure the wealth and food security of dominant groups (557). When explaining her song afterwards, she laments: "*Sin tierra nos morimos de hambre*" ("Without land, we die of hunger"). She is referring not only to her inability to grow her own food, but also to the difficulties in obtaining the basic materials needed to make clay grills, such as sand and clay. "*Antes, íbamos por ay cerca a rascar el barro y la arena; hoy hasta para eso hay que ir lejos a comprar y sale caro*…" (Before, we would go nearby to dig for clay and sand; nowadays, even that we have to go buy far away and it is expensive…). Her testimony resonates with the acoustics of the Salvadoran nation, which have racialized and relinquished Indigenous peoples to the poorest and most inhospitable lands in the territories (563). By dispossessing the Nawa-Pipil from arable land,[175] and expecting *Wijwitzapanchin* to pay

[175] Wixapan is not listed in the General Index of the Archive of Lands of the Republic of Guatemala as having benefitted from communal land, even though *Wijwitzapanchin* have shown the existence of two small plots of communal land. Communal lands were permitted by Indian laws as inalienable rights of every indigenous community (Palma Murga 1993: 233).

tribute[176] to the Crown with food, the Spanish colonizers obliged them to a disciplinary regime of hunger. These exploitive tactics forced Indigenous people to become consumers of local or imported products, extracting from them, everything that they could generate, especially their indentured labor and nourishment. Food security is at the center of capitalism and biopower, as according to Foucault (2007), food is central to regulating the vital biological processes of life. Thus, when *Nantzin* Antonia sings about eating "*tortilla con sal*" (salted tortilla) on her way down the mountain to sell the products of her labor in the cities, she is helping us understand how food (in)security becomes a strategy of governance of the nation-state, to manage life, especially the life of those who are subjugated to the margins because of their [racial and gendered] differences are out of the norm. Further, unconcerned with the food (in)security needs of Nawa-Pipil communities, racial capitalism and neoliberalism have normalized hunger as a 'natural' occurrence or a reflection of 'laziness' on the part of those who experience it. Thus, Foucault's theorizing (2003) reminds us that those who conform to market logics are 'let live', while those who 'disrupt it" must be eliminated as they are deemed "biological threats" to the nation-state. Therefore, they are justifiably killed to protect the species (256).

In lines nine through fourteen *Ne Wijwitzapanchin* describe the clay grills they make, *"shikua taja ne kujkulmalchin wan tiutikinita sujsul gajgalanchin pal ma tikinishka ne tajtamalchin wan tikinkwa iwan ayujwach"* offering them to buyers in the towns and cities they travel through, exalting the good qualities in them, a product of their hard labor. Here, *Nantzin* Antonia celebrates Nawa- Pipil cultural traditions and ways of being and knowing the world that have been passed on by her ancestors, such as making clay grills and corn tortillas with "*alhuashte*." This highlights, again, a sense of cultural specificity and geographical connection to the land. For instance, tortillas are only made by women out of *neshtamal* (corn cooked with ashes at dawn), in the clay *kumal*, after a long process of having sowed the land, cultivated, and harvested the best grains by men, and giving offerings to Mother Earth through ceremonies where everyone in the community participates. According to Nawa-Pipil oral tradition, there is also a story that the oldest ones tell, and that reveals the sacred nature of corn and ancestral agricultural knowledges (Lara-Martínez 2012: 14-1). *Alhuashte*, also a popular condiment used in El Salvador today, made from *ayut* (pumpkin or squash) seeds toasted in clay grills and grounded in the *metat* (*piedra de moler* or grounding stone), that is sprinkled over fresh cut fruits, such as *mangos, oranges, jicamas, jocotes, guindas*, and other tropical delights. It can also be made into a flavorful sauce that is used for cooking crab, chicken, and iguana dishes. Pumpkin or squash is part of the *mil* (*milpa* or cornfield), an ancestral agricultural practice that consists of intercropping and rotating grains and vegetables -- such as corn, beans, and squash -- to allow the soil to re-generate and protect the land. Staple foods produced in the *mil* are highly nutritional when eaten in combination, as they are high sources of both, protein and carbohydrates. *Tortillas con alhuashte* are prepared by women in clay grills and pots, which are also made by

[176] Tributes were the principal state mechanism of extraction that included paying with grains such as corn, beans, cacao, peppers, honey, etc. (Palma Murga 1993: 245). By the eighteenth century, tributes constituted 79 percent of the income generated by the Royal Hacienda (Solórzano Fonseca 1993: 22).

women's hands. The corn, the squash seeds for the *alhuashte*, and the clay all come from the land and nourish the body, denoting a life-giving, reciprocal relationship among all beings, animate or not, which we pay back when we die, as our bodies are placed back in Mother Earth to nourish her in return for all that she has given us. Thus, these lines of *Nantzin* Antonia's song help us reflect about the principles of relationality that the orality and aurality of the Nawat-Pipil language expose, revealing a poetics and a politics of being hungry for a different way of living, one in which our connections to each other and the universe cannot be denied.

Kwak ne tayua witz
Ne tunal mukwachtalia chiltik
tiwitzet ne wijwitzapanchin
tiwitzet ka tuchan
kan tikwat tamal wan et (2)

In the last four lines of the song, the day comes to an end, bringing with it a much-awaited moment: *"Kwak ne tayua witz ne tunal mukwachtalia chiltik tiwitzet ne wijwitzapanchin tiwitzet ka tuchan kan tikwat tamal wan et."* These words refer to selling clay grills and returning 'home' to eat *tortilla* with beans. Satiating hunger and the idea of a home remain recurring themes in the song. Beans represent the reward of a hard day of work that comes from being disciplined into back-breaking labor to re-structure world markets and fill the stomach of dominant groups, or what Harvey calls a process of "accumulation by dispossession" (2003: 137). Without having access to the land, Nawa-Pipil communities cannot have 'beans' and do not have a 'home' to return to. They are compelled to barely survive. Submissiveness and productivity are achieved through food control, the state's most dehumanizing disciplinary technology of control, capable of ravaging the life out of the entrails of our bodies, which are deemed intractable and able to bear indescribable pain. To reach this juncture in *Kushkatan*, colonizers attempted to destroy the Nawa-Pipil organization of community life and re-organized space, according to Eurocentric values, dispossessing Indigenous people from their land, their ancestral knowledges and cultural traditions, and socially constructing them as 'lazy', 'drunken', 'immoral', 'stubborn', 'dirty', 'terrorist', 'subversive', 'hooker', 'communist', 'terrorist', so that at times, the law -- and most often -- the state of lawlessness in the nation can reform their 'incivility' and 'savagery' one more time, before they die of starvation as they fail to produce for the system.

Tracing hunger in *Ne Wijwitzapanchin*, allows us to slowly swallow, digest, and expel the idea that the colonial project has produced nothing more than abject bodies. *Nantzin* Antonia's powerful song comes to us after days, months, and years of her returning home without any beans, offering us a loud and clear earwitness account of hunger through the praxis of *yultaketzalis* (reflection of the past through the eyes of another). In her words, hunger registers a permanent injury in the body that does not let us forget that it may not be just about food, but about an empowered, just, and dignified life that has the potential of nourishing our humanity to let us contemplate the brilliance of the sunset and the smell of rain, which are Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world, and valid research methods for understanding what it means to be human.

As we sit in one of the benches of the park eating corn, I think how *Nantzin* Antonia's voice reverberates in the distant mountains of Western El Salvador, disrupting

the incomplete project of modernity, breaking through centuries of silence and terror. When she emits a sound, the world hears her voice enveloped in a song. Her song carries the perennial melodies of water flowing downstream, the hushing movements of *conacaste* branches, the deep hunger pangs she feels, the silences of her solitude in the mountain, and the sounds of her footsteps in the passing rain … all this is uttered in ancestral soundings that come deep from within the colonial wound… and that gently reminds us of a Native presence that refuses to disappear amidst the chattering of women in the *tiankis* (outdoor markets), the rumblings of idling bus engines parked across the church, and the distinguishable laughter of *Wijwitzapanchin* children running freely in the streets.

Ne nawat suchikisa

naja nina ka ne tajtakamet
welit tajtaketzat nawat (2)
ne nawat suchikisa (4)
naja nina ka ne pijpipil
welit tajtaktezat nawat (2)
ne nawat suchikisa (4)
naja nina ka ne sijsiwatket
welit tajtaketzat nawat (2)
ne nawa suchikisa (4)
ne nawat nemi yultuk

El náhuat florece

Yo digo que los hombres
pueden hablar el náhuat (2)
el náhuat florece (4)
yo digo que los niños
pueden hablar el náhuat (2)
el náhuat florece (4)
yo digo que las mujeres
pueden hablar el náhuat
el náhuat florece (4)
el náhuat está vivo

Nawat Flourishes

I say men
can speak Nawat (2)
Nawat flourishes (4)
I say children
can speak Nawat (2)
Nawat flourishes (4)
I say women
can speak Nawat (2)

Nawat flourishes (4)
Nawat is alive

Known as the 'anthem' of the Nawat-Pipil revitalization efforts in El Salvador, *Ne Nawat Suchikisa* (2016), is a brief *a cappella* song of ten lines that conveys a simple, but upbeat lyrical repetitive message about the Nawat-Pipil language and the politics of Indigenous life and languages in *Witzapan, Western Kushkatan*, today. Similar to *Metzas Nawat* and *Ne Wijwitzapanchin, Ne Nawat Suchikisa* is an original song composed and performed in the Nawa-Pipil oral tradition by *Witzapan* artist *Nantzin* Antonia Ramírez, in the last five years. Unlike the two prior songs analyzed in this study, *Ne Nawat Suchikisa* has been transliterated from Nawat-Pipil into Spanish by the *Collectivo Tzuntekwani* and other Nawat-Pipil *neohablante* (new speakers) groups, and it was published online in 2016.[177]

The song has three short verses that openly announce in the first-person that men, women, and children can speak Nawat-Pipil (*naja nina ka ne tajtakamet welit tajtaketzat nawat, naja nina ka ne pijpipil welit tajtaktezat nawat, naja nina ka ne sijsiwatket welit tajtaktezat nawat*), to confirm Indigenous presence in El Salvador while simultaneously confronting the 1932 Matanza's official narratives and acoustics that assured the nation that progress was possible because "all indians had been killed" (Bermúdez 2017).

The two-line chorus, *ne nawat suchikisa, ne nawat nemi yultuk,* which is repeated after each verse, proudly proclaims that Nawat-Pipil is flourishing and alive, directly countering Western epistemologies that have classified this Indigenous language as critically endangered and relegated it to 'a thing of the past'. As an active maternal Nawat-Pipil speaker born in the aftermath of one of the most horrific state-sponsored Indigenous ethnocides recorded in the history of the Western hemisphere, *Nantzin* Antonia's experiences with multiple and sedimented displacements and dispossessions, invisibilization, forced assimilation, and struggles with *living everyday death* in El Salvador, function to affirm Indigenous survivance in *Kushkatan*.

Ne Nawat Suchikisa relies on the *grammar of the body* inherent in the Nawat-Pipil language, to allow *Nantzin* Antonia to embody her lived experiences in the land, in the spoken words of her song. For instance, when *Nantzin* Antonia uses the word *yultuk*[i] (corazón or heart) to express that her language is 'alive', Nawat-Pipil allows her to recognize that the politics of life take place within the body. *Yultaketzalis* or the Nawat-Pipil philosophy of reflecting on the past, makes possible for *Nantzin* Antonia's song to recall the collective pain and stories, locating them in her corporeality, thus allowing a re-birth of her community through the life inherent in the Nawat-Pipil language. As the title of her song indicates, The Nawat Flourishes, in the face of ethnocide -- year after year with the flow of seasons -- allowing for a 'return home' as a praxis of Indigenous survivance and ancestral/blood memory-making.

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[177] Sonia Megías' *Catálogo cronológico de artesanías, transcripciones náhuat-pipiles* *www://soniamegias.es/site/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/CatCronoArtesoni%CC%81as.pdf*. Accessed May 3, 2021).

As *Nantzin* Antonia finishes her song, a man yells from across a small creek, through a rusted barb wire fence that is partially covered by a deep green vine that I do not recognize, stating: "*Cuando ella canta, todos la oímos*" ("When she sings, we all hear her"), waving at me with a smile. *Nantzin* Antonia waves back at him and states to me in a low voice that he speaks Nawat-Pipil too, explaining that in *Witzapan*, a lot of people speak *Nawat*. "Nicole" she adds, pointing out at a young girl that is walking up her house's steps "*ya está aprendiendo Nawat, yo se lo enseño*" ("Nicole is already learning Nawat, I am teaching it to her"). "*Ella viene por aquí casi todos los días*" ("She comes by almost every day), she finishes. "*Né kan tiwitz?, ¡shitakwa ini manguj*, Nicole!" ("Where are you coming from? Have a mango, Nicole!"), says *Nantzin* Antonia, looking at the girl in the eye and passing her the basket of mangos. *Nantzin* Antonia turns to me and states, "*Cuando yo me muera, yo me voy a llevar el Nawat conmigo a la tumba. Por eso los jóvenes tienen que aprenderlo, para que así queden las palabras. Así el Nawat florecerá*" ("When I die, I am going to take Nawat with me to the grave. This is why young people must learn it, so that the words can remain. This way, Nawat will flourish"). She adds "*Yo escribí Ne Nawat Suchikisa y Nicole ya se lo puede. ¡Vaya, cantémolo otra vez!*" ("I wrote/composed *Nawat Fluorishes* and Nicole already knows it. Let's sing it, again!"). They lock eyes and begin to sing in Nawat-Pipil with great joy, overcoming in a moment, the violences of decades of imposed silence that has kept Nawat-Pipil subsumed to the myth of disappearance for decades.

A child's laughter interrupts my thoughts and I see Nicole running down the slippery steps toward the road below with the mango in her hand, leaping over rain puddles and repeating the chorus "*Ne nawat suchikisa, ne nawat suchikisa, ne nawat suchikisa, ne nawat nemi yultuk…*" on an on, until we cannot hear her. Earwitnessing this encounter of Nawat-Pipil voices between an elderly woman and a young child, who perform together a Native song before my eyes and ears with such spontaneity, does not conform to the acoustics of agonizing languages, I think to myself. In this moment and in this space, their vocal exchanges are vibrant, filled with movements and sounds, amplifying a story of Indigenous survivance and resurgence through a millenary language that is still sounding.

The curative potential of *Ne Nawat Suchikisa* for Nawa-Pipil communities in *Witzapan*, is embraced with excitement by many Salvadorans who believe that 'things are changing in El Salvador'. On the surface, *Ne Nawat Suchikisa* has visibilized and made audible Indigenous existence in *Kushkatan*, centering Nawa-Pipil women's ear-testimonies of survivance in the land and recovering the past without dwelling on it and/or allowing us to forget it[178]. Most importantly, *Ne Nawat Suchikisa* has created conditions of possibility for re-directing Indigenous elderly women's echoes of past resistances toward the future, resonating ancestral promises that Nawat-Pipil sound worlds are part of Salvadoran cultural identity and as such, they will remain amongst us forever.

Unfortunately, the curative potential of *Nantzin* Antonia's song has been challenged by a recent scandal that erupted in social media, internationally, re-opening the old colonial wound for Nawa-Pipil communities. While this is an evolving situation

[178] Morrison 1988 and Le Espiritu 2014.

that requires careful investigation, it is not beyond the scope of this study to pause and reflect on the relations of power in contemporary Indigenous music production that may appear to re-produce in some way -- however slight -- the control and exploitation of labor, resources, and products, and its distribution in the world market, thus reminding us of the durability and pervasiveness of the coloniality of power (Quijano 2000).

According to online archives, *Ne Nawat Suchikisa* was first performed publicly at a 2017 concert bearing the same name although other records indicate that *Nantzin* Antonia performed it in 2014 at the Mexican Embassy. The 2017 concert was directed by Spanish musical composer Sonia Megías and sponsored by the *Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo* (AECID) and *El Centro Cultural de España en El Salvador*. Megías travelled to El Salvador in 2012 to collect Nawat-Pipil songs for which she documented the partitures and later re-arranged them for children's choir and orchestra. In 2019, she published 500 copies of a choral songbook titled *Cancionero Coral: Ne Nawat Suchikisa* (Maya Print, Guatemala), and in 2020, Megías created a virtual space titled *Tuyulu Takwika*[179] or *Nuestro Corazón Canta (*Our Heart Sings) to help disseminate Nawat-Pipil revitalization efforts and protect the language through music, according to her website. Unfortunately, in 2021, *Ne Nawat Suchikisa* and other Nawat-Pipil songs published by Megías were thrusted at the center of an international controversy stemming from claims filed by *La Asociación Nacional Indígena Salvadoreña* (ANÍS) and ANIS Internacional[180] that the *Tuyulu Takwika* project[181] has harmed the Nawa-Pipil community in *Witzapan*, by extracting from them what could be the last few songs composed and performed in Nawat-Pipil by Nawa-Pipil elderly women. Megías responded by posting a statement on her Facebook page [182] that denied the allegations. There is no explanation given by Megías about the money she recently raised in the crowdsourcing site Verkami, except for a few Instagram messages from her, encouraging followers to donate to help her publish a songbook; in a social media post dated April 16, 2021, she states: "*Nadie absolutamente, estaba haciendo caso a estas canciones que se estaban creando en nawat*…" ("No one, absolutely no one was paying attention to these songs being created in Nawat…"). This controversy, short of being resolved anytime soon, highlights James's theorizing about the relevance of sound as a space to think about political ontology that can be both revolutionary and a recuperative, even though it also appeals to colonial relations of domination, subordination, and extractivism in neoliberal and biopolitical ideologies and economies (2019: 6).

Additionally, this controversy highlights resonant theory knowledges produced by Indigenous scholars, such as the notion of "listening privilege" and "inclusionary performance"[183] (Robinson 2020), which help us reflect about Western approaches to Indigenous *soundworlds.* Particularly applicable in this case is the Western fixation upon

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[179] www:soniamegias.es/en/music/tuyulu-takwika/ (Downloaded May 3, 2021).
[180] www.change.org/p/stop-sonia-megias-verkami-from-exploiting-nawat-indigenous-elders-and-their-songs (Downloaded May 3, 2021).
[181] www.verkami.com/locale/es/projects/29558-el-poder-de-cantar-en-nahuat (Downloaded May 3, 2021).
[182] https://m.facebook.com/EdicionesDelantal/photos/a.358399757535669/539191499418409 5/?type=3&source=54&ref=page_internal
[183] See Robinson's *Hungry Listening* (2020: 6, 7).

'accommodating' and 'fitting' Indigenous music into classical composition and Western performance systems for Eurocentric audiences' enjoyment. In this context, Indigenous music is typically regarded as a contribution to, or an enrichment of Western artistic audiophilic values and production, instead of being regarded as having its own artistic, socio-historical and political values, and sacred meanings. Therefore, I include this development in my study, to encourage critical reflection about how the acoustics of biopolitical and neoliberal ideologies and economies of the West make it feasible for inclusionary music practices to offer Indigenous communities a performative space. Most importantly, we need to recognize that these displays of equality may be more concerned with appropriating and coopting Indigenous music under the discursive of Indigenous and or language-inclusion to benefit from emphasizing difference and re-producing and privileging Eurocentrism, than with respecting the intellectual sovereignty and self-determination of Indigenous communities, resulting in what Fanon refers to as "profoundly asymmetrical and nonreciprocal forms of recognition" (Coulthard 2014: 25 qtd. in Robinson 2020: 7).

According to Quijano (2000), racial difference and the asymmetries deriving from it have positioned Europeans with advantage and privilege to control labor and capital, globally (Ibid 537). Further, the European appropriation and extraction of Indigenous cultural knowledges reproduces hegemonic dominance and protagonism, which Quijano states, produces an ethnocentric perspective of knowledge that, in this case, is audible in Megías musical re-arrangements for choir and orchestra of *Ne Nawat Suchikisa.* While I previously explained that this is not a music composition analysis of *Ne Nawat Suchikisa,* it aims to critically analyze the genealogies of [European] domination that continue to re-occur in every aspect of Nawa-Pipil life in El Salvador today, including through Indigenous song.

Despite the national and international popularity that *Ne Nawat Suchikisa* has attracted under the guise of neoliberal ideologies of 'inclusion,' *Nantzin* Antonia has not benefitted financially from her beautiful musical creations. We cannot avoid to stop and think about the conditions of life for Indigenous communities that exist in El Salvador today, which make it possible for an Indigenous song, written, composed, and performed in the oral/aural tradition by an elderly Nawa-Pipil woman who lives alone, in a small and remote municipality, to have become the site of political and economic international contestation. Understanding the genealogies of domination that Nawa-Pipil communities have endured and survived in *Kushkatan* for nearly 500 years is crucial to nuancing the often-imperceptible liminal spaces between the poetic and the political orality/aurality of the Nawat-Pipil tradition, which – while under contestation -- is still resonating and reclaiming intellectual sovereignty, dignity, and respect for its speakers, where they are.

Conclusion

As I leave *Witzapan* and drive back to Santa Tecla, the narrow road back to *Centzunat* curves left and right and left again. An assortment of secluded landscapes flashes before my eyes with each bend. No two turns are alike. Occasionally, a dog or a few cows appear at a distance, contrasting sharply with the deep green hills, but not a single soul is on the road. It is cloudy and humid, and the patches of fog in the mountains make the afternoon seem cooler than it is. Childish Gambino[184]'s "Redbone" plays loud in the speakers of my car -- a black Nissan Sentra that according to the man who sold it to me, came from Hurricane Katrina's archive of 'total loss and destruction' directly to El Salvador; his CD loops on an on, keeping me company on these trips to *Witzapan* every time, as there is poor radio reception… "But stay woke, N… creepin' they gon' find you, gon' catch you sleeping…". His words written for and about a world that is 3,000 miles away urge me to remain intentionally watchful of the violences taking place in my immediate surroundings and they help me reflect on the prevalence of the past and its violences, across time and space. As I approach a segment of this deserted road where there is no phone signal, *Nantzin* Antonia's words re-play in my head, as she always asks me to call her when I make it home. "*Tenga cuidado*" ("Be careful"), she warns me, touching my arm, gently. I try not to think about the unspeakable daily violences that are affecting this and other regions of the country, but the violent realities do not escape my mind easily. The thought of being robbed at gun point, kidnapped, raped, or even killed and forcibly disappeared on these remote roads is very present. I turn up the volume and look in my rearview mirror. As I approach the hairpin turn on the steep downhill nearby *las pilas de agua* or el *nacimiento de agua (*water spring), there it is, the San Pedro *Puxtla* bus coming uphill flashing its colorful lights as if it were a carnival on wheels, and there it is, a motorcycle passing it on my lane, coming head on toward me. Since there is a precipice to my right, I slow down, taking a deep breath. This is the very spot *Nantzin* Antonia told me that her bus rolled down the cliff several years back and she was hospitalized for several days.

Soon, the hamlets around the exit toward Santa Catarina *Masahuat* are visible: there are a few school-age children in white and blue uniforms walking on the road and some men and women sitting on the side, selling food and water to passersby. A bright reddish-orange carpet of *flor de fuego* petals covers the wet, narrow paved road and they fly in all directions as I drive under the towering tree. Amidst the rural quietness, I think of *Nantzin* Antonia's voice and how it escapes her body and creates a sound or two, or three, or more converting the vibrations of her throat into millenary Nawat-Pipil words that flow out as a melody, and eventually as a story. I think about how these sounds flow out from the interiority of her body and resonate in, within, beyond, through, and above

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[184]American rapper, whose name is Donald Glover, became very popular for his 2018 "This is America" song (credits given to Ludwig Göransson and American rapper, Young Thug), where he confronts ongoing systemic racism, prejudice, racial violence, the 'ghetto', and the violence of law enforcement in the United States toward black people, among other social problems (Cornish 2018).

her surroundings, bouncing off the *bajareque* (Spanish terms that describes walls made of bamboo and mud) walls of her house, the trees, and into the open space where they disperse freely into the air. And a thought comes to mind "…*as long as there is sacred air… there will be Nawat-Pipil*".

I continue to drive toward Santa Tecla, remembering *Nantzin* Antonia smiling gently and saying "pues, aquí estamos" ("well, here we are"), looking me in the eye. As she twirls her long gray hair and pins it up -- still wet -- I think of her songs as projects of life that create sovereign spaces, making a "return-home" possible for Nawa-Pipil communities in Western *Kushkatan*. I leave *Centzunat* thinking how *Nantzin* Antonia's songs bear witness to a powerful decolonial, countermapping discourse that un-makes Western knowledges about Indigenous languages in an instant, disrupting the colonial soundings and acoustics that Indigenous peoples are a thing of the past. By decolonizing Indigenous existence in the liminal spaces between the poetic and the political intervals of her songs, which I frame as a system of knowledge: -- *-mati, ix -mati, yul -mati* – she teaches me that Indigenous women continue to create sovereign spaces that make it possible to open claims of Indigenous survivance and resurgence in *Kushkatan* today.

Chapter 2: Indigenous Deathworlds

Preamble

Tekiw[185] *(Reciprocidad* / Reciprocity)

Apan
Río
River

> … a water-locative, that functions as a toponym, despite lacking a locative suffix" (Lara-Martínez 2017: 188, 194). "In Nawat-Pipil, *apan* may be thought of as an entity that *is* (to be), and a place (to be in) that shelters flora and fauna…" (Ibid 195), "…that sprouts, receives, water" (Ibid 199). "Apan as geographic seat where *space-time-lived,* refuses to disassociate events that occur in a place, from the place where they occur..." The 'being-of-history' occurs in the 'being-in-of-space-time'… it implies a reflection of space-time that frames the history and the existence of the collective. (Ibid 200).

Kan pejket ini ajajsimatilis ipal yektamatilis ka ikman wan ninemi iwan nujnunoya wan tajtatanoy, niweli nimati ne innemilis ka ne iijtik ne apan tik ne peyna ipal ne metzti junioj ipal ne shiwit 2019, mukwentijtuk yujyultuk, ka ijtik ne shushuknaj ken tzunkwachti wan ne ajajkupanka tesu kenha inpal ne ijiswat ipal duraznoj, sajsaucej, shijshikilit, ajachkatumat, ajalamoj wan se wey at ipal shujshuchiswat ipal pejperumet intachishka kuchiltik apujpu, mumimtiwit tesu muekchiwtiwit ken mupitzakujtuk amat tik se mutalulis ka katani. Itzalan mijmichin tataknaj, tejtepemichin, ajayutzin wan kajkalat, kajkatalnikaj, wijwilut, ajapahuyani wan tejtekulut; pijpinzon wan kwajkawti, wajwakalchia wan ijishkwawti; mujmutuktzin, ijichkamasachin tesu kajkalpishtuk, majmasat, ajachkamasat, wan miak ukseuk. Wan iwan ne uk chijchikitik, ken kwijkwitakululujtzin, tujtukat,tzijtzinewilin wan tzijtzikat; chujchumelu, tzijtzipajsul, pajpapalut, kajkawashpapalut ka ajku… Yejemet ipal ne tal kinyawaluat iwan itiutajpal wan tetasujtalis, mukwijtiwit tik ini tuchan itech ne apan, ka sujsul ikman. Ne tunal tatawilua. Nemi se tutunik ejekat. Datka tik ne apan kinwalantia yejemet. Ne yektatzutzunalis ipal ne at kisa talul wan kwakwalaka, techatekia wan puni, wan tik kejkemanchin kutakwika se ishtunani 'on…', kwak panu talul pal ejejkuni tejtet wan majmatzal ipal abutilon itachishka tultik shukuk ka kiajsit itech ne kuyawalujti pal kinmaka ne inyekanwalajtiwit inchan. Ini, se peyna ipal talku ka tekeman tiwelit tikajkawat tinemit iwan, nian tikajkawat ma yawi itaelnamikilis; tik se apan, kan ne tal-shiwit tinemitiwit iwan tesu kineki ma muelkawa muchi ne ujukseuk ka panut tik ini taltakutun, ipal ne takutun kan panut, ne tal kimati ka kia panut muchi tutaelnamikilis ka

[185] Tekiw is a Nawat-Pipil word that means doing voluntary work, in a system based on reciprocity; when someone dies, locals say that the dead assume their "tequiu" or duty with the living as ancestors (Time immemorial knowledge).

tiinat (Nawat-Pipil translation by Juan Valentín Ramírez, Cultural Consultant, Witzapan 2023).

English Translation:

From these epistemological understandings and with the accompaniment of mis *abuelas* and *abuelos*, I behold Óscar and Angie Valeria's presence in the interiority of *apan* on the morning of June 26, 2019, being sheltered by life, among the velvety greenery and the uneven heights of peachleaf willows, indigos, wolfberries, cottonwoods, and a sea of baby pink stick pea petals, carelessly scattered like confetti on a southerly flow. Among silvery minnows, trout, turtles, and toads; parakeets, doves, *horneros*, and owls; finches and eagles, sparrows, and hawks; squirrels, bighorn sheep, deer, elk, and many more. And with the little ones, such as beetles, spiders, grasshoppers, and ants; honeybees, moths, butterflies, and dragonflies above... Earth beings surround them with *ijiu* (life force, sacred energy) and love, received from this time-immemorial riverine abode. *Tunal* (Father Sun) shines. There is a warm *ejecat* (wind). Nothing in *apan* disturbs their being. *At's* (water's) symphony burbles and bubbles, splashes, and gushes, and at times it hums a long lasting 'om…', rushing pass curious rocks and lime-yellow abutilon branches, that show up at the bend's edge, to welcome them home. This, on a summer morning of *chikume akat*[186] that can never be unlived, nor its memory let go; in *apan,* where space-time-lived refuses to disassociate events that occur in a place, from the place where they occur, the land bears witness to the continuation of our stories.

Ac aczo yo oc ic noca xi hual choca,
Noca xi hual icnotlamati,
Zan tinocniuh,
Zan ye niyau,
Zan ye niyau, ye ichan, ohuaya, ohuaya.
zan quitohua noyollo,
ayoc ceppa ye nihuitz,
ayoc ceppa niquizaquiuhqui in yece tlaticpac,
zan ye niyauh, zan ye niyauh ye ichan, ohuaya, ohuaya[187].

Quizás por mí, llorarás,
por mí, estarás triste,
tu, amigo(a),
pero ahora me iré,
ahora, estoy yendo a Su casa.
Solo esto dice mi corazón,
yo no regresaré,
nunca regresaré a la tierra,

[186] In the Nahua way of counting of time, 2019 was the year seven reed.
[187] A stanza of *Cuahcuatzin Inocuicatl* (Cuahcuatzin's *Song of Lamentation*), written in the year *nawi akat* (four reed or c. 1431) that is as powerful and heartfelt today, as it was then. See León-Portilla (1992: 107-109).

ahora me iré, estoy yendo a Su casa[188].

Perhaps because of me, you will weep,
because of me you will be sad,
you, my friend,
but now I will go,
now I am going to His house.
Only this, my hearts tells,
I will not return,
never will come back to the Earth,
now I will go, I am going to His house.

Returning to t*unantzin*[189] is a praxis of gratitude and reciprocity for the life and nourishment we have received from her, which maintains the equilibrium of the universe[190].

[188] My translation (November 2022).
[189] Nuestra Madre Tierra in Nawat-Pipil.
[190] Ancient Nawa-Pipil ways of knowing and being in the world (Sánchez-Vides and Flores 2019).

Introduction: "*Oya Norte*"[191] / *El Viaje* / The Voyage

Rio Grande,[192] Matamoros,[193] Mexco. On the early hours of June 26, 2019, *The New York Times* reports that the body of two-year-old Salvadoran Angie Valeria Martínez "was captured in a searing photograph[194] of father and daughter lying face down in murky [river] waters littered with reeds and discarded beer bottles" (Semple, June 28, 2019). A CNN news story added, "The photograph shook viewers worldwide and it was a reminder of the harsh realities of the migration crisis and risks taken to reach the southern U.S. border" (Gallón, June 26, 2019). *USA TODAY* highlighted, "The images from the Rio Grande are gut-wrenching," adding that "At first glance, the images resemble crime scene photos: two bodies, photographed from different angles, crime scene tape, law enforcement officers and a woman gesturing toward the river". The story stresses that: "Death is a constant along the border, but rarely is it captured in such a direct way. And photography has the power to freeze a moment in time, one that in this case encapsulates the danger and desperation surrounding the exodus of immigrants primarily from Central American countries" (Garcia, June 26, 2019).

La Prensa de México stated that "the image [of Óscar and Angie Valeria] has gone around the world, generating great commotion as it is comparable with that of Aylan Kurdi, the three-year-Kurdish toddler from Syria, who died in a Turkey beach when the barge he was travelling in as a migrant to the Greek Island of Kos, sank down[195]" (Jimenez, June 26, 2019). *La Prensa Libre de Guatemala* published that "…the lifeless bodies of father and daughter were located by state authorities, military officials, and civil protection personnel. The finding took place on the banks of the river, amongst branches, a few kilometers from the Matamoros International Bridge that connects this city to Brownsville (Texas). From the images that emerged, it is presumed that the father managed to reach the girl after the current snatched her from him and put her under his shirt. However, both drowned[196]" (*Redacción EFE*, June 25, 2019).

La Prensa Gráfica de El Salvador highlighted that, according to a Honduran migrant woman interviewed at the Matamoros border, the Salvadoran family had been advised not to cross the Río Bravo, adding that "what happened [referring to the widely circulated photograph that depicts the drowned bodies of father and daughter] to them has impacted the world," (AP June 27, 2019). Meanwhile, in her home located in the municipality of San Martín, east of San Salvador, Rosa Ramírez, the surviving mother of Óscar and grandmother of Angie Valeria, told *Associated Press (AP) News*: ''It's tough,

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[191] "*Oya norte*" is Nahua way of referencing migration to the United States (Time immemorial knowledge).
[192] These are the occupied, unceded territories of the Coahuiltecan, Ndé Kónitsaaií Gokíyaa, Esto'k Gna, and Rayados peoples (Native-land.ca). Rio Grande is the name of the river in the U. S. border side and Río Bravo on the Mexico border side, circa 1840s (Wagner 1998: 3). In this study, I use the spelling of Rio [Grande] or Río Bravo, as published in the news media.
[193] These are the occupied, unceded territories of the Coahuiltecan, Ndé Kónitsaaií Gokíyaa, and Rayados peoples (Native-land.ca). Spanish surname and place name meaning 'Moor slayer', as in Saint James Matamoros (Moore 1996).
[194] Photograph credited to journalist Julia Le Duc and published by the Mexican newspaper *La Jornada* (June 26, 2019).
[195] My translation (2021).
[196] My translation (2021).

it's kind of shocking, that image. But at the same time, it fills me with tenderness. I feel so many things because at no time did he let go of her" (Orsi and Guthrie, June 26, 2021).

Above, I juxtapose Rosa Martínez's sparse words, which she uttered in the aftermath of the devastating loss of her son Óscar and granddaughter Angie Valeria, to the preceding assemblage of racialized media narratives that accompany the broadly publicized and 'seemingly still'[197] photograph of their death, which continues to circulate around the world today. I draw attention to the bareness of her words that absconded from within her body and enthralled a mother's grief to re-member the distressing image of her loved ones, as an elusive semblance of them being 'together', through embrace, offering us the possibility of re-claiming sacred ancestral readings of this heartbreaking moment.

Reflecting about violence and forgetting during a conversation in Itzalku (July 2019), only days after this tragedy, *Tajtzin Tamachtiani* Sebastián Morales, a Nawa-Pipil elder from Santiago Texacuangos,[198] shares that "*Para deshacer el daño de la colonización en nuestras comunidades y en la sagrada Tierra, es necesario sentir y pensar lo que fuimos y lo que somos, con ojo de venado*[199]" (to undo the harm of colonization on our communities and the sacred land and water, it is necessary to feel and think what we were and what we are, with a deer's eye). He adds, "*Fíjese niña*[200]*, lo que se ve y lo que no se ve, siempre está presente allí -- en el recuerdo -- especialmente cuando estamos hechos pedazos*" (Pay attention, young lady, what it is seen and not seen is always present there, in re-membering, especially when we feel/are shattered). There is heaviness in the warm air of Itzalku and a restless silence that can be felt from 30,000 souls that were massacred in La Matanza in 1932, awaiting justice in unmarked mass graves at the foot of the volcano[201]. The rain begins to fall.

Tata Sebas, as I call him, tells me: "*Vea, niña, le voy a explicar como a mí me lo explicaron. A mí mis abuelos y abuelas me enseñaron, pues, que no hay presente que no venga del pasado*" (You see, young lady, I am going to explain it to you the way it was explained it to me. To me, my grandparents taught me, well, that there is no present that does not come from the past). Pointing at his chest with his thin hands, *Tata* Sebas adds,

> *Nuestras historias, cada una de las experiencias*
> *que hemos vivido, se guardan aquí, dentro de*
> *nuestro cuerpo. Todos tenemos una banda aquí –*
> *golpeando suavemente su cavidad torácica – que*

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[197] In the Nawa-Pipil cosmovision, all animate and inanimate beings possess a life force or spirit, sacred energy known as *ijiu*. Nothing is 'still' as in the Western sense of a lifeless suspension (Flores, 2019 Interview).

[198] Teczacuangos in Nawat-Pipil means elevated place of stones, place of the yellow-hooded black birds (genus Icterus) place of silence. (Meza 2012: 464).

[199] Cuauhixti: Native seed from the tropics (mucuna pruriens), used by Nawa-Pipil communities as a talisman to protect from *mal de ojo* illness, or evil eye, harm (Torres 2006: 14, 29, 31). Nawa-Pipil communities say that *ojo de venado* refers to a state of always being acutely aware of one's surroundings and relying on instinct and speed to survive, similar to the notion of "woke" claimed by African American communities in the U. S. A. (Ancestral knowledge 2019).

[200] A feminine colloquial term of endearment used respectfully in El Salvador - in this case, to address me as a "young lady" (Morales 2019).

[201] See Tilley (2005); Almeida (2008); Gould and Lauría Santiago (2008); Bermúdez (2018); DeLugan (2020).

> *graba cada cosa que nos pasa y que la comunica al cosmos, porque en el universo todo lo que hacemos y nos hacen, se sabe. Todo queda grabado allí para siempre.* (2019)
>
> Our stories, each of the experiences that we have lived, are safeguarded here, in the interiority of our body. We all have a band here - tapping gently at his thoracic cavity - which records everything that happens to us and that it is communicated to the cosmos, because in the universe everything we do and is done to us, is known. Everything stays recorded there for always. (2019)

Wagging his right index finger toward the sky, Tata Sebas asures me that "*por eso es que podemos recordar el pasado y mantener un equilibrio en el presente. Cuando recordamos algo o a alguien que ya no está, nos estamos reencontrando nosotros mismos con la memoria de ellos, de los muertos, pues, que viven aquí mismo dentro de nuestros cuerpos*" (that is why we can recall the past and maintain an equilibrium in the present. When we remember something or someone who is no longer here, we are re-encountering ourselves with the memory of them - well, the dead - who live right here within our bodies). He continues, "*Me decían mis abuelos, esas memorias están guardadas en tu hígado, cipote*[202]*, y nunca se olvidan"* (My elders would tell me, those memories are stored in your liver, boy, and are never forgotten). He smiles warmly, touching the edge of his colorfully decorated straw hat with the word "Cojutepeque"[203] embroidered on it with yarn, while looking me in the eye. *Ojo de venado*.

Nahua-speakers in Kushkatan say that *ilnamiki*[204] is a beautiful *living word* that means *what one has lived that comes to one's head* or to bring to memory something or someone from the past to the present. In other words, to *recover* memories or a type of 'seeing collectively again'; to re-member or to 'put back together again, that which has been broken'; to reencounter something or someone from the past, an opportunity to 'con-front again' that, which cannot be forgotten or as Tata Sebas says: *"to see the present with the eyes of the past, con ojo de venado*" (Morales's interview, July 2019).

Similarly, linguistic anthropologist Rafael Lara-Martínez (2012) reminds us that the centrality of the grammar of the body in the Nawat-Pipil philosophy permits an unfolding of the world from the concrete embodied experience to abstract thinking,[205]

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[202] Salvadoran slang for muchacho or boy; derivative from the Nawat-Pipil word tzipit, sipit, cipit, or hijo penúltimo (Hernández 2019: 154).

[203] Coxutepec is a municipality of the Department of Kushkatan. In Nawat-Pipil, it means *cerro de coyotes, cerro de pavas, cerro del faisán* (Meza 2012: 193).

[204] In this study, I intentionally break down some words with hyphens as a method of decoding to create phonemic awareness about the signification and re-signification of combined words and invoke a cognitive pause on the reader to invite a search for meaning or implied, missing element.

[205] Abstract thinking is never separated from concrete lived experiences for Nawat-Pipil speakers. Rather, these two realms are always unified in harmony through Nahua cosmologies, the principle of duality, and the notion of circularity (Lara-Martínez 2012: xiii).

which locates *ilnamiki*, in a space between memory and forgetting, or what he refers to as an "intractable encounter" of historical events that, in this case, we safekeep [in our bodies] with suspicion and that are rooted in a specific dynamic organ, the liver (xiii). It is from these ancestral ways of seeing con *ojo de venado,* being in, and understanding the world, that I think when Rosa Martínez *re-members*[206] those who have been violently *dis-membered* from her life, restoring their humanity to the present, without explaining it. Despite using Spanish -- the "enemy language"[207] imposed after contact -- to express her most intimate *sentires y pensares* (feelings and thoughts) to confront a tragedy of this magnitude -- an Indigenous mother has a way of recovering her "indianness" without having to justify it, through her Native perception of the world. In this way, the Nawat-Pipil language makes it possible for Rosa Martínez's pain and loss to shed light into the world and help us meditate about this intractable encounter, in a different way -- not about the tragedy of Óscar and Angie Valeria Martínez's untimely deaths at the river in the U. S. – Mexco border, but about honoring Óscar and Angie Valeria's lives, dignity, and humanity in the historical memory of a grieving community that refuses to forget them, while simultaneously re-defining the sacredness of water, despite the tragic events that occurred in it.

In this study, I trace the forced migratory journey across land and water, of Indigenous descendants Óscar and Angie Valeria Martínez, from the heart of Kushkatan in the center of *Abya Yala*[208] to the edges of the U. S. - Mexco border north on the continent, which resulted in their death. I expose the politics and the policies of the U. S. that placed them in the river on June 26, 2019, and that instantly 'disappeared'[209] them after consuming their difference,[210] denying them humanity, even in death. I center the struggles for survivance[211] of an historically dis-membered, 'out-of-place', Indigenous community, that through their mother tongue, is continually re-membering their humanness and recovering the sacred land and water beneath their feet to claim a place for themselves within this world, *con ojo de venado*, as a unit of analysis similar to Edward Said's intertextuality (2012) or Mishuana Goeman's poetics of embodiment (2013).

I seek to understand how Nawat-Pipil ontologies and epistemologies help unsettle the spatial logics of a U.S. empire that continually attempt to erase Indigenous presence from the land and water, forcing the Nawa-Pipil to exist in the fixed temporality of geographies of inhabitability and anti-humanness at home, while in transit, and at the U.S.-Mexco border. I endeavor to answer how the Nawat-Pipil and Nahuatl languages, as ancestral systems of knowledges, confront and denaturalize the teleological silences of forced dis-placement and dis-possession of its *hablantes/*speakers, when they are

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[206] See Anzaldua's *Coyolxauhqui's imperative,* a complex healing process that moves a person from a state of fragmentation to wholeness (2015: 243). I borrow her theorizing, as a method in this study, to find healing in the process of writing about traumatic events, by searching for a sense of completeness in words, as I break them down with hyphens, or what she refers to as "speaking across the Divide" (Ibid).
[207] See Harjo and Bird o Reinventing the Enemy's Language (1997: 21).
[208] In the Kuna/Guna language spoken by the Kuna people of Panama and Colombia, *Abya Yala* means the American continent in its totality (Escalante 2014).
[209] Disappearance as a form of state-sponsored terror in El Salvador (Menjívar 2005: 21, 96, 102, 337).
[210] See Karl Marx's definition of *commodity fetishism* (Taussig 1987).
[211] See Vizenor's concept of *survivance* (2008).

persistently forced to grapple with wounds, traumas, racisms, and other colonial violences *que nos hacen pedazos el alma*/that tear our souls into pieces[212]. In contemplating the drowning deaths of Óscar and Angie Valeria in the summer of 2019, I ponder if and how can the drowned emerge from the river -- a *rajadura*/crack between two supposedly dichotomic worlds that define the oppressors and the oppressed[213] -- to help us re-imagine sacred and ancestral forms of selfhood and re-construct life anew. What does it mean for Indigenous bodies -- which are considered by Eurocentric hegemonic narratives, the sites of dysgenic narratives -- to float in murky river waters amidst beer cans and other debris? Are they vulnerable to further filth?

I argue that Nawa-Pipil communities and their descendants in Kushkatan and around the world today, hold onto ancestral praxes of *seeing the present with the eyes of the past con ojo de venado,* to grapple with the violence of the colonial wound that is not over and that has not healed. As they bear witness to living *everyday death* in El Salvador, Nawa-Pipil communities and their descendants sustain themselves through ontologies and epistemologies, such as *ilnamiki*, to actively recover on a quotidian basis, that which has been lost in the discursive geographies and narratives of the West, that is simultaneously divided and bound by Western teleologies. These regimes of truth continue to conceive Indigenous peoples as 'still submerged'. It is in the same geographies, that Nahua mytho-poetics have been telling us for millennia, prior to the European invasion, in the different configurations of the ancient Uto-Aztecan linguistic family, in different spaces and places -- from *Abya Yala* to Turtle island -- stories that continue to be re-membered today. Through the unique re-iterations of these ancestral stories, Nahua mytho-poetics reveal inexorable threads that unify the south, center, and the north of the continent, altering its geographies and temporalities, making it possible for us to re-imagine a borderless and more bountiful *Abya Yala* for Indigenous futurities, where conditions of possibility for being within and beyond this world, exist in the land and water.

In the first section of this study, *North of the Border: The Politics,* I expose the U.S. politics that put Óscar and Angie Valeria in the water. To do so, I utilize Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez's theory of the *coloniality of migration* (2018) to reveal the connections between the media, racial capitalism, and the asylum-migration policies of the U. S. that, through the Steinle case (2015), re-activated a specific conjuncture of racism in the U. S. 2016 presidential elections, resulting in harsher migration controls. In the second section of Part 1 of this study, *North of the Border: The Policies,* I utilize Achille Mbembé's theories of *necropolitics and viscerality* (2019), and I borrow the concepts of *matrix of rules* (Ibid 96) and *remote borderization* (Ibid 100) to examine the U. S. spatial logics that authorize technologies of terror such as enclosure, contraction, and containment tactics at the border sites of empire; to highlight the experiences of Central American families migrating north, I utilize the notion of *river-borders/border-rivers* developed by Salvadoran-American scholar Jorge Cuéllar (2021), as a spatial technology of terror that renders the Indigenous/immigrant body, as the most immediate

[212] See Anzaldua Light in the Dark (2015).
[213] See Albert Memmi (2013).

place and site for spatial control,[214] effecting its death. I introduce Laura Briggs's reflections on reproductive justice (2020)[215] to interrogate the history of Indigenous child-taking by the U. S., from Salvadoran families, that is not over. I frame this history, as a teleologically[216] produced *grammar of terror*[217], the anti-thesis of the Nawa-Pipil *grammar of the body*[218], deployed against Indigenous descendants asylum-seeking families at the U.S. - Mexco border, who are actively protesting their location within necropolitical regimes and demanding a more humane world for themselves, their children, their futures, and the planet's. I close this section, with Sylvia Wynter's anti-colonial meditations about the geographies of inhabitability and antihumanness in a neoliberal capitalist society (McKittrick 2015) to situate Óscar and Angie Valeria's presence/absence to and in the river, at the U. S. southwest border, altering Western notions of fixed geography and of what it means to be human from a Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) perspective.

In Section 2 of this study, *South of the Border*, I unpack the impact of colonialism, U.S. intervention, imperialism, and militarism on Indigenous communities in Kushkatan, centering Óscar, his wife Tania, and Angie Valeria's hometown of San Martín, which is in the outskirts of San Salvador, to provide historical context, understand the current living conditions, and reckon with its past. Utilizing the few colonial archives that exist about San Martín Pelulapan today, I utilize Sylvia Wynter's notion of the geo-racial (2015: 124) and Aníbal Quijano's concept of racial capitalism (2000: 536) to shed light on the racialized division of labor and the violent human exploitation practices connected to the histories of indigo production and extraction that took place in central Kushkatan, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. I show through the silent archives of indigo economies in the region, that race and labor became structurally linked and reinforced each other to configure a new local model of power that was directly associated with Europe's need for producing commodities and capital in the world market. These relations of power that rested on indigo production and extraction (and that was later substituted by coffee production in western El Salvador), helped legitimized Eurocentric ideologies of superiority/inferiority between colonizers and the colonized in Kushkatan, leading to unspeakable violences against Indigenous communities and resulting in an ethnocide of unspoken proportions[219].

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[214] See Mishuana Goeman's concept of *embodied geographies* (2013: 120).
[215] See Foucault's work on biopolitics and thanatopolitics in *The History of Sexuality I* (1990).
[216] Philosophical explanation of phenomena by their purposes. See conditions of domination (McKerrow 1989: 91).
[217] For this study's purpose, I use Chrichton's definition of the *grammar of terror (2007)*, as the rhetoric of the Bush Administration, whereas terror is dissociated from those who experience it; 'terror' becomes interchangeable with 'terrorism' and 'terrorist(s)'; and it results in the personification of 'terror' as an omnipresent demonic enemy, which exemplifies a discourse-based form of control observed by Giddens, Bourdieu, Foucault and Habermas (Ibid 15).
[218] Lara-Martinez (2012: viii).
[219] Before contact, Indigenous peoples constituted 100 percent of the population in the region. By the early 2000s, U.S. sources estimated that Indigenous peoples in El Salvador constituted less than one percent of

For those who survived the colonial carnage, I trace their 'disappearances' from the land through their forced migration to the mountains and/or their systematic forced assimilation and *ladinization* or *de-indianization* processes[220]. I propose that this context is necessary to understand that Indigenous 'disappearances' during colonial times and its aftermath in Kushkatan, became part of Indigenous repertoires of resistance and survivance that continue to function today, as systems of knowledges that protect Indigenous self-possession and the relationship with the land and water, in the face of ongoing colonial dispossession. For Indigenous descendants today, such as Óscar, Tania, and Angie Valeria, and thousands of Salvadoran families on the run, these living histories inform their trans-territorial identities, political sovereignty, and permanent state of fugitivity through *ojo de venado* epistemologies. Re-membering to run, to flee, to be in flight, in liberty, in transit -- as deer do -- is an action that connotes agency and that bonds us closely to the ground, as we place one foot in front of the other, but never lose touch with the land. In Nahuatl and Nawat-Pipil, the word for running or fleeing is *tlaloa*/*talua,* which uses the root *tla*/*tal,* which means *tierra, territorio*/dirt, land, territory, earth. In other words, to be an Indigenous fugitive through Nawa-Pipil ontologies and epistemologies of *il-na-miki* is to remember to possess-the-self and the territory *con ojo de venado or t*o be in liberty on and with the land and water.

In Section 3 of this study, "El Otro Viaje ("The Other Voyage"): *Apan / El Río /The River,* I utilize ethnographic methods to shed light on ways of knowing and being -- *el sentir y pensar cotidiano* of Indigenous communities in Kushkatan, about what it is like to *live everyday death,*[221] wherever they are[222]. Centering Nawa-Pipil ontologies and epistemologies of *ilnamiki* and *ojo de venado* as my framework and storytelling as method, I relate my observations and notes from "the field" -- which is an Indigenous sovereign territory/my homeland -- using emic (insider)/etic (outsider) perspectives and the notion of hybridity (Grosfoguel 2005), to meditate on stories from our ancestors through different temporalities and spatialities, about perishing in water.

I start with excerpts from a pre-Columbian Nawa-Pipil text written in Nawat-Pipil, *Miktan,* or *En la profundidad [del agua]* /In the Depths [of Water]. Miktan was first published by anthropologist Leonhard Schultze Jena in 1935 (Lara-Martínez 2016: 5) and addresses the underwater journeys of those who drown, according to Nawa-Pipil cosmology. I do so to recover sacred and ancestral readings that help us see present traumatic events through *los ojos del pasado*/the eyes who saw past [traumatic] events *con ojo de venado*. In this manner, I propose that Nawa-Pipil philosophies illuminate what we cannot see of past intractable events that continue to dis-member the present, so

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the country's population, but no one really knows today. This includes Nawa-Pipil, Lenca, Maya Ch'orti, Pokomam, and Kakawira peoples in Kushkatan (Tilley 2005: 171).

[220] Jorge Cuéllar refers to the Salvadoran government narratives of elimination/deracination following the 1932 Matanza as "mestizaje cultural" or "ladinizar" or "make mestizos" (2018: 46). Marisol de la Cadena refers to the process of systematic forced assimilation as *de-Indianization* or "purging the stigma of Indianness" (1996: 4).

[221] I borrow HNR Ramírez's phrase of "everyday death" for this study, to speak of society's normalization and acceptance of death/dying, as a way of life for Latinx/Indigenous descendants (2010).

[222] See Mignolo's discussion about epistemology and the politics of location in "I am where I think" (1999).

that we can re-member it, and heal. To *deshacer el daño colonial*/undo the colonial harm, *las palabras vivas de los más viejos*/the living words of the eldest that are safeguarded in the *grammar of the body*, offer us the possibility of counter-mapping the discursive ground of the West's death worlds (different from the Indigenous ones) that persist on attempting to erase Indigenous histories and presences from the land, and to highlight Indigenous epistemological lifeworlds that are grounded on Nawa-Pipil cosmovision.

In the second part of this section, I reflect on excerpts from a Nahua poem song of lamentation written in Nahuatl, compiled in *Cantares Mexicanos* (Circa 1550-1585), titled *Michcuicatl* or *Cantar de Peces*/Fish Song (stanzas 854, 860, 866, 867, 884). The selected excerpts of this Nahuatl allegory make-memory of the Spanish invasion and occupation in the Mexica metropoli in 1520-1521, capturing the agony of those who perished in the waters of Lake Texcoco, their acceptance of defeat, and their new reality of being converted into Catholicism. It describes metaphorically, what is like for fish to live perpetually in the interiority of water, waiting to be caught by fisherman. *Michcuicatl* is also based on the Nahua's myth of creation, T*he Legend of the Suns* (de Los Arcos 1967) and the eight omens predicting catastrophe (the invasion and occupation of Tenochtitlan) found in Book XII, Chapter 1 of the Florentine Codex (Sahagun Circa 1540-1587). I selected this Nahuatl text, as a space where it is possible to recover the human right to an ethics of accompaniment from the eyes who saw the past, for Central American Indigenous families who transit in dangerous occupied lands, at a time when there is an intensified need among Black and Indigenous communities for walking in the company of others (Fanon 2004: 238, 239). Standing alongside others who can be eye-and-ear-witnesses and advocates for each other's futures because they have been there, is restorative and transformational for those who struggle to survive, as it reminds us of the power of the living words of our elders, who in the face of muskets, rifles, pistols, and swords responded with poetry and song.

In the third part of this section, I summon the presence of a contemporary poem written in English by an Indigenous descendant living in the U. S. diaspora, Diana Magaloni Kerpel, titled "*Dear Little One/Canto de Peces*" (2019). In this poem, Magaloni Kerpel connects the recent deaths of Central American Indigenous children at the U.S. southwest border, with the prophecies foretold in the Florentine Codex, and the experiences of displacement, dispossession, defeat, and death, spoken of in *Michcuicatl*. This poem serves as a way of holding an interminable vigil, a dignified bridge to another world, where our 'being present' can lift the burden of their deaths off their shoulders and place it where it belongs: in the West. It is my hope that by being present, the living words of our ancestors that resonate within the new *tlacuiloqueh* may engender collective healing and transformation, and ameliorate the harm caused by the passive by-standing or active denial of human suffering that continues to take place, and that it convenes a coming together to confront the ways in which colonial violences continue to cut across each other's experiences.

By juxtaposing the polyvocal perspectives of two ancient Nahua texts, one in Nawat-Pipil and one in Nahuatl, with a contemporary poem written in English by an Indigenous descendant living in the U. S. diaspora, I seek to highlight the connections

and spaces of the past and the present, beyond the binaries of, and, between, around, under, over, the center and the north, the land and water, the visible and the (in)visible, the Human and the (in)Human, the colonized and the colonizer, the living and the dead, the north, the south, to locate the life energy of the living words of Indigenous elders in our lived-spatialities and temporalities, from *Kushkatan* to *Aztlan*[223]. It is in these ancestral, yet simultaneously contemporaneous spaces, that *the grammar of the body* of the Nawat-Pipil and Nahuatl languages help us re-encounter, sacred ancestral readings of the present order to re-envision a more humane hereafter.

Quiquizque[224] / De los Salvadoreños / Of Salvadorans

IX Poema de Amor

Los que ampliaron el Canal de Panamá
(Y fueron clasificados como "silver roll" y no como "gold roll"),
Los que repararon la flota del Pacífico
En las bases de California,
Los que se pudrieron en las cárceles de Guatemala,
México, Honduras, Nicaragua,
Por ladrones, por contrabandistas, por estafadores,
Por hambrientos,
Los siempre sospechosos de todo
("me permito remitirle al interfecto
Por esquinero sospechoso
Y con el agravante de ser salvadoreño"),
Las que llenaron los bares y los burdeles
De todos los puertos y capitales de la zona
("La Gruta Azul, "El Calzoncito", Happyland"),
Los sembradores de maíz en plena selva extranjera,
Los reyes de la página roja,
Los que nunca sabe nadie de dónde son,
Los mejores artesanos del mundo,
Los que fueron cosidos a balazos al cruzar la frontera,
Los que murieron de paludismo
De las picadas del escorpión o la barba amarilla
En el infierno de las bananeras,
Los que lloran borrachos por el himno nacional
Bajo el ciclón del pacífico o la nieve del norte,
Los arrimados, los mendigos, los marihuaneros,
Los guanacos hijos de la gran puta,
Los que apenitas pudieron regresar,
Los que tuvieron un poco más de suerte,
Los eternos indocumentados,

[223] See Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, 1848, in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* (1987).
[224] Nahua word for: *los que siempre están afuera* (the ones who are always away) (Time immemorial knowledge).

Los hácelotodo, los véndelotodo, los cómelotodo,
Los primeros en sacar el cuchillo,
Los tristes más tristes del mundo,
mis compatriotas,
Mis hermanos.
(Dalton 2008: 361-362).

Love Poem

Those who widened the Panama Canal
(and were on the "silver roll" and not on the "gold roll"),
Those who repaired the Pacific fleet
In California bases,
Those who rotted in prisons in Guatemala,
Mexico, Honduras, Nicaragua,
For stealing, smuggling, swindling,
For starving
Those always suspected of everything
("Allow me to place him in your custody
For suspicious loitering
Aggravated by the fact of being Salvadoran"),
Those who pack the bars and whorehouses
In every port and capital
("The Blue Grotto", "The G-String", "Happyland"),
The sowers of corn deep in foreign forests,
The crime barons of the scandal sheets,
Those who nobody ever knows where they're from,
The best artisans of the world,
Those who were riddled with bullets crossing the border,
Those who died from malaria
Or scorpion bites or swarming bees
In the hell of banana plantations,
Those who got drunk and wept for the national anthem
Under a Pacific cyclone or up north in the snow,
The spongers, beggars, potheads,
The stupid sons of whores,
Those who were barely able to get back,
Those who had a little more luck,
The forever undocumented,
Those who do anything, sell anything, eat anything,
The first ones to pull a knife,
The wretched the most wretched of the earth,
My compatriots,
My brothers.

(Dalton. Translated by Shaaf in Shaaf 1984: 47).

Part 1: North of the Border: San Francisco, California, United States of America

Section 1: The Politics

At approximately 6:30 PM on July 1, 2015, 32-year-old Kathryn 'Kate' Steinle was shot while walking with her family along Pier 14, in the Embarcadero District of San Francisco, California. She was hit in the back by a single bullet. The man who fired the gun, José Inez García Zárate, also known as Juan Francisco López Sánchez, stated that he had found it wrapped in cloth under a bench he was sitting on, just moments earlier. He picked it up. The gun went off. The bullet ricocheted off a concrete deck of the pier and struck Steinle in the back, who was about 90 feet away. She died two hours later. Garcia Zárate had been deported five times from the U.S. prior to this incident and had several felony convictions, including heroin possession and manufacturing narcotics. The gun belonged to a ranger of the U. S. Bureau of Land Management, who had reported it stolen from his parked vehicle in a San Francisco street, a week before Steinle was shot. It is unknown who stole the gun (Gonzalez 2019).

Steinle's tragic death immediately became a media flash point for immigration debates across the nation and a talking point for harsher immigration policies in the U. S. presidential campaign in 2015-2016 (Associated Press, July 8, 2015; Stahl August 10, 2017). It also renewed media interest on the 2014 refugee 'crisis' at the U.S.-Mexco border,[225] which conservative politicians insisted was rendering the southwest border insecure and threatening to disrupt social order[226] (Gomez, December 1, 2017). In this context, two days after her death, in a tweet directed at one of his opponents, Republican presidential candidate Donald J. Trump, posted[227]: ".@marcorubio what do you say to the family of Kathryn Steinle in CA who was viciously killed b/c we can't secure our border? Stand up for US" (Vinograd, July 4, 2015). The following day, Trump released a media statement asserting that "The senseless and totally preventable act of violence" was "yet another example of why we must secure our border". He added, "This is an absolutely disgraceful situation, and I am the only one that can fix it. Nobody else has the guts to even talk about it. That won't happen if I become president. The American people deserve a wall" (Ibid; Stahl, August 10, 2017).

It is noteworthy to mention that Steinle's death took place two weeks after Trump's notorious campaign launch speech in New York, on June 16, 2015, where he had first referred to Mexicans as "rapists" (Phillips, June 16, 2017). It is well-established

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[225] According to WOLA, 2014 became the largest year on record for Central American child and family migration to the United States. A total of 49,952 unaccompanied children (16,404 were Salvadoran), and 52,326 family units (10, 872 were Salvadoran), were apprehended by U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) at Rio Grande Valley (RGV) alone. The numbers declined sharply in 2015 and the media's interest declined (Meyer & Isacson 2015: 2, 15).

[226] Statistics support that most Central American minors and family units apprehended in the RGV region actively sought border patrol agents to surrender themselves. These data dismiss the idea that Central American migrants posed a 'threat' as they were neither running from, nor resisting U. S. authorities (Isacson, September 2015).

[227] The Donald J. Trump's Twitter account @realDoanldTrump was permanently suspended by Twitter Inc. on January 8, 2021, for violations of the Twitter's *Glorification of Violence* policy. Tweets from this account can be accessed as previously reported in the news media (Twitter Inc. January 8, 2021). Accessed December 2021.

that his social media-based political campaign played on inflammatory racialized, gendered, sexualized, and nativist resentments from the very start. Despite Trump facing economic consequences for his bigoted comments against immigrants, following his June 16, 2015 incendiary speech, when many major corporations cut ties with his organization, he did not back down. Instead, he doubled down, telling CNN's Jake Tapper that people coming into the United States "from all over … are killers and rapists." He added that "Public reports routinely state great amounts of crime are being committed by illegal immigrants" (Stahl, August 10, 2017).

On July 6, 2015, The O'Reilly Factor's[228] host, Bill O'Reilly, began his conservative talk show with a lengthy speech about Steinle's death, stating: "Mexican criminals represent a whopping 16 percent of all convicts serving time in federal penitentiaries,"[229] he continued his speech, shouting: "That's a huge burden on the American taxpayer and a dangerous situation for we the people, like 32-year-old Kate Steinle" (Stahl August 10, 2017). On July 8, 2015, Trump amplified O'Reilly's discourse in a Fox News' interview:

> *What can be simpler or more accurately stated? The Mexican Government is forcing their most unwanted people into the United States. They are, in many cases, criminals, drug dealers, rapists, etc. This was evident just this week when, as an example, a young woman in San Francisco was viciously killed by a 5-time deported Mexican with a long criminal record, who was forced back into the United States because they didn't want him in Mexico.*
>
> *(Ye Hee Lee July 8, 2015).*

Later that day, Trump added, "This man, or this animal, that shot that wonderful, that beautiful woman in San Francisco, this guy was pushed back by Mexico. Mexico pushes back people across the border that are criminals, that are drug dealers" (Ibid). CNN also reported Trump as saying: "This senseless and totally preventable act of violence committed by an illegal immigrant is yet another example of why we must secure our border immediately" (Schleifer, July 8, 2015). The next day, O'Reilly posted a petition on his website calling on Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Speaker of the House John Boehner to pass "Kate's Law" (Stahl, August 10, 2017). Eight days after her death, Republican Representative Matt Salmon of Arizona introduced the *Establishing Mandatory Minimums for Illegal Reentry Act*, which he dubbed "*Kate's Law*" (Ibid). By July 13, Bill O'Reilly had invited Steinle's parents on his show, highlighting their grief-stricken faces next to a rotating gallery of photos of their smiling daughter. Jim Steinle, Kathryn's father, shared the final moments of his daughter's life, recalling how they "laughed and walked" and "enjoyed the beauty of San Francisco",

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[228] A conservative American cable television news and talk show established in 2006, and rebranded *The Factor* in 2017, following sexual misconduct lawsuits against the host (Tikkamen 2021).

[229] When excluding immigration-related offenses, both documented and undocumented immigrants are much less likely to be incarcerated than native-born Americans, but politicians rely on studies that use undocumented migrants' incarceration rates instead of rates of violent crimes alone in their politicized messages (Nowrasteh 2021: 17-19; 2017 Cato Institute Report).

until he said he heard “a loud bang" and his daughter collapsed in his arms, saying "help me, Dad" (Associated Press, October 24, 2017).

By July 21, 2015, Jim Steinle was testifying before the Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing on Illegal Immigration. His opening statement read: “All children are special in their own way. Kate was special in the way she connected with people. We call it the Kate Effect” (Stahl August 10, 2015). He described his daughter as “…beautiful, kind, happy, caring, loving and deep in faith. Kate had a special soul, a kind and giving heart, the most contagious laugh, and a smile that would light up a room” (Ibid). He also recalled her passion for traveling: “Everywhere Kate went throughout the world, she shined the light of a good citizen from the United States of America” (Ibid). He strongly denounced the system for failing to protect her: “Unfortunately, due to unjointed laws and basic incompetence of the government, the US has suffered a self-inflicted wound in the murder of our daughter by the hand of a person that should have never been on the streets in this country” (Ibid). He urged the Senate to pass new legislation aimed at keeping “illegal immigrant criminals off the streets” to “help prevent more killings” (Ibid). He closed his testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee by saying: "We feel that if Kate’s Law saves 1 [sic] daughter, 1 [sic] son, a mother or a father, Kate’s death won’t be in vain” (Steinle Family’s Testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing on Illegal Immigration, July 21, 2015). Kate’s Law passed the House of Representatives, but not the Senate, only three weeks after her death (Ibid).

As seen so far, the political negotiations played out in the media to the nation, about the unfortunate death of a young white woman by a man, in this case -- an ‘undocumented man of color with a lengthy criminal record’ -- highlight a deceiving transformation of what appears to be a counter-hegemonic response that attempts to ‘protect women’ from patriarchal power. These political negotiations were aimed to open a space for the elements of society who refuse to see themselves as complicit with violence against women, thus appropriating a patronizing ‘women’s need for protection’ into becoming constitutive of a hegemonic bloc[230]. These ideologies reinforce toxic masculinity and gender roles with racial tropes of subordination, thus creating fear of the Black and Brown men Other.

To illustrate the formation of a hegemonic bloc through the Steinle case, that supported Trump’s White hetero-patriarchal ethno-nationalistic ideologies[231] during and after the 2016 U.S. Presidential elections, I interrogate an Instagram post on August 31, 2015, by the realdonaldtrump account on behalf of Trump’s presidential campaign. This

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[230] Antonio Gramsci’s notion of *hegemonic bloc* (or power bloc) was mostly developed at the 'national-popular' level of the state and associated with a historical bloc mobilized in support of a particular hegemonic project. (1971: 408-09; 376-77; Jessop 1997: 6, 7). Homi Bhabha states that through "negotiation rather than negation"(1998: 11), a hegemonic bloc attempts to appropriate rather than negate, marginalize, and or eliminate oppositional elements to generate a hybrid moment -- a “third space” (1994: 53-56) – to create new forms of power, displacing the histories that constitute it.

[231] The activation of white majorities concerned about the perceived threat that demographic change poses to American national identity; a set of beliefs concerning with what it means to be a “true” American (Thompson 2021: 279).

post is an Instagram attack ad[232] directed to or at one of his Republican Party contenders, Jeb Bush, titled "This is no act of love as Jeb Bush said…" Here, Trump's post depicts the mugshots of three Latinx men of color who were not authorized to work in the U.S. and who were also charged with or convicted of committing murder: García Zárate, Santana Gaona, and Brian Omar Hyde. Political historians offer that Trump's 2015 attack advertisement against Jeb Bush's 'politics of love'[233] is reminiscent of an attack ad run by the National Security Political Action Committee (NSPAC) during the 1998 George H. W. Bush versus Michael Dukakis's presidential campaign, which favored the former. In this $8.5 million dollar attack advertisement, the NSPAC used the mugshot of Willie Horton[234] to highlight Dukakis's soft stance on crime, in contrast to George H. W. Bush's harsh stance for the death penalty and against the temporary prison furloughs[235] of first-degree convicted murderers. The Horton attack advertisement was considered racially divisive[236] in modern political history, because it played into white fear and African American stereotypes of the Black male threat, highlighting the strongly created connections between race, crime, and politics, and defining the turning point in the 1998 elections (Luc 2018: 156).

According to sociologist Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez, attack advertisements produce what she refers to as "a specific conjuncture and contingency of racism" (2018: 17), where the spectacle of a racialized man -- as killer, and as rapist -- creates an affective connection between people and politicians, resulting in a *moral panic*[237]. In the Horton attack advertisement, an off-screen narrator tells the story of Horton's crimes while pictures of Bush and Dukakis and a menacing mug shot of Horton flashes across the screen. The narrator notes that Bush supports the death penalty for murderers. A spokesperson for the Dukakis campaign stated that "the ad featuring Horton succeeded in

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[232] Name given to political ads that blatantly stoke racial fears and stereotypes (Criss, November 1, 2018).
[233] In 2014, Jeb Bush stated in an interview that he thinks that "those who come into the country illegally generally do so because they had no other means to provide for their family, and what they did is 'not a felony.'" "It's an act of love. It's an act of commitment to your family" (Associated Press, April 6, 2014).
[234] Horton was a Black man serving a life sentence for murdering a 17-year-old boy during a robbery in a gas station in 1974. While in prison, he received furlough in 1986, but did not return to prison. In 1987, he assaulted a man, raped a white woman twice, and stole a car. He was recaptured in Maryland and sentenced to life plus 85 years and sent to a maximum-security prison (Criss November 1, 2018).
[235] Most state and federal prisons allowed prisoners who were serving life terms to leave prison temporarily (UPI 1988), alluding to the high rate of success of the furlough program (The New York Times 1974), in Blakemore (2018).
[236] Susan Estrich, Dukakis campaign manager states: "You can't find a stronger metaphor, intended or not, for racial hatred in this country, than a Black man raping a white woman". See Luc (2018: 156).
[237] Known as social reaction theory in the 1960s, moral panic theory derives from concerns with the media's role in stereotyping and misrepresenting minor youth deviance to appeal for greater social control (Cohen 1972). It is associated with Durkheim's ideas of moral boundaries and collective conscience (1966). Stuart Hall et al (1978), used it to refer to exaggerated social reactions to 'muggings' and street robberies entailing violence, while critics denounced this concept for being ideologically biased against the maintenance of social order (Waddington 1986). Later, Jenkins and Goode (1992) and Ben-Yehuda 1994 related this concept to risk society, discourse analysis, and moral regulation. Overall, debates about moral panic theory have taught us that its rise and development in specific times and locations, focus attention on underlying socio-cultural events that are a source of social anxiety, which can help us understand how the state's changing mechanisms of control regulate the social order (Hier 2011: vii, viii).

achieving the GOP's goal, which was to make Willie Horton into Dukakis' running mate" (Criss, November 1, 2018).

Similar to the 1998 Horton attack ad, a video tweeted by the Trump campaign only days before the 2018, U.S. midterm elections, featured Luis Bracamontes, a Mexican national who was convicted of possessing narcotics in Arizona and deported to Mexco more than once. Bracamontes returned to the U.S. and in 2018, and thereafter, he was convicted of the slaying of two California deputies in 2014. In the Trump attack ad, Bracamontes is seen in court, stating with a grin: "I'm going to kill more cops soon," as captions flash across the screen, reading: "Democrats let him into our country. Democrats let him stay", while images of a Central American caravan en route to the U. S. - Mexco border are spliced. CNN reported that the Bracamontes video has become, perhaps, the most racially charged political attack advertisement in 30 years, where President Trump and the Republican Party accuse Democrats of plotting to help "Central American invaders swarm the nation with cop killers" (Collinson, November 1, 2018).

I note here that the CNN analysis to describe a racist political 'attack' advertisement also relied on racially charged language. Both the Bracamontes attack advertisement in 2018, and the García Zárate attack advertisement in 2016, reproduce the moral panic of the Horton attack advertisement in 1998, and demonstrate how, according to Gutiérrez Rodríguez, a hegemonic bloc preys on colonial ideologies that represent racialized men of color as a threat to the White hetero-patriarchal ethno-nation's imaginary (Chavez 1995). It is very important to highlight, that throughout his campaign and thereafter, Trump conflated the national origin of various Latin American immigrants through the use of xenophobic rhetoric, as seen in the Bracamontes example above -- where he used a Mexican national to render all immigrants, especially Central Americans -- as "cop killers", and equated them with "criminals", "drug lords," and "bad hombres", stating that "We have some bad hombres here and we're going to get them out" (Ross, October 20, 2016). Anthropologist Leo Chavez refers to this as the "Latino threat narrative" (1995). These images, he states, shape public discourse and collective understandings of Latinos, regardless of national origin, race, class, sexuality, gender, etc. and are used in racial scripts to reinforce white-ethno-nationalism. Defining Latinos as a threat simultaneously casts them as 'non-American' and therefore, 'undeserving' of access to citizenship rights and resources, such as education, health care, housing, and wealth. It also justifies the dehumanizing migration policies that make up the tenets of racialized illegality for Mexican immigrants applied to unaccompanied minors in the context of refugee flows from Central America, denying people of color dignity and justice (Canizales 2001: 152, 156).

Through the saturation of racialized news articles and images in the media and social media about the Steinle case and the persistent association with crime and unauthorized migration to the U.S., it became evident that the death of a young white woman in San Francisco, was one of the most opportune tragedy that helped Trump win

the Republican Party's presidential nomination in July of 2016,[238] and a year later, the presidential elections, as it mobilized his base (Rafferty July 19, 2016). Data from the Economist/YouGov[239] polls (Francovic July 17, 215), supports The Atlantic's contention that "Something happened in July [2015] to send Trump's numbers soaring" adding that, "That something, may have been the murder of Kathryn Steinle" (Frum, July 29, 2015; Stahl, August 10, 2017).

A *Slate Magazine*[240] report on the Steinle case and the rise of Trump to power proposes that the death of a young white woman caused by a Mexican man with lengthy criminal and deportation records gave Trump a space to fuel a moral panic among voters during the 2016-2017 presidential campaign and thereafter (Stahl, August 10, 2017). The combination of a young, white woman's tragic story played out in public light, a perceived breakdown of immigration enforcement in the U. S., and a looming refugee 'crisis' at the southwest border invigorated a captive audience to take part in the grieving process of a visibly distraught mother and father (Ibid). Thus, Trump's highly publicized racialized rhetoric and his promises to deport millions and build a wall appealed to the strong emotions of frustrated, angry voters of his base audience. In the public's view, Kathryn Steinle would still be alive if people, who, by law, should have been deported, would have not been allowed to remain in the country (Ibid). The *Slate*'s article quoted Trump as saying, if "beautiful Kate in San Francisco" -- a young, innocent white woman -- could be murdered in cold blood by a Mexican "animal," so could any young, innocent white woman[241] in any town in the U.S. (Ibid). For Liz Sullivan, the mother of Kathryn Steinle, her opinion of what her daughter's death meant for Donald Trump is clear: "[We] were just what he needed -- beautiful girl, San Francisco,[242] illegal immigrant arrested a million times, a violent crime and yadda, yadda, yadda," she said. "We were the perfect storm for that man" (Ibid).

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[238] According to the RealClearPolitics polling average, on July 10, 2015, Trump was seventh in the Republican field, but only ten days later, he had overtaken the number one spot of the GOP presidential contenders (Stahl, August 10, 2017).

[239] A top ten, statistically reliable market research and public opinion polling firm founded in 2000 (Department of Political Science and Program in Legal Studies at University of Massachusetts, December 2021).

[240] A progressive online magazine that covers current affairs, politics, and culture in the United States (Library of Congress Web Archive December 2021).

[241] The idea of white innocence avoids the argument that white people generally have benefited from the oppression of people of color, providing an analytical lens through which racial/ethnic interactions might be understood (Ross 1990: 301; Orozco & Diaz 2016: 132). Gotanda offers that white innocence centers in the belief that a new beginning exists in race relations that do not account for "the reality of racial subordination and the differential benefits [to Whites] of innocence" (2003: 673). See Peggy McIntosh's White Privilege (1988).

[242] In 1989, San Francisco passed the "City and County of Refuge" Ordinance (SF Administrative Code Chapter 12H and 121, which generally prohibits City employees from using City funds or resources to assist Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in the enforcement of Federal immigration law, unless such assistance is required by federal or state law (San Francisco Office of Civic Engagement and Immigrant Affairs, 2021). However, the Sanctuary movement was a religious and political campaign in the U.S. that began in the early 1980s, to provide safe haven for Central American refugees fleeing the armed conflict. At the heart of the refugee crisis were Salvadoran and Nicaraguan families.

According to Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2018), the significant role played by the media in reactivating white heteropatriarchal ethno-nationalism is key to continuing to uphold racial hierarchies and carry out colonial politics[243] in the modern nation-state. In the U. S., the historical legacies of racialized segregation in the South that portrayed Black men as a sexual threat to white women, legitimized the control of men of color's sexualities, to legally prohibit interracial sexual relations and marriages (Collins 2000: 144). Thus, in the U. S. 2016 presidential elections, it is evident that juxtaposing Kathryn Steinle's photograph with the mugshot of José Inés García-Zárate, shifts the public's focus to the (alleged) threat posed by racialized men, re-organizing "white neonationalist femininities"[244] (Keskinen 2016). Gutiérrez Rodríguez points out that the re-organizing of public perceptions around women's safety and well-being to negotiate a media 'crisis', highlights a central paradox in the discourse about violence against women in the U.S., given that White women struggle against gender-based violence on a day-to-day basis[245].

Moreover, the re-organizing of white neo-nationalist femininities such as in this case functions to perpetuate racialized violence against minoritized men, as part of the larger white heteropatriarchal ethno-nationalist and imperial project (Ticktin 2008: 865). The continued re-telling of Steinle's demise at the hand of a 'foreigner' who should have never been on the streets of this country mobilizes the underlying racial hierarchies of the colonial experience and defines the boundaries of the nation-state and citizenship, enacting what Ticktin calls "the language of border control" to decide who belongs and who does not (2008: 864). Gutiérrez Rodríguez states that the convergence of media, affect, and politics through images of crimmigrants[246] and a refugee 'crisis' at the border, surfaces within a specific conjuncture of racism in the U.S., where colonial legacies of the racialized *Other* are re-activated to legitimize new forms of governing undesirable bodies (2018: 18).

In this light, a specific conjuncture of racism in the U.S. is articulated by the trope of the 'refugee', who is unwelcome, undeserving, not human, and the media's conjuring

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[243] The control over sexuality and reproduction was at the core of defining colonial privilege and its boundaries (Stoler 2002: 39).

[244] In nationalist discourses women are central to the reproduction of national identity and in signifying the honor and glory of a nation (Anthias and Yuval Davis 1992, McClintock 1995, Yuval-Davis 1997 in Keskinen 2016: 4, 5). This is related to women's reproductive role in giving birth to future citizens and in passing on cultural values and practices of an imagined community. Therefore, women bodies must be protected against rape by foreign intruders because rape "plants alien seeds" and it destroys the maintenance of the community through time (Ibid).

[245] See Kimberlé W. Crenshaw for intersectionality theory (2013).

[246] Crimmigration: The now indistinct intersection of criminal and immigration law that results in the criminalization of immigration law. A crimmigrant is a criminalized immigrant. According to membership theory, individual rights and privileges are limited to members of a social contract between the government and the people. In the convergence of criminal and immigration law, we see membership theory manifesting through the potential to include individuals in the social contract or exclude them from it. Membership theory expresses itself in crimmigration through two tools of the sovereign state: the power to punish and the power to express moral condemnation. The convergence of immigration and criminal law brings the harshest elements of each area of law, and the apparatus of the state is used to expel from society, those deemed criminally alien (Stumpf 2006: 376-78).

up of a refugee 'crisis' in public and political debates (Ibid 18). The refugee 'crisis' at the southwest border operates within the logics of what Gutiérrez Rodríguez refers to, as "the coloniality of migration," after Quijano's theory of the coloniality of power (2000). Here, migration becomes the unit of analysis that differentiates between an insider and an outsider since the emergence of the modern nation-state in the nineteenth century (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018: 34). This difference evokes the logics of Quijano's coloniality of power, as it constructs racial hierarchies between insiders, who are members of the nation or 'citizens' and 'migrants,' who are considered outsiders, aliens. Thus, the dichotomy between citizens and migrants is embedded in a racializing logic derived from social relations shaped by colonial power (Ibid). Therefore, Gutiérrez Rodríguez situates the *asylum-migration nexus*[247] at the juncture of racial capitalism,[248] where it is expressed through the racial coding of migration policies, which reproduce a modern hierarchical order with racializing effects, reminiscent of European colonialism (2018: 18, 34).

Gutiérrez Rodríguez borrows Stephen Castles's definition of the asylum-migration nexus (2006), which he defines as "the blurring distinction between economic and forced migration" (26). This growing indistinction, he offers, exists at all stages of the migration chain: in countries with weak economies, increasing inequality, widespread impoverishment, tyrannical rulers, poor state apparatuses, and high levels of human rights violations. The mobility of economic migrants and refugees from these countries, he adds, relies on using the same mechanisms for mobility and the same routes. On arrival, economic migrants and refugees rely on networks. Lastly, the measures of receiving countries to keep out unwanted economic migrants and asylum seekers, reinforces the asylum-migration nexus, by forcing asylum seekers to use human smugglers and enter the country illegally, to survive. In response, receiving countries treat economic migrants and asylum seekers as criminals (Ibid 30).

Gutiérrez Rodríguez supports Castles's proposition that the asylum-migration nexus is essentially concerned with South-North migratory movements (2006: 31). They offer that, countries have an interest in differentiating economic migrants from asylum seekers, to determine who is a 'desirable' and an 'undesirable' entrant, based on racialized terms[249] (Ibid 27). Categories such as 'refugee', 'asylum seeker', or 'economic migrant' are products of a human rights taxonomy generated to ensure that migration operates within a matrix of social classification based on colonial racial hierarchies that conceive the *Other* as 'fundamentally different and inassimilable' (Castles in Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2018: 34). Thus, the term asylum-migration nexus can be understood as a

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[247] Alfonso Gonzales uses the term "asylum-detention nexus" (De Genova 2016) to contextualize the legal production of migrant illegality, detainability, and deportability in the U.S., based on the racialized and gendered body of Central American asylum-seekers that have continually presented in the RGV region, including the 2014 unaccompanied minors 'crisis' (2020: 336).

[248] The racist distribution of new social identities, combined with a corresponding racist distribution of work and exploitation, and control of productive resources and capital in America, manifested by the emergence of Europe as the central place of the colonial/modern capitalist power that became the privilege of whiteness (Quijano 2000: 217, 2018).

[249] See membership theory (Stumpf 2006).

discourse used by policy makers to meet certain economic, political, or ideological objectives as an aspect of 'knowledge-power' relations in the Foucauldian sense, which is mainly expressed through legal rules that define migration categories (Foucault 1977: 27). Gutiérrez-Rodríguez expands this argument by adding that the asylum-migration nexus functions as a politics of legitimation by managing the collateral damage of global war, militarism, securing borders, and eroding the humanitarian aspect of asylum (2018: 20).

When framing Steinle's case from the perspective of the asylum-migration nexus, García Zárate, is 'fundamentally different and inassimilable', and therefore 'not desirable' to enter this country. He had spent most of his last 25 years in American prisons and attempted to re-enter the U.S. from Mexco without authorization to work at least three times, proving himself as needed justification for the politics of legitimation, for his inability of meeting the demands of labor production under the logics of racial capitalism. He had been convicted of four drug-related felonies, the most recent of which took place in 1996 (Har July 14, 2015). In September 2009, García Zárate was caught trying to re-enter the U. S. again and spent five-plus years behind bars. He was set to be deported upon his release in 2015. Instead, in March 2015, Department of Justice (DOJ) officials sent García Zárate to San Francisco, on a 20-year-old outstanding warrant for the purchase of $20 worth of marijuana. The city was no longer prioritizing such crimes and dismissed his case. At that point, according to federal law, it would have made sense to return him to federal custody for deportation. However, San Francisco's Sheriff Ross Mirkarimi had issued a new interpretation of San Francisco's "Sanctuary City" policy. He had decreed that his Office would deny Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), "access to inmates in jail" and would not provide information about their "release dates or times" without a court order or warrant. Therefore, the San Francisco Sheriff's Department ignored ICE's request to be made aware of Garcia Zarate's release date and set him free in San Francisco in April of 2015, where he had no connections. Before the Steinle killing, he had never been convicted of a violent crime (Stahl, August 10, 2017).

Regardless of his intent to kill Kathryn Steinle or not, according to the asylum-migration nexus' discourse, Garcia Zárate's criminal background neither fit in any of the categories of foreigners who could be allowed to enter and/or remain in the nation -- per the existing U. S. migration rules, nor was he ever classified as a 'refugee' from a 'war torn country.' Additionally, Garcia Zárate was not considered a vulnerable person in need of "humanitarian protection" per the United Nations (UN) General Assembly Resolutions' conventions, declarations, and other instruments[250], to legitimately be granted entry in this country. In the context of a white heteropatriarchal ethno-nationalist agenda during the 2016 U.S. presidential elections that framed all Latinos as a threat, Garcia-Zárate's 'difference', 'inassimilability', and 'undesirability' were extended to all immigrants at the border, including to 24-year-old Salvadoran Óscar Martínez and his 23-

[250] See the UN General Assembly Resolutions since 1946 (https://research.un.org/en/docs/ga/quick/).

month-old daughter, Angie Valeria, who unaware of these human rights, racialized taxonomies, would trek their way north three years later, in search of a new life.

As for the García Zárate trial two years later, both the prosecution and the defense acknowledged that the bullet that killed Kathryn Steinle had first ricocheted off the pier. According to expert testimony from a preliminary hearing, the bullet appears to have hit the ground 12 to 15 feet in front of where García Zárate was sitting, then bounced off the pavement and traveled an estimated 90 feet farther, before killing Steinle. Given the path of the bullet, experts testified that it was "impossible" that García Zárate had tried to shoot Steinle on purpose. In court proceedings, it was established that he did not know her, and he did not aim the gun at her or anyone else. The .40-caliber SIG Sauer semi-automatic pistol recovered at the crime scene "was left loaded and unsecured" in a car belonging to a ranger from the U. S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Neither the media nor politicians showed significant interest in understanding the liability and complicity of a U.S. institution in Kathryn Steinle's death[251]. However, police reports did state that it is undeniable that García Zárate picked up the pistol on July 1, 2015, and that a bullet fired from that gun struck and killed Kathryn Steinle (Ibid).

Further, there was little to no interest from the media and/or politicians about gun control and public safety issues arising from the Steinle case, even though firearm-related deaths in the U.S. are a leading cause of death for young people, especially in domestic violence cases, where women are five times more likely to be killed with guns than men, and the numbers have been steadily rising since 2014[252]. In terms of the safety of the weapon involved, the San Francisco Examiner reported that the SIG Sauer "operates exactly as designed… It's an elite handgun intended for law enforcement and military personnel who may need to fire it with split second notice" (Gonzalez, July 11, 2017). Hence, the gun was described as having "…a hair trigger in single-action mode". During the trial, it was disclosed that even among well-trained users, this weapon has a lengthy history of accidental discharges, including in the San Francisco Police Department, where from 2005 to 2011, "it sustained 29 accidental discharges when the SIG Sauer was the primary sidearm" (Ibid).

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[251] A lawsuit filed in the United States District Court for the Northern District of California against the City and County of San Francisco; defendant Juan Francisco López Sánchez; and San Francisco Sheriff Ross Mirkarimi, by John and Elizabeth Steinle, heirs to Kathryn Steinle, deceased, was dismissed by a federal judge in January of 2020. The Court's Opinion filed in San Francisco, CA on August 24, 2021, cites that "the connection between the Bureau of Land Management [negligent] ranger's storage of the pistol in his vehicle and Ms. Steinle's death was so remote that, as a matter of law, the ranger's acts were not the proximate or legal cause of the fatal incident. The panel did not reach the question whether the ranger owed a duty of care to Ms. Steinle (Steinle Vs. the United States, No. 20-15419 D.C. No. 3:16-cv-02859-JCS, 2021).

[252] According to mortality data from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), firearms are the second leading cause of death for young adults ages 25-34 (Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence and Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, 2021: 24). The largest single-year increase in the overall gun death rate in the U. S. was from 2014 to 2015; this substantial 7.3 percent jump can be directly attributed to an astronomical increase in the firearm homicide rate that year (Ibid 10).

On November 30, 2017, García Zárate was found not guilty on charges of murder in the first and second degree, and in the alternate charge of involuntary manslaughter of Kathryn Steinle. The jury's decision indicates that it was convinced that the shooting was accidental. After the verdict was announced, the deputy director of ICE, Thomas D. Homan, said in a statement, "ICE will work to take custody of Mr. García Zárate and ultimately remove him from this country." President Trump tweeted his reaction to the outcome: "A disgraceful verdict in the Kate Steinle case! No wonder the people of our Country are so angry with Illegal Immigration" (Gonzalez, November 30, 2017). García Zárate has been incarcerated since July 2015, and despite his acquittal, he remains in federal custody pending new charges[253]. His trial date has been delayed indefinitely because he was found to be not competent to stand trial. He faces a maximum of 20 years in prison if convicted (Iovino, September 29, 2021). As for García Zárate's attorneys, they argue that "It is unlikely that the shooting death of Kathryn Steinle would have gained any more than regional attention had then, presidential contender Donald Trump, not sought to exploit the circumstances of the case for his political gain" (Gonzalez 2019). His lawyers theorize that in the Steinle case, Trump saw the opportunity to strengthen his political agenda by demonizing unauthorized immigrants and linking them to violent crime (Ibid).

In the months that followed Steinle's death, Trump campaigned by promising to build a wall, strengthen U. S. immigration enforcement by deporting millions of persons who lacked the authorization to work in the U. S., and increase border security. He entered office in 2017, intending to drastically reshape the U.S. immigration system and be tough on crime (Diamond, January 25, 2017). According to an extensive inventory of U. S. immigration policy changes under the Trump administration prepared in 2020 by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), his administration accomplished nearly everything his campaign promised, at a rapid pace. The transformation of U.S. immigration policies took place in "sweeping ways" but also, in "small technical details", effecting more than 400 changes during his term and layering each initiative with a series of regulatory, policy, and programmatic modifications (Pierce and Bolter 2020: 1).

[253] Of being a felon in possession of a gun and ammunition and being an undocumented immigrant in possession of a firearm and ammunition (Iovino, September 29, 2021).

Section 2: The Policies

In 2017, only days after his inauguration, Trump set in motion significant immigration policy changes, via executive action[254]. His initial push began in the interior of the country with an executive order that made every unauthorized immigrant, a priority for arrest and removal via workplace raids. He expanded immigration enforcement in the interior by banning nationals from eight Muslim-majority countries from entering the U. S., he cancelled the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals[255] (DACA) program, ended the Temporary Protected Status[256] (TPS) of nationals of several countries -- including El Salvador--, and reduced admissions of refugee-ed/asylum seeking persons to the lowest number since the 1980s (Pierce, Bolter, & Selee 2018: 6). According to the 2020 MPI report, the Trump administration exercised its statutory and administrative authority to change and enforce immigration laws to the maximum extent possible, from the very beginning (Pierce and Bolter 2020: 24).

By mid-2018, the Trump Administration shifted its focus from immigration enforcement in the interior of the country to border enforcement, implementing a systematic separation of migrant families at the U.S.-Mexco border. Family separation at the border, was facilitated by the administration's "zero-tolerance" policy[257] (Ibid 52). It is during this time that large numbers of Central American families were traveling in caravans[258] to reach the U.S.-Mexco border in search of asylum[259] (Ibid 25). As a result of the large numbers of Central American families reaching the U. S. southwest border that year,[260] Trump instituted more policy changes aimed at shutting down the U. S. asylum system. By cutting off non-Mexican migrants' access to filing their asylum claims in U. S. soil, his administration effectively ended the primary venue to access U.

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[254]On January 25, 2017, Trump signed the "Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United" Executive Order stripping federal money from Sanctuary Cities and directing the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), to hire 10,000 immigration agents, among other measures. He also signed the "Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements" Executive Order, directing federal funding to construct a wall along the U.S.-Mexco border, hiring 5,000 more Border Patrol agents, building facilities to detain undocumented immigrants near the Mexco border and ending "catch-and-release" protocols (Diamond 2017).

[255] A program for unauthorized immigrants brought to the U. S. as children created under the former University California President, Janet Napolitano, who from 1009-2013, was the appointed Secretary of the Homeland Security Department, by President Barrack H. Obama (MPI 2020: 4).

[256] A temporary form of humanitarian protection offered to nationals of certain countries who are present in the U. S. and are unable to return to their countries due to violent conflict or natural disaster (MPI 2020: 82).

[257] A 2017 Department of Justice instruction given to federal prosecutors along the southwest border, to prosecute all illegal entry cases referred to them (MPI 2020: 52).

[258] A form of collective travel that is understood by Central Americans as being safer and cheaper than hiring smugglers to make the over 4,000-kilometer trek to the U. S. (MPI 2020: 25).

[259] MPI points out that poverty, crop failures due to a prolonged drought crisis, violence, and corruption in Central America are factors that contributed to the forced migration of entire families (2020: 25).

[260]According to U. S. Border Patrol, in 2019, there were a total of 851,508 unauthorized apprehensions at the U. S. southwest border. Apprehension data counts events, not individuals. This is a conservative estimate of the total number of migrants/refugee-ed persons reaching the U.S.-Mexco border and contacting U. S. authorities.

S. entry for thousands of Central American asylum-seekers (Ibid 25). It is a few months later -- in the summer of 2019 -- that Óscar Martínez, his wife Tania Vanessa Ávalos, and their 23-month-old daughter Angie Valeria reached the Rio Grande Valley (RVG) region in Matamoros, Mexco, after being several months on the road and when confronted with the realities on the ground, the family made the decision to cross the river.

It is in May of 2019, at the peak of Central American migration at the U.S.-Mexco border, that U. S. authorities made 133,000 apprehensions[261]. To speed up the removal of thousands of potential Central American asylum seekers from U. S. soil and deter future arrivals from reaching the southwest border, the U. S. government began implementing new measures (Ibid 25). Among the most salient measures introduced by the Trump administration at this time were *metering* or the practice of only allowing a limited number of asylum seekers to present themselves daily at ports of entry; the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP, also known as "Remain in Mexico"), which require migrants, mainly asylum seekers, to wait in Mexico for their adjudications; a *ban on U. S. asylum eligibility* for migrants who have not first sought and have been refused asylum in a transit country (for instance, Mexico, for those travelling from Central America); the *Asylum Cooperation Agreements* (ACA) with Central American nations to return asylum seekers from the U. S. to Central American partnering countries, to request asylum there; and, programs to speed up the adjudication of asylum and other humanitarian protection cases known as the *Prompt Asylum Case Review and Humanitarian Asylum Review Process* (Ibid 6, 26, 68). During the period when Central American border apprehensions were the highest (from late 2018 to late 2019), DHS resources that otherwise would have been used to sustain migration enforcement in the U.S. interior -- ICE detention space -- were diverted to border enforcement (Ibid 25). As the new measures adopted by the U. S. government were implemented at the southwest border, they were effective in decreasing[262] the number of Central American migrants apprehended, while crossing the southwest border each month (Ibid 26).

The Trump administration also implemented changes to block access to the U. S. asylum system to Central American families at the southwest border in 2019, thus ending the possibility for any asylum-seeking families to stay in the U. S. for the duration of their asylum proceedings (Ibid 13). In March 2019, it implemented the *Suspension of Foreign Aid to Central America* (ACA) policy, which cut most foreign aid to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, declaring that these three countries had failed to prevent their citizens from migrating without authorization to the U.S. After negotiations with these countries, the Trump Administration conditionally restored the aid, if migration was reduced through the creation of economic opportunities at home (Ibid 28). To secure ACA, the Trump Administration threatened to impose tariffs on Mexican goods if Mexico did not agree to receive Central American migrants under MPP and to strengthen its own immigration enforcement at its southern border with Guatemala and in the interior of the country. As a result, Mexco deployed more than 25,000 members of its

[261] According to U. S. Customs and Border Protection, in 2019, there were 339,135 apprehensions at the RGV region alone, out of 851,508 total apprehensions at the U. S. southwest border that year. That is, 40 percent of all border apprehensions in 2019, took place at the RGV region.

[262] Apprehensions at the border declined drastically, from 133,000 in May 2019, to 30,000 in March 2020 (Ibid 26).

National Guard to enforce immigration laws in Mexco's northern and southern borders and in the interior, particularly along routes popular with smugglers (Ibid 28).

In response to the decision by Guatemala's Constitutional Court to block its president from signing an ACA with the U. S., Trump also threatened to impose tariffs on Guatemalan goods, tax remittances, and ban travel from Guatemala. Under economic pressure, Guatemala complied with U. S. demands (Ibid 26). In May 2019, the U. S. and Guatemala signed a *Memorandum of Cooperation* (MOC) to allow U. S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U. S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBD) to train Guatemalan security agents on immigration enforcement matters (Ibid 28). Between July and September of 2019, the U.S., Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras signed ACAs to send asylum seekers arriving at the U.S. -Mexco border, to first seek asylum in these three countries instead (known as *Safe Countries*). By December 2019, the U. S. began sending deported Mexican nationals on flights to the interior of Mexco, rather than to border cities through the *Resumption of Interior Repatriation Initiative* (RIRI), to make it more difficult for deported migrants to cross the U. S. border again (Ibid 16).

With these harsh anti-immigration policies in place, not only the number but also the demographic profile of Central American migrants arriving at the U.S.-Mexco border shifted. In May 2019, before most of these policies were implemented, Central Americans traveling as families -- such as Óscar, Tania, and Angie Valeria -- made up almost two-thirds of U. S. apprehensions at the border, accounting for 78 percent of apprehensions, whereas a year later, in June 2020, adults traveling without children made up 90 percent of the apprehensions (Ibid 26).

In 2020, the surge of the COVID-19 pandemic gave the Trump administration an opening -- in the name of public health -- to further close off the border, barring nonessential travel through land ports and ending cross-border tourism, but also preventing asylum seekers who were waiting in Mexco under the U.S. metering policy, from being admitted to ports of entry to register their claims (Ibid 26). By invoking a 1944 public health statute that gave power to the Surgeon General to block the entry of foreign nationals who pose a public health risk, the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued an order on March 20, 2020 that mandated all foreign nationals without authorization to enter the U. S. to be pushed back to Mexco or Canada or returned to their countries. This CDC order ended asylum at the U.S. southern border (Ibid 8, 13, 14, 80). Simultaneously, the administration assigned 100 Border Patrol agents and 500 ICE security investigations officers to ten "sanctuary" jurisdictions across the U. S. to support ICE's immigration operations and begin a 24-hour-a-day surveillance operations program around the homes and workplaces of unauthorized immigrants (ibid 45). During the same month, the U. S. CBP signed a *Targeting Development* Aid *to Migrants' Points of Origin Memorandum of Understanding* (MOU) with the U. S. Agency for International Development (USAID), agreeing to share anonymized demographic data on migrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras who are apprehended or determined to be inadmissible at the U.S.-Mexco border (Ibid 29).

Since the pandemic, the Trump administration put in place a sweeping response that has touched each part of the U. S. immigration system and includes some of the most daring historical actions on immigration policy to date: a ban on travel from 31 countries, and a suspension of immigration for most family and employment-based visa categories

and four temporary worker programs (Ibid 8, 12, 14). At the same time, the Trump administration continued to push forward the construction of the wall, building 229 miles of new and replacement barriers along the nearly 2,000-mile border corridor, with the goal of reaching 450 miles by the end of the year. As of July 2020, it had obtained a total of $15 billion for this purpose, with 30 percent of it appropriated by Congress, and the rest coming from repurposed funds from the Department of Defense accounts (Ibid 27).

In the four years of his administration, Trump has taken apart and rebuilt the U. S. immigration system, making hundreds of policy changes, mostly exclusively by the Executive Branch. Simultaneously, humanitarian protections have been severely diminished. The U. S. - Mexco border is now more secure than at any other time in U. S. history. Immigration enforcement seems arbitrary and legal immigration to the U. S. has decreased. These changes have taken place through sweeping presidential proclamations and executive orders, departmental policy, and many-layered technical changes. The Trump administration's policy changes will have lasting effects on the U. S. immigration system long after his time in office. His administration has mainstreamed a political discourse that fringes on the idea that legal as well as illegal immigration are a threat to the United States' economy and security (Ibid 3).

As I have shown through this analysis, the connections between media representations, affective associations, and ideological negotiations in the case of the refugee 'crisis' in the U S. southwest border, requires, according to Gutiérrez Rodríguez, that we approach it as an articulation of a contingency of a specific conjuncture of racism in the U. S. (2018: 17, 18). Her theorizing reminds us that the racist rhetoric and images involved in the production of the refugee 'crisis' at the U.S.–Mexco border and its political associations with violent crime that I propose, resurfaced during the 2016 presidential elections, framing Central American asylum-seekers as threats to the nation. This specific conjuncture of racism in the U. S. reactivated the white heteropatriarchal ethno-nation's racist fantasies of foreign invasion and loss of national identity and culture, legitimizing new forms of governing racialized bodies through harsher migration controls internally, and at the border. The swift expansion of migration controls in the U. S. during the Trump Administration is a clear example of a specific conjuncture of racism articulated by the trope of the refugee 'crisis' in public and political debates that operates within the logic of the coloniality of migration, today (ibid).

To critically understand the ramifications of the formation of a refugee crisis in the U. S. in this context, I cite political theorist and historian Achille Mbembé, who problematizes some of the basic elements of this peculiar moment of our times, which he defines as "a time of planetary entanglement," where capitalism, warfare, and the rapid advance of automated statistical systems, regimes of assessment of the natural world, and modes of prediction analyze and treat life as a finite and computable object, threatening the exceptionalism of human species and leading us toward the path of extinction (2019: 93, 96). He proposes that the planetary entanglement of our time is characterized by a "matrix of rules" designed to facilitate the "enclosure, contraction, and containment" of those deemed a biological threat[263] to the imaginary of the white heteropatriarchal ethno-nation (2019: 96, 97).

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[263] See Foucault's *Society Must Be Defended* (2003).

The matrix of rules, according to Mbembé, manifests through the spatial logics of the settler-colonial state[264] to differentiate and control who is a desirable member of the nation and who is not, who should be conferred citizenship and who should not. As such, he proposes that the settler-colonial state continues to deploy tactics of enclosure, contraction, and containment that are foundational to the racialized violence deployed against Black and Indigenous bodies in the formation of this nation. Historically, these spatial arrangements resemble the slave plantation[265], the Native American reservation,[266] the American Indian residential schools, [267] the national park system[268] (now managed by the Bureau of Land Management [BLM] of the Department of the Interior, which I have shown was implicated in Steinle's death), island prisons,[269] and historical migrant detention camps such as Ellis and Angel Islands, Japanese internment camps, and Guantanamo Bay detention camp in Cuba[270] (Ibid 97). These exclusionary spaces have historically functioned as the antecedent for the recent establishment of over 200 contemporary U. S. immigration detention facilities across the country and the refugee camps [271] in the southwest border, where some of the most vulnerable unwanted racialized bodies, including unaccompanied children, are enclosed, contracted, and contained through the logics of the settler-colonial state and the matrix of rules I discussed previously (Ibid).

According to a report by the American Immigration Council (2020), the U. S. has the largest immigration detention camp infrastructure in the world today, with hundreds of sites directly owned or under direct contract[272] by the federal government. Through a variety of DHS facilities[273] working closely with ICE and CBP, the immigration detention apparatus in the U. S. regulates the process of asylum adjudication, detention, and refugee resettlement. In these immigration detention camps, [Central American] asylum-seekers are most likely to be isolated from legal counsel and, as a result, they lose their asylum cases. In these contained spaces, they remain in indefinite detention without

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[264] See Wolf's theory of the *Logic of Elimination* of the settler-colonial state (2006: 388); Goeman (2013).
[265] Mendieta (2004); McKittrick (2011); Wacquant (2002).
[266] See Carroll (2014: 4-7); Perea et al. (2007: 193-278).
[267] See Adams (1995).
[268] See Neumann (2202: 185).
[269] The history of colonial violence against Black and Indigenous sovereignty can be mapped through the geography of island prisons in the U. S. (Perera & Pugliese 2021: 87), such as Alcatraz Island (Bauer 2021: 102; Melloy Guziak 2000: 25-26); Rikers Island (Foner 2015: 52); Deer Island (Gallay 2009: 47); McNeil Island (Young 2019: 71), and Guantánamo Bay (Derek 2006: 2006).
[270] See Werner (2009); Lloyd (2018); Sakurai (2002); Kaplan (2005); Steyn (2004).
[271] The camp represents the physical commitment of the state to creating a permanent state of exception, where it decides who lives and who dies; as long as the *state of exception* is established by the state, the potential for violence to become genocidal is there, as the suspension of citizens' rights is no longer reserved for emergencies but, is now becoming a normative function of modern democracies such as in the U. S. (Gonzales 2020: 339).
[272] ICE may avoid federal procurement rules by contracting with state or local governments, who then contract with private companies to operate their facilities. These include state and federal prisons, private detention centers, hotels, and even hospitals (American Immigration Council 2020; Mountz et al 2013).
[273] According to the American Immigration Council, most noncitizens in ICE custody are detained in Service Processing Centers (SPCs), Contract Detention Facilities (CDFs), Non-Dedicated Intergovernmental Service Agreements (IGSAs), Dedicated IGSAs (DIGSAs), and U. S. Marshals Service Intergovernmental Agreement (IGAs).

opportunities for release and experience significant mistreatment and abuse, including suffering the neglect of serious medical and mental health conditions (Cho et al 2020: 4).

Mbembé highlights that at the detention camp, the U. S. deploys harsher migration control tactics, such as the *blockade*, which is used to prohibit, obstruct, and limit who and what can enter and leave these enclosures. Military presence in and around these enclosed spatial arrangements, such as the one utilized in Palestine, maximizes constriction of "excess", "unwanted bodies" that are kept alive -- under the latest technologies of terror, state repression, and extrajudicial punishment -- only to be removed from the land and transported to remotes sites in unfamiliar countries and abandoned there, in unknown landscapes or let die[274] (Ibid 2019: 96-98). In the camps for foreigners, asylum seekers remain unfree and denied of the idea of "a shared humanity" after being rendered 'illegal' and criminalized for having moved across the land and water, into spaces and places where they should never have been undeserving of dignity (Ibid 97-103).

In this context, I propose that Salvadoran asylum seekers face blockades at the southwest border, when the U. S. government apprehends them as they attempt to cross the border and detains them indefinitely in the camp, empowering the DHS to impose a *state of exception*[275] on their bodies. DHS does so by demanding unreasonable "bail" amounts, denying their asylum claims, and ultimately rendering them disposable and deportable. By refusing to recognize Central American women and children as refugee-ed[276] persons and by denying their claims to asylum, the U. S. suspends their right to have rights, and their 'refugee protections', pronouncing them outside of the law and basically reducing them to "bare life"[277] (Gonzales 2020: 336, 337). The violence that undergirds racial capitalism and the settler-colonial state condemns refugee-ed fugitive bodies in the camp to indefinite detainment, exclusion, abandonment, uncertainty, and humiliation. Here, hunger, illness, abuse, rape, drownings, disappearances, murders, and the separation of children from their mothers' arms keep happening[278] as "old prejudices are constantly recycled" (Mbembé 2019: 97-99).

For instance, according to a report by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), child/family separation practices at the U.S.-Mexco border started in January 2017, when parents crossing the border without authorization were captured, detained, and criminally charged with a misdemeanor, as part of a pilot project in El Paso, Texas. Immigrant children who were taken from their parents' arms were unable to reunite with them, because the U. S. government failed to create a tracking system to facilitate their

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[274] See Foucault's biopolitics (1990) and Mbembé's necropolitics (2019).
[275] See Agamben (2005).
[276] The term refugee has a legal contextual meaning most often used within human rights discourses. In this study, I intentionally use the term "refugee-ed", as a form of discursive activism, to refer to a person's ongoing formation of identity that is always exceeding its present state, not necessarily by choice, but by external forces. See Coleman (2012 XLII).
[277] Gonzales offers that Central American refugee-ed women, children, and their allies have managed to fragment and resist the state's efforts to reduce them to bare life, through hunger strikes and organizing efforts. He coins the term *semi-state of exception* to speak of Central American immigrant resistances (2020: 336, 337).
[278] The immigration detention camps in the U. S. have their roots in the history of racial capitalism, as such, racialized and gendered violences are the norm (Gonzales 2020: 339).

reunification. By 2018, the U. S. government had implemented a "zero-tolerance" policy mandating that all migrants who cross the border without authorization -- including asylum-seekers -- be referred to the Department of Justice (DOJ) for prosecution. Any accompanying children under the age of 18 were taken away from their parents and scattered across the country, into approximately 100 shelters and other care facilities from the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). Under this policy, hundreds of Central American children under the age of 5, were separated from their families by the U. S. With significant pressure mounting and under a court order, the Trump administration was forced to end the practice of separating children/families at the border in June 2018. However, it remains unclear how many immigrant children in total were forcibly separated from their parents at the southwest border. Ultimately, HHS identified 2,814 children in its jurisdiction as of June 2018, while DHS estimated that it had separated 3,014 Central American children from their immigrant families[279]. As of May 2020, the government had identified at least 1,134 additional Central American children who were separated from their parents (SPLC March 23, 2022). In 2018, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) reported that as of October of the same year, there were 179 Salvadoran children aged 5-17, separated from their parents in unknown U. S. custody arrangements. This figure excludes separations where the child and the parent waived their right to reunification (American Civil Liberties Union 2018).

Child-taking for political ends is not a new experience for Salvadorans. The 1980s war is still fresh in the Salvadoran historical memory, providing the clearest example of it, according to Laura Briggs (2020). During this time, between 800 and 1,000 Salvadoran children were forcibly taken from their parents by military, paramilitary forces, and death squads, who were trained, armed, and paid by the U. S. government[280]. Holding power through terror was a Cold War strategy in Vietnam that the U. S. imported to El Salvador and that incorporated extrajudicial detentions, disappearances, and death to eliminate the "social base of the guerrilla" and break people's will to resist the military. With a $1- $2 million dollars per day investment in the Salvadoran war, the U. S. sought to control the future of the country "…by refusing to allow those suspected of being communists from raising a next generation" (85).

According to Briggs, the *Asociación Pro-Búsqueda de Niños y Niñas Desaparecidos*[281] attributes 90 percent of the child-taking during the 1980s war to the military and 10 percent to the guerrillas (87). The Interamerican Court of Human Rights ruled in 2005 that there are still many unanswered questions about the level of involvement of the *Atlacatl Battalion*[282] and the U. S. Military and intelligence advisors,

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[279] It is estimated that 94 percent of children separated from their families at U. S. borders from 2017-2018 were Central American and that 95 percent of family separations took place in the Yuma, Laredo, and RGV corridor (Homeland Security's Initial Progress Report of the Interagency Task Force on the Reunification of Families, Embargoed June 2021, in Rose June 2021).

[280] U. S. School of the Americas (Briggs 2020).

[281] Established in San Salvador in 1992 by Jesuit Priest Jon Cortina to investigate war-related child-taking (Briggs 2020: 87).

[282] Atlacatl in Nahuatl could mean water human being/people, water reed, scepter, symbol of leadership. In El Salvador, it is also the name of a controversial Indigenous warrior figure that some believe was fictionalized by the *Indigenista* policies of dictator General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez in El Salvador, which romanticized "conquest indians" after his regime carried out the 1932 Matanza (Tilley

who are believed to have trained the Salvadoran military and paramilitary forces in torture and in the implementation of scorched-earth strategies and the child-kidnapping policy in El Salvador. The Atlacatl Battalion was trained by the U. S. School of the Americas in North Carolina, and it was advised by U. S. military advisors during the war. A recent *Washington Post* article cites that of over 1,000 victims of El Mozote massacre -- one of the worst mass killings in the modern history of El Salvador -- more than 500 were children, and that these killings carried out by a U. S.-trained and supported rapid reaction infantry battalion in 1981, haunt the U. S. southwest border today (Rauda and Washington 2021).

Venezuelan journalist Carlos Henríquez Consalvi'[283] describes scenes from El Mozote's massacre site through his vivid testimony in his book *La Terquedad del Izote* (1992). He states: "repeating house, after house, after house"; "children embraced by their mothers"; "their skin looked like parchment"; "vultures having a feast"; "the sun lifts the unbearable stench of death". He recalls "amid burnt bones and debris, hundreds of U.S.-made 5.56 caliber M-16 shells and a NATO ammunition box left behind" … and "on a piece of wood, written with charcoal there is an inscription:

> *Aquí estuvo el Atlacátl*[284]
> *El papá de los subversivos. Segunda Compañía.*
> *Aquí la cagaron los hijos de puta*
> *y, si todavía huevos le hacen falta*
> *pídalos por correspondencia al Batallón Atlacátl.*
> *Nosotros los angelitos del gobierno volveremos.*
> *Queremos terminar con ustedes.*
> (Henríquez Consalvi 1992: 109 in Binford 2018: 53).
>
> Here was the Atlacatl.
> The daddy of the subversives. Second company.
> Here the sons of a bitch fucked up
> And, if they are still missing balls
> Ask for them by mail to the Atlacatl Battalion.

2005: 84, 85, 91-95, 194, 197, 204). In 1981, the U. S. created, trained, and supported El Batallón de Infantería de Reacción Inmediata (BIRI) Atlacatl, the most feared and infamous Salvadoran military elite forces responsible for rape, disappearance, child-taking, and brutal massacre during the 1980s civil war (Menjívar 2005: 14, 15), including the Massacre of El Mozote in December 1981, and the assassination of six Jesuit priests and a mother and her daughter living in the Central American University (UCA) premises in December of 1989 (Binford 2018: 35).

[283] Also known as "Santiago", Henríquez Consalvi documented the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran wars in the late 1970s and 1980s. He created the famous clandestine *Radio Venceremos* that broadcasted the Salvadoran war from the mountains for 11 years, and the Peace Accords in 1992; he is also the founder of the *Museo de la Palabra e Imagen*, dedicated to preserving the cultural and historic patrimony of Salvadorans (Cover, La Terquedad del Izote 1992).

[284] *Atlacatl* is a Nahuatl name given to a fictitious Nawa-Pipil warrior; it means the lord of the reed, the king. In El Salvador, this Indigenous figure has been co-opted by the military and the government to symbolize the unknown soldier, the supporter of independence, the resistance of the nation that honors the power of God and the nation, similar to the country's name's sake, El Salvador, which means 'the savior' and it glorifies an imposed European religion upon the people of Kushkatan (Marín 2007: 16).

We, the little angels from hell, will be back.
We want to finish all of you."[285]

Briggs concludes that even if U. S. advisors did not directly urge child-taking for political ends during the 1980s war in El Salvador, every child who was forcibly taken out of the country passed for orphan, and then, 'legally' adopted transnationally in the U. S. went through the U. S. embassy in San Salvador[286]. She cites Robert White, the 1980-81 U. S. ambassador to El Salvador, to comment on the Carter, Reagan, and Bush administrations: "The Salvadoran military knew that we knew, and they knew when we covered up the truth. It was a clear signal that, at a minimum, we tolerated this. If they knew and didn't speak against it, U. S. officials aided and abetted [Salvadoran] child-taking" (89).

El Mozote massacre is but one historical example of U. S. involvement in the taking of Salvadoran children from their parents during the 1980s war that does not begin to account for the 77,000 human beings brutally tortured and killed, or the thousands of others who were forcibly disappeared and that remain disappeared as of today, for they too, were someone's Indigenous children. For Salvadorans who know of El Mozote, bearing witness to the drownings of Óscar Martínez and his twenty-three-month-old daughter Angie Valeria in the Rio Grande waters in the summer of 2019, it is not possible to do so, without first confronting the "grammar of terror" produced by U. S. Cold War interventionist policies in El Salvador. Since prior to La Matanza of 1932, Salvadorans re-member ethnocide[287] and connect it to the U. S. necropolitical regime, which has marked for death anyone considered a biological threat to the imaginary of this white heteropatriarchal ethno-nation, whether an insurgent in the Salvadoran Cold War historical imaginary then, or an asylum seeker at the U.S.-Mexco border, today.

To curb unauthorized migration into the U. S. and control the biological threat of Central American immigrants at the southwest border, Gutiérrez Rodríguez's theorizing offers that declaring a refugee 'crisis'[288] or emergency, allows for an expansion of the nation's sovereign power, which according to Mbembé, takes place through strategies such as *remote borderization* (2019: 99, 100). These strategies, he proposes, transform the edges of the settler-colonial state, and delimit distinct sovereignties to track and govern fugitive bodies that exceed the spatial imaginaries and temporal bounds of the white heteropatriarchal ethno-nation (Ibid 98, 99). Further, remote borderization strategies are carried out from afar and take place through a combination of harsher migration controls and militarized technologies[289] to justify hunting down, surrounding,

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[285] My translation (March 2022).
[286] It is reported that 2,354 Salvadoran children who were adopted received immigrant visas from the embassy during the war (Fainaru 1996 in Arauz 2014).
[287] Bermúdez (2017).
[288] See Barton's media study utilizing Critical Discourse Analysis on the 'Syrian refugee Crisis' in Europe in 2015, which (in)visibilizes Kurdish peoples (2018).
[289] Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has a large, militarized presence in the RGV region, including nine Border Patrol stations, two airfields (or "Air Branches"), and three ports (or "Marine Branches"). In this region there are 13 of the 52 land ports of entry (official border crossings) that exist between the U. S.

capturing, and killing excess bodies in motion, and reducing them to flesh. Under a refugee 'crisis', asylum seekers become faceless forms under a radar that are menacing and mobile, and therefore, must simply be destroyed (Ibid 100-103). These remote borderization strategies, take on new meaning, after videos of the Mexican Navy's helicopters surfaced, flying low over the Suchiate River between Mexico and Cuahtemalla in 2018, to create large waves and harm the movement of Central American immigrant families advancing in large groups, as they attempted to cross the river towards Ciudad Hidalgo, Mexico (Garcia Rawlings 2018).

While spectacles of hunting down Central American immigrant families play out in the news media, Mbembé proposes that the settler-colonial state simultaneously relinquishes any responsibility for migrants' lives and defers its legal accountability for their safety and well-being, and for protecting their human rights (Ibid 97). Instead, the settler-colonial state uses human rights discourses and humanitarian campaign to enclose, contract, contain, and deport refugee-ed persons[290]. Mbembé points out that the aim of remote borderization strategies is not to turn the settler-colonial nation into an impenetrable place, but to grant themselves alone the privilege of the right to free movement across the entire planet (Ibid 103).

Despite remote borderization strategies deployed by the U. S. to control its borders, Cuéllar highlights that Salvadorans are migrating through and beyond unfamiliar geographies that are not only restricted by militarized encounters but also, contained by securitization technologies that enable their capture, which forces them towards riskier passages (2021: 61). In the process of avoiding these fortified sites of biopolitical control, Salvadoran families who migrate to the U. S. become not just 'mojados' once (wet), but "tres veces mojados"[291], as they venture to enter border-rivers multiple times to avoid detention and reach U. S. soil. Cuéllar describes the historical experiences of "wetness" of Central American migration as "a mobility punctuated by encounters with rivers, transboundary waters, riparian ecologies, or river-borders"[292] (Ibid 59, 60). The insecurity and vulnerability of Central American migrants caught by the camera lenses in the 'fluidity' of river-borders, according to Cuéllar, amplifies the socio-ecological collapse

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and Mexco. At the height of the Unaccompanied Minor 'crisis' in 2014, the RGV region had Remote Video Surveillance systems (Cameras), Remote Monitoring Surveillance systems (sensors), night vision goggles, Forward Looking Infrared (FLIR) radar, Z-Backscatter (mobile x-ray machine) van, Global Positioning System, Thermal Acquisition Monocular System, FLIR Recon Handheld Camera, Radiation Isotope Identification Device, Personal Radiation Device, Tethered Aerostat Radar System (TARS), a large helium-filled balloon holding radar equipment that can "see" for about 200 miles and detect activity on the ground at closer distances. Predator-B drones and manned surveillance aircraft operated from a CBP Air and Marine base in Corpus Christi (Meyer 2015: 18).

[290] See Perugini and Neve Gordon (2015).

[291] Horacio Roque Ramírez's lecture. University of California, Santa Barbara (2012). The term "mojado" is a Salvadoran slang for crossing the U. S. border. It is usually not offensive when said among Salvadorans. It is considered offensive when used by non-Salvadorans to describe Salvadoran immigrants, depending on context and tone. Ramírez explained the term "tres veces mojado"/having to cross three borders, as a site of resistance and resilience of the Salvadoran spirit, while contextualizing U. S. anti-immigrant policies.

[292] River-borders on the Mesoamerican to the U. S. route include Río Paz, Río Goascorán, Río Usumacinta, Río Suchiate, Río Bravo or Rio Grande.

lived in Central America every day, which he says, prompted their expulsion in the first place, but he argues, it also commodifies their suffering (Ibid 62).

Similar to the child-taking experiences of the 1980s (un)civil war in El Salvador, Cuéllar points out that river-border crossings today are contextualized in the historical memory of Salvadorans as a survival strategy, which proved useful for many to avoid being killed, then. He highlights two major massacres that took place at river-borders in the 1980s: the *Río Sumpúl* (1980) and *Río Lempa* (1981). In the former, the Salvadoran army executed about 600 women, children, and men at the riverbanks, who were trying to escape to Honduras; and in the latter, about 200, although the data are unclear (Rauda, Dimas, and Palacios 2019b). As people ran for their life to escape the indiscriminate fury of military bullets, many were shot to death and or fell in the water, drowning. Other testimonies of these massacres recall soldiers bayonetting children and slashing babies with machetes (Molders 2019, 19). The brutalities of these riparian experiences in the Salvadoran historical memory help us understand that although rivers may function as natural barriers that may or may not prevent access to the other side, in some cases, they become sites of death. According to Cuéllar, rivers are also central to piecing together a cultural history of Salvadoran mobility practices and survival strategies in difficult times. Further, he notes that these experiences, in and of themselves, constitute an archive of riverine practices paramount to everyday life and death for Salvadoran families and aggrieved communities, who simply refuse to forget (63). To Cuéllar's riparian archive of life and death, I add the *Río Sensunapan*, which holds on its banks, some of the unmarked mass graves from the 1932 Matanza, and the *Río Cuyuapa*, which on February 22, 1983, bore witness to a massacre in the *Cantón Las Hojas*, both in *Centzunat*, western El Salvador. In both river massacres combined, tens of thousands of Indigenous men were brutally exterminated by government forces (Sánchez Interview June 2019; University of Minnesota 1992). Tata Nicolás Sánchez, a Nawa-Pipil spiritual guide and leader states: "*El río siempre ha sido sagrado para nosotros, pero ahora que los huesos de los abuelos descansan allí, es todavía más sagrado*" (the river has always been sacred to us, but now, that the bones of our grandfathers rest there, it is even more sacred grounds) (Interviews 2019).

While the Trump Administration's matrix of rules and remote borderization strategies supported the formation of the migrant [detention] camp at the U.S.-Mexco border and significantly reorganized the political contours of U. S. empire during his term, these actions do not represent a departure from the past or a rupture from the project of modernity that is foundational to the emergence of this settler-colonial nation. Rather, according to Sylvia Wynter, there is a clear and traceable teleological trajectory that connects the establishment of the U. S. with the European logics of racial capitalism and the settler-colonial ideologies that engendered the *"new world"*, following the 1492 voyage of Christopher Columbus (McKittrick 2015: 164). Wynter points out that, in the making of a new world out of Abya Yala, subjectivities such as race, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, etc. were imagined for the first time on this hemisphere -- as we know them today -- giving rise to an imaginative geo-racial space constituted by oppositional binaries that have entangled and divided people in social relations of power through their strong connections with the land and water (Ibid 165).

Further, in Wynter's geo-racial analysis of the production and meaning of "Man", the new world stems from European medieval cosmographic conceptions of the world[293], which bifurcated the world into sites of habitability in the temperate zones, and uninhabitability in the torrid zones, prior to the first Columbus voyage in 1492. These European cartographic distinctions of space continued to be used during the Enlightenment to create heteropatriarchal religious, and racialized taxonomies in the new world,[294] resulting in the marking of uninhabitable spaces[295] with the 'inhuman', 'dysgenic', 'immoral' bodies that dwelled in these regions (Ibid 124-133). Thus, the tropics became the experiences of northern Whites "moving into an alien world - alien in climate, vegetation, people, and disease" (Metzler 1997: 74).
The medieval teleologies that classified the tropics as "submerged underwater" and "too hot for habitation", in other words incapable of sustaining life originated, according to Wynter, from the biblical Flood,[296] which first defined habitable and uninhabitable

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[293] In the Middle Ages, the world was conceived according to a corpus of travel literature (Marco Polo c. 1271-1292; Odoric and Pordenone c. 1318-1330; and Sir John Mandeville c. 1356), along with Christian philosophy (the Fall and the Flood in the Book of Genesis 6:9-9:12 of the Bible), and patristic doctrine (Jerome's *Liber de nominibus Hebraicis* and Angelomus' *Commentarius in Genesin*), which supported the classic scholastic idea of three continents: Asia, Europe, and Africa, entirely surrounded by water (see tripartite or Noachid maps). Popular medieval geography and climatology used the traditions established by the texts of such authorities as Aristotle, Plato, and Pliny, to divide Earth into five, sometimes seven climatic zones (Albertus Magnus c. 1260), termed Macrobian zones (after its author, Aurelious Macrobious c. AD 400). According to Macrobious's zonal theory, the hottest zone was around the equator, and it was believed to be too hot to be inhabited or traversed (attributed to Bede's *De natura rerum* (c. 673) and Gervase of Tilbury and William of Conches (c. 1080-1154)); the coldest on the poles, and the temperate zones between them. Medieval scholastic philosophy used unusual climate - such as heat - to explain deviations from the European norm. This environmentalist paradigm formed by the connections between climate, health, and medicine ran from Greek antiquity, via the Middle Ages, through to the eighteenth century to establish 'otherness' and explain cultural differences. In this view, water separated the temperate zones from the torrid zones allowing the tropics to exist distant and in juxtaposition to the normality of temperate lands. The predominant medieval scientific view, the humoral theory (see Hippocrates' *Airs, Waters, Places*), also reiterated that climate affected the diversity of the human race, resulting from accidents of nature (Metzler 1997: 71-75; Friedman 2000).

[294] See Kant's "On the different races of man" (1775); Blumenbach's "Degeneration of the races" (1781); Hume's "Of the Populousness of Ancient nations" (1748).

[295] During the Enlightenment, racial, religious, and gendered classifications emerged as a measure of humanness, and it was later reinscribed through biological determinism or hierarchies of eugenics for the selected ones and for the dysgenic Others, who were deselected for their hereditary bio-evolutionary defectiveness and sinful character (McKittrick 2015: 129, 130). The discarded ones were peoples of color – particularly Black and Indigenous - who according to Wynter, were classified by the biopolitical colonial apparatus for their filth, underclass, impurity, disease, contagion, moral degradation, and pollution, which she explains, could only be attained through the construction of whiteness (Ibid 131). The European formation of subaltern spaces and bodies guaranteed that Indigenous and Black bodies would remain fixed within geographies of uninhabitability and deviance, criminality, contagion, and filth, validating their inhumanity. Thus, in the European teleological construct, the essential condition of a space deemed uninhabitable is the occupier's inhumanity. According to this logic, out of place bodies and spaces must be excised (McKittrick 2015: 132-136).

[296] According to the Book of Genesis in the Bible, after the Flood, each son of Noah received a continent: Shem, the first born received Europe; Japheth, Asia; and Ham, Africa. Patristic author Jerome posited that Ham received Africa because his name is derived from 'hot' (calidus) and Angelomus connected Ham and his progeny with Africa because of the hot and humid climate (Metzler 1997: 74).

geographies based on the moral character of people who inhabited them. Habitable regions contained European peoples who were redeemed by God to rise above water in the tempered zones. The uninhabitable areas held the spiritually degraded elements that had to be submerged in water[297] for purification purposes. Over time, through the language of discovery, conquest, and colonization the U. S. was transformed from a "torrid" into a "temperate zone" - an epistemological shift that sought to impose homogenization and privatization of the land and water to sustain European habitation, based on the notion that "no humans were previously occupying it[298]" (Ibid 129).

Centuries later, the migrant [detention] camp -- a site of excision -- in the borderized thresholds of U. S. empire functions to restrain indeterminately, the movement and the life of masses of 'excess', 'alien', 'fugitive', out of place bodies from the south, where they must live in what Europeans previously defined as unlivable spaces. In these constructed anti-human cartographies, Salvadoran families who migrate north from the tropics, are still separated from the 'temperate zone' by [the Rio Grande's] water and continue to derive their 'inferior' location in the world from the geographical spaces they occupy, according to European medieval imaginaries. This calculated manhunt and caging of Indigenous bodies, like animals,[299] into the migrant camp at the southwest border for the purpose of excising them, inevitably narrows the options for families on the move. In the case of Óscar and Angie Valeria, from a Western gaze, it permanently fixed their teleologically ascribed inhumanity and wickedness within the river. There, submerged under water - as "in the biblical Flood", "*in its natural place", terra-nullius* or no man's land - father and daughter lie, waiting for a purification ritual, where they will remain enclosed, contracted, contained… excised, and no longer thought of as bodies of flesh, and their names will soon be forgotten (Wynter qtd. in McKittrick 2015: 129-131, 136; Mbembé 2019: 101).

While Óscar and Angie Valeria's physical absence from the land remains a ghostly presence in the water, from a Western gaze, nonetheless it remains there, defying a European geo-racial fantasy of white bodies in White spaces and a telos of racial, religious, and gendered purity and superiority that configures the structure of the settler-colonial nation. Simultaneously, their ethereal presence in the water unravels the possibility of making new claims through the re-imaginings of ancestral knowledges such as *ilnamiki* and *ojo de venado*. Thus, it is possible for Óscar and Angie Valeria to re-emerge from being permanently submerged in the river, where they are subjected in time and space by the lens of a camera, to locate their presence in the permanency of the landscape. In *apan*, according to Nahua traditions, alternative forms of life are possible. Lara-Martínez posits that the river, as a living entity, is a geographic seat where space-time-lived, refuses to disassociate events that occur in a place, from the place where they occur (2017: 200). Indigenous understandings of the world, allow us to naturally re-member for posterity, the trans-territorial collective identities, knowledges, agencies, and sovereignties of Nawa-Pipil stories that have never been peripheral in land and or in

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[297] Wynter "1492" (1995: 22). A medieval myth holds that Ham was cursed by Noah for his sexual impropriety on the arc, a sin that has been used to justify the enslavement of Blacks based on a matrix of sex, skin color, and religion (Goldenberg 2009).

[298] Terra nullius, no-man's-land.

[299] Rhetoric used by Donald J. Trump in his 2016 presidential campaign, shown previously.

water, but central to it. Therefore, in the fluidity and movement of Rio Grande's waters, Óscar Martínez and his family may have seen *apan*, as a beginning, and from within these sacred spaces of life, their experiences help us understand what it means to be human through the poesis of their storytelling and the extraordinary power of their will to move through unfamiliar terrain and wet their feet in water.

Part II: South of the Border: *San Martín Perulapan*, San Salvador, El Salvador

Of Nawat-Pipil origin, San Martín's name prior to the Spanish invasion is *Polulapan*[300] or *Pelulapan* or *Pesulapan* or *Perulapan*, which comes from the Nawat-Pipil words: *pulul, perul, pesul*: mud; j*uilin*: sweet water fish or catfish; and *apan*: *río; Perulapan* means *in the muddy waters* o *river of mud,* or *river of catfish* and it describes a place with and/or surrounded by abundant waters (Meza 2012: 460). Today, San Martín is no longer recognized by its original Nawat-Pipil name -- *Perulapan* -- or for being originally an Indigenous settlement in Kushkatan. Instead, it is mostly known as a region controlled by gangs and for having some of the highest crime rates in the nation[301]. This was the hometown of Óscar Martínez and his family, prior to migrating to the U. S. in 2019, and encountering death in the waters of Rio Grande (Semple 2019).

One of 19 municipalities in the Department of San Salvador, San Martín is situated along the Camino Real,[302] in an administrative and geographic zone known now, as the Metropolitan Area of San Salvador (*Área Metropolitana de San Salvador* or AMSS), at approximately 720 meters above sea level, which endow the region with picturesque views of rolling green hills, streams, rivers, lakes, and volcanoes. Its geographic limits are to the north, *San José Guayabal* and *Oratorio de Concepción*; to the east, *San Bartolomé Perulapía* y *San Pedro Perulapán*; to the west, *Tonacatepeque*; and to the south, *Ilopango* and the Lake of *Ilopango*[303] (Flores Montalvo 2013: 21).

The oldest records of *San Martín Perulapan* are found in the *Relación Marroquín*[304] (1532), where it is described by the bishop as part of the Villa de San Salvador, in *Kushkatan* territories, with 350 tributary houses (Amaroli 1991: 44, 47). A more generous historical record of *San Martín Perulapan* appears in the chronicles of Monsignor Pedro Cortés y Larraz, in his report to SMG Carlos III, titled *Descripción geográphico-moral de la Diócesis de Goathemala*, dated 1771 (Ramírez Luengo 2019). In it, Cortés y Larraz documents that *San Martín Perulapan* is located five leguas

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[300] San Martín is believed to have been the original site of La Ciudad de los Caballeros or City of the Knights, established by Martín de Estete in or around the end of January of 1530, for the purposes of expanding the geographical dominion of Pedro Arias Dávila, governor of Nicaragua and Panama (1514-1531); Estete's efforts failed and soon after, the Villa of San Miguel in the eastern part of El Salvador was established in or around May or June of 1530, by Pedro de Alvarado's troops to fend off Esteste's presence from the Kushkatan territories (Alvarenga et al 1994: 83, 84).

[301] Available crime data for San Martín show that between 2002-2007, violent crime rates (assault, theft, threats, and extorsion) increased significantly in urban areas, while homicide rates were ten times higher than the international standards established by the World Health Organization. Geo-crime data analyses show that the entire territory of San Martín was under gang control or influence (MS-13, or Barrio 18th, or both). Nine out of 10 residents declared having being victims of gang crime and most believed that violence and insecurity related to organized crime was the most significant problem they faced in their municipality (Flores Montalvo 2013: 94, 95).

[302] See Browning for a map of the environs of San Salvador during colonial times tracing the Royal Road (1971: 98).

[303] The Ilopango caldera is a super volcano that has had over a dozen quaternary, explosive eruptions dating 1.5 million-years ago, some of which have been among the most catastrophic in Central America, depositing thick ashes, pumice, and pyroclastic density currents over much of El Salvador, affecting Mayan communities (Jicha et al 2021: 2).

[304] Bishop Francisco Marroquín collected the testimonies of *encomenderos* in the Villa of San Salvador, Cuscatlán, in 1532 (Amaroli 1991: 44, 47).

(leagues) from the town and Parish of *Coxutepeque* -- which is the responsibility of Dominican friars [305] -- in the *Valley de Giboga*[306], between the volcanoes of *San Vicente* and *San Salvador*, where "the land is fertile" and there is "a mighty river" by the same name (Ibid 194-196).

He reports that *San Martín Perulapan* has "a population of 850 persons[307]" and describes the region as "*muy agradable por tantas siembras de caña y muchos trapiches*" (very pleasant for its abundant sugar cane crops and sugar cane mills) (Ibid 196), adding that "*Las cosechas de este territorio son maíces, muchísima caña, ganados, frijoles, verduras y cuanto quiera plantarse, porque esta tierra es fértil… con todo y con tanta caña, son indios que pueden tener dinero abundante y van sumamente desnudos*" (The crops of this territory are corn, lots of sugar cane, cattle, beans, vegetables and how much one wants to plant, because this land is fertile… with everything and so much sugar cane, they are *indians* who can have plenty of money and they go extremely naked) (Ibid). He remarks on the bounty of the land, perhaps as a motivating factor for the King to send more priests to the region to continue re-organizing the land. A few pages after, he reveals his vision for the region, stating: "*Para todo convendría extinguir los valles, hatos y caseríos y reducirlo todo a pueblos…*" (For everything it would be convenient to extinguish the valleys, the herd parcels and hamlets and *reduce it* all to towns…") (Ibid 198).

To "*reduce it all to towns"* historically refers to implementing the Spanish system[308] of reorganizing Indigenous communal spaces and people into towns -- specifically "indian towns" -- a coercive system imposed by the Spanish authorities in the isthmus region, as early as 1552 (Fonseca Corrales 1993: 97). This re-organization of people was also a re-organization of space, which some scholars have compared it to a social engineering project of "flesh and bones"[309] that resulted in the de-structurization of Indigenous communities for the benefit of the invading forces. More explicitly, Spanish reductions in Kushkatan consisted of the gathering of Indigenous bodies in contained spaces to extract free labor and collect taxes from them, while forcibly imposing Eurocentric religious beliefs and language (Ibid 96). In other words, Spanish reductions became durable socio-spatial redistributions of power intended to administer the control and exploitation of natural and human resources, and the consolidation of territories for the benefit of empire (Ibid 97). The concentration of Indigenous peoples forced into "Indian" towns in Central America -- including in El Salvador -- was part of the Dominican belief system, which, according to Fonseca Corrales, was inspired by

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[305] The first two friars were assigned to the Villa of San Salvador in 1551, and by the end of the century, 7 friars and 25 "doctrineros" or "doctrinaires" were administering 21 Indigenous towns in central El Salvador (Martínez Peñate: 2015: 22).

[306] Today, it is known as "*Valley de Jiboa*" or Jiboa Valley. Comes from the Nawat-Pipil word *jilo, shilut, xilot* which means baby corn and the word *at, atl* which means water. Jiboa means in Nawat-Pipil, río de los jilotes or river of the baby corn (Meza 2012: 490).

[307] While Cortés y Larraz does not initially describe the racial or ethnic make-up of the inhabitants of *Pesulapan*, reports from the Vicaries of San Salvador on or around 1785, refer to these localities as exclusively "indian" towns (Castellón Osegueda 2019: 169).

[308] Based on the 1542 Leyes Nuevas (Fonseca Corrales 1993: 97).

[309] See Jeremy Mumford (2017).

Bartolomé de Las Casas's philosophy against the use of weapons to evangelize in the New World and instead, relying on Christian pacifism[310] to achieve colonial goals (Ibid).

In *Kushkatan*, "Indian" towns such as *San Martín Perulapan* were planned and built according to European patterns of urban development (Ibid); preference was given to sites that were rich in agricultural production or mining, and had good access to water; many "Indian" towns were established nearby or in existing Indigenous settlements as a strategy to control the population and to gain access of their already established sources of food, textiles, and other basic sustenance products (Ibid 106). Each "indian" town was assigned to a parish, which oversaw the violent Christianization process and, most importantly, the collection of goods that Indigenous peoples produced to sustain the church and the Crown[311]. The more "Indians" concentrated in a town, the more *diezmos y tributos* (tithes and tributes) collected by the colonial authorities. Tithes and tributes were collected in accordance with the traditional local Indigenous economy[312] based on age, gender, and marriage status (Ibid 97, 101, 121).

In response to colonial authorities' attempts to contain Native bodies in reductions, Indigenous peoples started fleeing to the mountains to resist Spanish dominion; there, in the thick jungles and "*peñoles*" -- as they called them -- they hid effectively for long periods, as they sought to re-produce their ways of living and circumvent the violent religious and economic practices[313], family structure, slavery, and systemic exploitation imposed by Spaniards since the invasion (Ibid 98, 101-105, 124-126). Despite being required to remain in reductions to pay tithes and tributes and meet the compulsory labor obligations[314] imposed by colonial administrators, which required them to work in the haciendas[315] and the [316] sugar cane mills in the central area, or to serve as *tamemes*[317] in the fields and mines, many Indigenous people fled their homes in desperation (Ibid 123). In these early forced migratory journeys, many Indigenous people died; others, settled far from their homes, vanishing into the countryside and living off

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[310] See Carolina Sancholuz for an analysis of de las Casas''s philosophy in *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Inidas* (2013: 201)

[311] *Diezmos* were an obligation paid by Indigenous peoples that sustained the church; it consisted of giving ten percent of the agricultural production of a parish. *Tributos* were a charge imposed on Indigenous peoples ages 10-60 years old, to pay to the colonial authorities in products or money (Pinto Soria 1993: 325, 327).

[312] Corn, beans, pepper, ceramics, cotton thread, textiles, baskets, wax, honey, etc. The exception were chickens, which were part of the import economy.

[313] See the impact of "tributos, encomienda, slavery, and repartimiento" in Fonseca Carrera (1993).

[314] *Repartimiento* is a colonial system that provided for a compulsory draft of labor that obliged people or sometimes entire villages to work for unspecified periods, for a meager reward (Browning 1971: 73).

[315] A sizable property dedicated to cattle, sugar cane, indigo, cotton, and later coffee (Pinto Soria 1993: 325).

[316] *Indigofera tinctoria* and *indigofera suffruticosa*, a native plant to the region that produces a deep-blue dye known locally as añil or jiquilite (Browning 1971: 66; Pinto Soria 1993: 327), or *shiquilit or xiqiuilite* in Nawat-Pipil (Hernandez 2019: 119). Indigo is considered the root cause of capital accumulation in colonial El Salvador, starting from the end of the sixteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century. Xiquilite leaves were soaked in water and let to rot in stone vats, where bare human feet were used to macerate the putrid matter, until loads or *zurrones* of 214 pounds could be formed for export in Goathemala (Martínez Peñate 2002: 307; Browning 1971: 70).

[317] A person who carries heavy loads on their back (Pinto Soria 1993: 326). From the Nahuatl word *tlamamah* (Karttunen 1992: 280).

the bounty of the land, losing their cultural connections with their places of origin, which accelerated the disintegration of Indigenous communities in *Kushkatan* (Ibid). Virginia Tilley (2005) reports that by the end of the colonial period, many Indigenous settlements in El Salvador had drastically declined or disappeared altogether and, as much as 25 percent of the rural population was living scattered in the forests and hills, dispersed amid a matrix of hidden pathways that led to remote hamlets and *cantones*, a pattern that continues to delineate *San Martín*'s geospatial realities, today (111).

The rugged geography of *San Martín Perulapan* made it possible for Indigenous fugitives to evade capture for long periods of time and to successfully hide in the dense jungles, where they often employed traps, ambushes, and or engaged in bloody battles with their oppressors (Fonseca Corrales 1993: 125). According to Tilley (2005), ethnopolitical tensions between Indigenous communities and the dominant group -- which included ladinos -- were common in *Kushkatan* and were often, of explosive nature; these centered on material grievances such as forced labor in the haciendas, extortionist taxes, arbitrary punishment, and other abuses that emanated from the racial split in the administration of power during colonial times (Ibid 115, 119). To demonstrate the vitality of Indigenous resistance in El Salvador during colonial times, Tilley cites at least 43 Indigenous uprisings between 1771 and 1918, of which one-fourth of them (ten), took place in the surroundings of *Coxutepeque*[318] Indigenous towns, such as *San Martín Perulapan* (Ibid 123-127). Martínez Peñate also documents a slave revolt in *KushTata n*, in 1625, when around 2,000 Africans attempted to gain their freedom (2002: 309). Cortés y Larraz's chronicles remark about the challenging terrain of the region and its abundant aquatic life, mentioning some of the many streams and rivers that characterize the picturesque and productive landscape, which simultaneously, made this geography an ideal space for Indigenous fugitives to hide and or fight back:

> *El camino para ir a los anexos es malo… se cruzan varios arroyos y un río de algún caudal, llamado del Carmen … se cruzan algunos arroyos y un río de algún caudal llamado Michapan*[319] *y para todos hay caminos barrancosos, con subidas y bajadas, quebradas y piedras.* (Ibid 195).
>
> "The road to go to the annexed towns is bad… you have to cross several streams and a river with somewhat of a flow named del Carmen… you have to cross several streams and a river with somewhat of a flow named Michapan and in all directions there are ravines, steep hills with [steep] downslopes, minor streams and rocks (Ibid 195)[320].

[318] Coxutepeque Indigenous revolts: 1796, 1814-15, 1837, 1868, 1870, 1871,1872, 1885, 1889, 1890 (Tilley 2005: 123-127).
[319] *Michin* is the Nawat-Pipil word for fish; Michapan means in Nawat-Pipil, *river of fish* (Meza 2012: 206).
[320] My translation, 2022.

As for the inhabitants of the region, Cortés y Larraz refers to them as "indios" instead of "persons"[321], highlighting what he perceives as their state of depravity, based on Indigenous people not wearing clothing while bathing in the rivers. Cortés y Larraz avoids documenting the high temperatures and humidity of the region, which makes it a quotidian necessity for the residents in this region of *Kushkatan* to be unclothed and to immerse in rivers, streams, and lakes to cool down from the oppressive humidity and heat. Using his Eurocentric, religious perspective, he emphasizes the nudity of bathers in the rivers and their drunkenness to construct a modern/colonial imaginary of racial impurity and moral decay in the *San Martín Perulapan's* geographies, amplifying the colonial difference[322] between conquerors and conquered to justify the Spanish civilizing project in *Coxutepeque*:

> *…los escándalos que ha advertido son de ordinario nacidos de la embriaguez que abunda mucho…y de la deshonestidad y desenvoltura que hay, principalmente en los ríos en donde se mezclan hombres y mujeres sin distinción, ni recato alguno, del todo desnudos, sin pudor, ni vergüenza de los hombres, ni temor de Dios, de que resultan muchas y gravísimas ofensas a la Divina Majestad.* (Ibid 196-197).
>
> …the scandals that he[323] has warned, are usually born out of the drunkenness that abounds a lot…and of the dishonesty and ease that there is, mainly in the rivers where men and women join without distinction, or modesty, completely naked, without shyness, neither shame of men, nor fear of God, which results in many and very serious offenses against the Divine Majesty. (Ibid 196-97).[324]

On his final reflections about the Parrish of *Coxutepeque*, Cortés y Larraz continues to make emphasis on how the riverine geographies and landscapes of the fertile San Martín Perulapan region punctuate Indigenous ways of living, contributing -- according to his Eurocentric perspective -- to the promiscuity and degradation of its inhabitants:

> *… en orden a bañarse en los ríos promiscuamente hombres y mujeres… es desorden general en todas estas provincias y que aun las mujeres en algunos parajes, puestas en el baño, solicitan a toda especie de pasajeros, como sucede en Sonsonate. Que entendía que San Salvador era una Sodoma…* (Ibid 197).
>
> …to bathe in the rivers with promiscuity men and women… it is a general disorder in all these provinces and that even

[321] See Cortés y Larraz's census count (Ramírez Luengo 2019: 195).
[322] See Walter Mignolo (2000: 56, 58, 63).
[323] Referring to Don Pablo Medina, priest in charge of the Parrish of Coxutepeque (Cortés y Larraz 1771: 196).
[324] My translation, 2022

> women in some places, ready to bathe, they solicit all kinds of passersby, as it happens in Sonsonate. That he [Medina][325] understood that San Salvador was a Sodoma… (Ibid 197)[326].

Cortés y Larraz concludes his reflection of the Parish of *Coxutepeque* and its towns -- including *San Martín Perulapan* -- with a Judeo-Christian[327] observation that highlights, again, the state of 'decadence', 'sin', 'impurity' of Indigenous peoples in the region when he compares San Salvador and Sonsonate to Sodoma (Sodom)[328]. By evoking Judeo-Christian religious imagery where people are scorched to the ground for their 'wickedness' to describe Indigenous peoples in El Salvador, Cortés y Larraz's chronicles cast his aspersions against *Kushkatan* and its inhabitants from his Eurocentric perspective. Thus, his writings expose the colonizers' desire to excise, disappear, exterminate bodies deemed 'out of place', 'impure', 'dirty', 'in excess', and also 'sex' - their means of reproduction - imposing a project of death upon them, from that moment. Through Cortés y Larraz's gaze, *San Martín Perulapan* becomes a contested terrain that must be re-organized and rendered clean, purified, for European habitation[329], as in the civilizing project, racial impurity, disease, and moral degradation can only be overcome through the embodiment of whiteness (McKittrick 2015: 131). Under this and other ontological certainties in the historical record, such as the idea that 'no humans occupied the New World', including the fluvial geographies of the *Coxutepeque* region, San Martín *Perulapan* becomes a cartography where European invaders map the borders of what are habitable and unhabitable geographies. Further, they attempt to define who can live within them and who cannot, marking permanently the (in)humanity and the (im)purity of Indigenous bodies that occupied this subalternized land, and fixing the geo-racial in the historical memory of *Kushkatan*.

The reductions of *Coxutepeque* that Cortés y Larraz talks about in 1771, far from being 'his or a vision of the past', offer us an invaluable opportunity to critically contemplate *San Martín Perulapan*'s colonial histories -- told and (un)told -- to help us trace the contemporary geo-racial and spatial trajectories, severe socio-economic afflictions, and the resulting violence that are still forcing many *Perulapan* families to be on the run today. In other words, as Tata Fidel Flores tells us with a broad smile on his face, "*Necesitamos des-aprender para aprender*" or "We need to un-learn to learn", referring to one's compromiso/commitment to understand the root causes of our present condition by re-membering what has been dis-membered from our past by colonization and its durable legacies, to protect our futures and heal by sustaining ourselves on our ancestral knowledges. Tata Sebas uplifts Tata Fidel's [internal] decolonization message by emphasizing the urgency of feeling and thinking what we were and what we are "con *ojo de venado"* or "with a deer's eye". He refers to always being in a permanent state of

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[325] Referring to Don Pablo Medina, priest in charge of the Parrish of Coxutepeque (Cortés y Larraz 1771: 196).
[326] My translation, 2022.
[327] See Enrique Dussel's definition of Eurocentrism (2002: 46).
[328] Sodom is one of two legendary biblical cities destroyed by fire, by God's anger for the wickedness of its citizens (Genesis 19: 1-28).
[329] See Aníbal Quijano's definition of the *coloniality of power* (2000: 57, 58).

vigilance and hyper-awareness about our Indigenous ways of understanding and being in the world, which teach us to not separate our bodies from our environment as it forges our connections with all beings -- human or not -- on this planet and beyond, as indestructible. In this way, Nawa-Pipil epistemologies, such as *ilnamiki*, help us see the present with the eyes of the past, to begin con-fronting our colonial histories to put back together what has been broken, so that we can heal.

While there is a dearth of information about San Martín Perulapan's histories - which makes confronting the past more complicated - colonial records show that although dedicated to modest agricultural production, its proximity to the *Villa de San Salvador* led it to acquire specific urban development characteristics and internal population density dynamics. Historians associate these changes to the significant production of indigo in the central region of *Kushkatan* that started since the mid-sixteenth century, which attracted the attention from the authorities in the *Reyno de Goathemala*, for its economic and commercial value[330] (Palma Murga 1993: 253, 254; Martínez Peñate 2002: 26). Factors such as the extraction of natural resources[331] and Indigenous labor[332] that could meet local, regional, and even external subsistence needs and pay tithes and tributes to sustain the church and the Crown, played a central role in the configuration of political, administrative, and economic power in the Villa de San Salvador and its vicinity. Thus, the Villa de San Salvador region became the second most occupied territory after the central region of *Cuahtemalla* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Palma Murga 1993: 225-227, 240). During this time, indigo was cultivated in almost the entire Salvadoran territory, changing the rural landscape by consolidating the idea of private property through the "*hacienda añilera*" or indigo haciendas, and solidifying a new class of "*terratenientes*" or landowners in the hands of a peninsular and or *criollo*[333] minority (Martínez Peñate 2002: 308; Browning 1971: 67).

The consolidation of power in the central region of *Kushkatan*, resulting from its high indigo production came with many negative consequences for Indigenous communities in the *Coxutepeque* and *Perulapan* region. Besides being consistently forced to pay taxes with species, legumes and grains produced in their communal lands,

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[330] By 1740, reports show that there were 618 indigo fields in Kushkatan and that between 1786 and 1806, they were producing 487,000 pounds of indigo per year, a value of 670,000 pesos or the equivalent of 80 percent of that crop produced in the entire Reyno de Goathemalla (Martínez Peñate 2002: 27).

[331] Since the decline of cacao exports in the XVII century, indigo became the most important crop in Kushkatan. Most of the indigo exported to Spain, Perú, and the Antillas by El Reyno de Goathemala in the XVII century, was produced in Kushkatan, which - because of Spanish greed - led to the appropriation of communal lands, the disappearance of entire Indigenous peoples and settlements, and increased mestizaje in the indigo-producing regions (Palma Murga 1993: 258, 259, 301; Martínez Peñate 2002: 308-319).

[332] The re-organization of Indigenous territories after the Spanish invasion was based on the forced extraction of human and natural resources to account for annual tributes to the church and the Crown. Colonial demographics consisted of priests and colonial administrators counting Indigenous bodies and collecting benefits from them, such as taxes, free labor, merchandise, grains and species, textiles, etc. Although, colonial tax records were scarce and fragmented initially, by the second half of the XVIII century, they show that Kushkatan amassed 30% of all taxable Indigenous population in Central America (Palma Murga 1993: 229, 230).

[333] Person of Spanish ascendency born in America (pinto Soria 1993: 324).

and or textiles, honey, salt, chickens, and their indentured labor[334], a new demand to pay taxes with coins[335] was imposed, which created monetary debt, for the first time, for Indigenous peoples (Palma Murga 1993: 245). The economic pressures they faced to comply with the monetization of taxes in *Kushkatan* forced Indigenous communities to 'rent' their labor for meager wages and to sell the agricultural products they cultivated in communal lands[336] for their sustenance, to obtain money, which indebted them further, and resulted in their experiencing famine[337]. In 1770, Cortés y Larraz reported that "…in San Salvador, indigo is harvested in great abundance… all the land of the haciendas is level and treeless" and in 1832, D. A. Juarros wrote that "… indeed the inhabitants devote their attention almost so exclusively as to neglect the growth of other articles of first necessity" (Browning 1971: 63, 64). In such light, historians offer a picture that the colonial production of indigo in *Kushkatan*, propelled Indigenous communities into a violently integration in the global economy, resulting in immeasurable labor exploitation, displacement and dispossession, hunger, disease, terror, anguish, and death (Palma Murga 1993: 264-267). The following quotation illustrates the abusive practices related to indigo production in central *Kushkatan* during colonial times:

> …they are treated worse than slaves… some are killed by beatings; women are collapsing and dying under heavy loads; …others are forced to work in the farms, where they live and sleep in the fields, wasted away by the poisonous insects; and many hang themselves; and others take poisonous herbs… (Preamble to a Royal Decree of 27 May 1582, qtd. in García Peláez' *Memorias Para la Historia* Vol. I (1943: 238) qtd. in Browning 1971: 73).[338]

Another passage from *Memorias para la historia del antiguo Reyno de Guatemala*, Volume I, by Francisco de Paula García Peláez (1943-1944), exposes some of the inhumane conditions to which Indigenous peoples in the Villa de San Salvador and its vicinity were subjected to, in the seventeenth century:

> *La experiencia ha mostrado los grandes daños que los indígenas naturales de estas provincias han recibido y reciben en haberlos metido en los obrajes de tinta añil, pues habiéndose comenzado en tierras baldías de la costa y otras partes donde simplemente se produce la yerba de que se hace la dicha tinta, la codicia de los españoles extendió*

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[334] According to the Nuevas Leyes/New Laws, all Indigenous men, ages 18 to 60 years old, had to work one week per month in the haciendas or pay a substitute to do so, in exchange for *one real* per day. In El Salvador, this system was used to forced Indigenous peoples to work in the indigo fields, under extreme unhealthy conditions (Palma Murga 1993: 246-248).

[335] By Royal Decree, in 1733, The Goathemallan Audience ordered all taxes to the Crown to be paid by coin, with some exceptions (Palma Murga 1993: 247).

[336] Communal lands were accumulated based on the interests and economic possibilities of each "Indian" town and were given by The Crown to ensure Indigenous people could pay their tributes with products (Pinto Soria 1993: 326).

[337] A food crisis resulted from the lack of corn and bean production, due to severe Indigenous depopulation and displacement from the land, to prioritize xiquilite production (Martínez Peñate 2022: 309).

[338] Browning does not provide the original quotation from García Peláez in Spanish.

> *tanto este género, ocupando no sólo las tierras de los indígenas sino sus personas; de manera que lo que hoy generalmente hablando son obrajes, fueron pueblos indígenas y extintos y acabados, de que no se ve sino sólo el sitio que tuvieron los dichos pueblos; y otros muy numerosos en la provincia de San Salvador hoy tienen sólo los nombres de lugares vacíos de gente consumida y acabada no sólo por el excesivo trabajo que les dan los obrajes, mayor que toleran las fuerzas humanas y en tierra caliente y la mala calidad de la tinta; sino ejecutando con rigor y opresión por mano de sus esclavos y negros que cargándoles a los indígenas el servicio que ellos deben, como esclavos, tratan a estos miserables como si fueran suyos, cuya crueldad es notoria*. (Ibid. 240).
>
> Experience has shown the great harm that Indigenous natives of these provinces have received and they receive in having put them in the indigo ink mills, since having begun in the coastal wastelands and other parts where the herb that makes said ink is simply produced, the greed of the Spaniards spread this kind so much, as to not only occupying the indigenous lands but also their personhoods; in the manner that what today generally speaking would be a manufacturing place, there were indigenous towns; and extinct and finished, that you can only see the site where said towns were; and numerous populous others in the province of San Salvador today have only empty place names of people consumed and finished not only by the excessive work that the mills give them, greater than human forces can tolerate and in hot lands and the poor quality of the ink; otherwise executing with rigor and oppression at the hands of their slaves and blacks who charging the Indigenous people for the service they must do, as slaves, they treat these wretches as if they were theirs, whose cruelty is notorious. (Ibid 240).[339]

Recovering the memories of such atrocious social and economic realities for many Indigenous families who were forced to work the indigo fields and mills in central *Kushkatan* during colonial times makes it possible for us - through epistemologies of *ilnamiki* - to confront the truth about why many of our ancestors did not survive,[340] why others were forced to migrate, yet why others were forced to assimilate. Tilley (2005)

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[339] My translation, 2022.

[340] Pernicious and deleterious e*ffluvia* fever in indigo fields, resulted from the noxious gases released in the air, by the acrid stench of the fermented indigo leaves in the processing vats, which was exacerbated by stagnant waters in the ponds; these putrid materials produced glucose, which attracted flies and mosquitoes and in term, spread diseases such as yellow fever among Indigenous and African slaves, planters, and livestock (Winberry 1979: 96).

describes the forced labor for indigo production in *Kushkatan*, as having a "shattering impact" on Indigenous communities (110). She explains: "the mashing of the pulp, by stamping on the leaves in the vats for days and weeks - was exhausting, and food was probably very bad". She adds: "the decomposing mounds of *jiquilite* pulp also drew swarms of flies, which in turn spread disease" (Ibid). So devastating was indigo production for Indigenous peoples that the Crown prohibited hiring "indians" to process indigo, which in term, encouraged the import of African slaves[341].

In 1636, a priest who visited El Salvador wrote:

> I have seen large Indian villages… practically destroyed after indigo mills have been erected near to them. For most Indians who will enter the mills will sicken as a result of the forced work and the effect of the piles of rotting indigo they make. I speak from experience as at various times I have confessed great numbers of fever-stricken Indians and have been there when they carry them from the mills to burial… and most of these wretches have been forced to abandon their homes and plots of maize, many of their wives and children die also. In particular, this is true of this province of San Salvador where there are so many indigo mills, and all these built close to Indian villages… (A.G.I., Audiencia de Goathemala, leg. 968, fol. 7 qtd. in Browning 1971: 73).

Three hundred fifty-one years later, Salvadoran poet and writer Manlio Argueta (1935) reckons with the violence of indigo production in central *Kushkatan*, which Indigenous families experienced during colonial times, in his historical fiction novel, titled *Cuzcatlán: Donde bate la mar del sur* (Kushkatan: Where the South Sea Beats, 1987) [342]. In its title, the author subverts the very words[343] that Spanish invader Pedro de Alvarado used to memorialize his first encounter with Nawa-Pipil armies in *Acaxual*, in 1524, by juxtaposing them with the original name of the territories that his European forces had trespassed. Argueta's work emphasizes first and foremost, an Indigenous

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[341] According to Tilley, in *Kushkatan*, "blacks were considered superior to Indigenous peoples and were imported partly to supervise Indigenous peoples in indigo production" (Tilley 2005: 108). This finding only aggravates the violent and divisive tactics of colonialism and empire for Black and Indigenous Peoples of Color (BIPOC) in this part of the global South. However, in 1738, the Crown's prohibitions to use Indigenous labor in the production of indigo in the Villa de San Salvador were taken away, pressured by producers, resulting in the unrestricted use of Indigenous labor, which had catastrophic demographic consequences on ethnic groups in the region, towards the end of the eighteenth century (Martínez Peñate 2002: 27).

[342] My translation, 2022.

[343] Argueta uses the phrase "… donde bate la mar del sur…" which he takes from the *Segunda carta de relación a Hernán Cortés*, written by Pedro de Alvarado in Iximchée or Tecpán, July in 1524 (Escalante Arce 2000: 28).

presence on an Indigenous land. His impactful storytelling begins by complicating European renderings of the 'history of conquest' of *Kushkatan*, as he reveals an Indigenous counternarrative to Alvarado's version of what took place, after the first battle. In this context, the author deploys a counter-mapping intervention to the geographies of (in)humanity established in the territories of *Kushkatan,* with the colonial imposition of racial capitalism and the advent of indigo fields and mills in the region. In plain words, Argueta re-tells how the powerful economy of the most lucrative monocrop in the region at the time became the "lifeblood" of trade in the Reyno de *Cuahtemalla* and abroad, after cacao production decreased, while literally poisoning the blood and taking the lives of thousands of captive Indigenous and African families who were forced to generate wealth for the European coffers (Floyd 1965: 471). Argueta's storytelling centers on the ill fate of Indigenous families, centering on mothers and children who worked the indigo fields and mills:

> "Catalina was a victim of indigo. She
> suffocated to death. After she gave birth.
> Her lungs couldn't stand the stress; they
> had been weakened by indigo effluvia.
> The dye had slowly poisoned her."

And it goes on[344] to tell us about the dark histories behind the rich and calm bluish-violet hues that made fortunes and dressed kings and their armies around the world, to help us re-member, the dis-membered lives of the nameless Nawa-Pipil and African men, women, and children - whose *ejekat* and *ijiyu* were robbed by those seduced by "devil's dye"[345]. This story also helps us meditate on the painful trajectories of modern-day descendants of Nawa-Pipil communities, who are still forced to live their lives in perpetual displacement of their cultural identity, cultural practices and traditions, and territories. And some, like Óscar, Tania, and Angie Valeria, who are from these lands continue to suffocate to death in search of a place to call home.

For those who survived the indigo mills, tithing and paying tributes and taxes to the church and the Spanish Crown became extremely difficult to comply with. Many requested to be exonerated, citing their living conditions: "*pobre endeudado*" or "poor indebted"; "c*on muchos hijos*" or "with many children"; "*tierra montuosa que da poca tinta*" or "rugged terrain that produces little ink"; "*sumamente desdichado*" or "extremely unhappy"; "*viejo de ochenta años pobrísimo*" or "elder of 80 years of age, very poor"; "*siempre anda huyendo de su casa por los acreedores*" or "always fleeing from his/her home because of the creditors"; "*mujer pobre*" or "poor woman"; and "*pobre sobradamente*" or "amply poor" (Palma Murga 1993: 240, 241). Others sought to

[344] See Appendix A for an excerpt of Argueta's novel, "Cuzcatlán: donde bate la mar del sur" (1987).
[345] Referring to indigo as a slavery-based cash crop. See McDuffie Jr. (1995: 13).

ladinizarse[346] and work in the *naborío*s[347], declaring themselves mestizos[348] or mulatos[349] to avoid paying the highest tax levels imposed to Indigenous peoples, even though mestizos and mulatos were also highly racialized and marginalized in *Kushkatan*, and their social mobility was extremely limited (Ibid 241, 287).

By the end of the eighteenth century in *Kushkatan*, demographic records[350] show an accelerated decline of the Indigenous population, which correlates with a rapid expansion of the mestizo population and commercial activities. Historians believe that forced assimilation contributed to the further disintegration of Indigenous communities in the indigo producing regions of central *Kushkatan*. Further, these marked demographic changes are believed to have resulted from the impact of the prolonged inhumane living and working conditions that Indigenous peoples were subjected to by colonial administrators, and simultaneously, from an Indigenous refusal to continue working under such exploitation (Ibid). Martínez Peñate highlights colonial records that illustrate the devastating impact of indigo production on Indigenous peoples in *Kushkatan*: "*Nos somos informados, que en esa Provincia se van acabando los indios naturales de ella*…" or "We are informed, that in that Province, the natural indians of that area, are finishing…"[351] (2002: 310). In addition to the drastic Indigenous depopulation in the central region of *Kushkatan* due to the harsh living conditions, many Indigenous peoples abandoned their towns and communities and or mixed with Africans and mulatos to give their descendants a chance to elude the tax obligations and back-breaking forced labor that targeted Indigenous peoples, as assimilating and or "passing"[352] allowed them an opportunity to negotiate racial oppression and spared them to suffer less barbarity and indignities than those who were perceived as Indigenous (Palma Murga 1993: 250, 251).

Given that Indigenous labor in *Kushkatan* was the basis of the colonial regime that established the extraction mechanisms necessary to launch global capitalism in this part of the world, the growth of the mestizo population toward the second half of the eighteenth century created greater pressure on the surviving Indigenous communities left behind. Exploited not only by criollos and ladinos,[353] but also, by mestizos themselves, who had learned to internalize the oppressive colonial system and to use it against Native

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[346] The process of forced assimilation (Arzú 2001).

[347] Indigenous that worked for Spaniards in domestic labor, who lived in barrios located in the outskirts of main cities (Pinto Soria 1993: 326).

[348] Person of mainly Spanish-Indigenous ascendency (Pinto Soria 1993: 326).

[349] Person of varied ascendency, mainly Spanish-Black (Pinto Soria 1993: 236).

[350] There are two partial reports from the Real Hacienda, 1687 and 1720, that document the taxable Indigenous population in the Reyno de Goathemala, that indicate the demographic ascent and decline of this ethnic group at different colonial epochs. It is only in the XVIII century, that the first general censuses of the population begin to take place in this region (Palma Murga 1993: 229, 230).

[351] My translation, 2022.

[352] A practice that emerges from the subject's desire to control the terms of their racial definition, rather than to be subjected to the terms established by white supremacy, to escape racial oppression and exploitation (Wald 2000:6).

[353] Initially, a ladino was an Indigenous person who spoke Spanish. Toward the end of XVII century, the term was used to designate individuals of Indigenous origin that had lost their connections with their communities and culturally, they were no longer considered Indigenous anymore, as they had adopted the Spanish language, dress, and customs. The ladinization process in Central America, favored the project of mestizaje (Pinto Soria 1993: 325).

bodies for their benefit and social positionality - Indigenous peoples continued to live a very marginalized and excluded existence in *Kushkatan* (Ibid 303).

The significant mestizo (also known as ladinos in Central America) population growth in the eighteenth century, altered profoundly race relations in the latter colonial period, as they crowded urban centers, its adjacent regions, and even "*pueblos indios*", given that most of them were Indigenous descendants themselves or were Indigenous peoples uprooted from their original communities, seeking to settle in familiar spaces. Known as "*valles de ladinos*" or "ladino valleys", these geo-racial settlements endured cumbersome procedures to obtain their village statutes from the colonial authorities, who refused to grant them recognition as population centers, to avoid giving them communal lands, in accordance with Spanish Crown laws. The presence of ladino valleys generally constituted a destabilizing factor for Indigenous communities, becoming a source of ongoing conflict (Solórzano Fonseca 1993: 28).

Meanwhile, many original settlements disappeared or became isolated, and yet others were absorbed by large estates supported by the liberal reforms[354] that took place during the last years of colonial domination. It was 1894, when *San Martín Perulapan* was first recognized as a village (Flores Montalvo 2013: 24). Yet, the durable effects of over three centuries of spatial re-organization, reductions, and exploitation of Indigenous labor in the indigo haciendas in central *Kushkatan* resulted in depopulation, forced migration, and the process of ladinization in the region, with numerous dispersed migrant communities attached to large private estates, who depended on the cultivation of seasonal crops for their survivance (Browning 1971: 76). As the European demand for indigo exports decreased causing a significant price reduction toward the second half of the eighteenth century, the production and commercialization of this product was halted abruptly in *Kushkatan*, giving way to a period of economic stagnancy. This commercial crisis was aggravated by an interruption of communications between Spain and its colonies and a series of armed conflicts with England, which significantly diminished Spain's imperial power globally (Solórzano Fonseca 1993: 46, 47).

By 1946, San Martín was established as a city and consistent with urban patterns of colonial development, it was configured into four neighborhoods: El Calvario, Santa Eduviges, San Antonio, and Las Mercedes, while its rural adjacent area is still composed of eight villages or *cantones*: *El Rosario, El Sauce, La Flor, La Palma, Las Ánimas, Las Delicias, San José Primero y San José Segundo*, and 107 hamlets (Ibid). Nowadays, the city of *San Martín* has a territorial extension of 55.84 square kilometers, and a population of approximately 73,000 inhabitants[355] of "mixed" racial and ethnic origins,[356] with the majority not identifying as Indigenous or even Indigenous descendants, anymore, despite having been "an almost exclusively Indian town" during colonial times (Browning 1971:

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[354] The Bourbon Reforms, under Carlos III (1773-1808), sought to consolidate political and economic power over peripheral areas in the Americas to make them more productive; they resorted to using new administrative structures that promoted progress through reason. This period is referred to, by some scholars as the "reconquest" (Weber 2008: 3-8; Martínez Peñate 2022: 313).

[355] A citywide population density of approximately 1,303 inhabitants per square kilometer (Flores Montalvo 2013: 25).

[356] See Jorge Cuéllar's article on Colonial Terror and Race Laws in El Salvador (2018).

128). Most importantly, Flores Montalvo (2013) reports that according to government estimates, 91 percent of the *San Martín*'s population is concentrated in the urban area, ranking the city as the number 16th most densely populated city in the nation[357]. Additionally, the total population growth rate for *San Martín*, is reported to be 22 percent, in the 15-year intercensal period[358], showing a significant (53 percent) urban population increase and a drastic (275 percent) rural population decrease during the post-war years. The accelerated pace and unplanned pattern of urban change in the small territory of San Martín, are believed to be directly linked to similar urban expansion processes that have engulfed the AMSS zone, following the Chapultepec Peace Accords[359] signed in 1992 (Ibid 25, 26).

Given that not all residents of *San Martín* experienced similar socioeconomic conditions during this postwar period of accelerated and unplanned urban expansion, the city saw the emergence of at least 30 unprotected and overcrowded communities[360], deemed to be areas of "high poverty concentration"[361] (Ibid 40). The new living space configurations that resulted from urban sprawl in the postwar in *San Martín* generated deeper social exclusion and marginalization for the most vulnerable families, a phenomenon that experts have linked to an increased probability of violent crime in the city (Ibid 27, 46). In addition, the capacity of the Salvadoran government to provide basic infrastructure and services to the citizens of San Martín to achieve the most basic human development goals toward social integration[362] after the 1980s war, such as education,[363] employment,[364] access to health,[365] recreation,[366] etc. has been documented as lacking. Under such circumstances, many San Martín families have struggled to attain a peaceful and prosperous living and they have been forced to flee internally and abroad, in search of a more bearable and dignified life for themselves and their children (Ibid).

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[357] An urban population density of approximately 1,768 inhabitants per square kilometer (MINEC-DIGESTYC, 2007 in Flores Montalvo 2013: 25).
[358] From 1992 to 2007 (Flores Montalvo 2013: 26).
[359] The 1992 Peace Accords ended a 12-year war and opened the process of democratization in El Salvador, which in term, led to the development of a neoliberal economic model (Robinson 2008).
[360] Also known as *Asentamientos Precarios Urbanos* or Urban Precarious Settlements (Flores Montalvo 2013: 40).
[361] San Martín maps show that 61 percent the population and 59.5 percent of homes are part of the 30 Urban Precarious Settlements identified (Flores Montalvo 2013: 40).
[362] San Martín was classified as an extreme poverty municipality in El Salvador (FISDL 2005: 50, 52).
[363] In San Martín, according to the 2007 Census, 7 percent of children ages 0-18 never attended school and according to the Ministry of Education, school drop-out rates increased to 7.1 in 2008. On average, residents of San Martín reported having a 7th grade education (Flores Montalvo 2013: 28, 33, 48).
[364] A significant part of the young population has reduced employment opportunities, which impedes the betterment of living conditions and increases vulnerability and social and economic inclusion (Flores Montalvo 2013: 48).
[365] San Martín has a high pregnancy rate, as well as a high (32 percent) gun-related mortality rate (Flores Montalvo 2013: 38, 47).
[366] San Martín has limited infrastructure for recreation and lacks an inventory of recreational spaces (Flores Montalvo 2013: 47).

By exposing the barbaric living conditions associated with the project of racial capitalism and the production of indigo in central *Kushkatan* that Indigenous families endured during colonial times, I attempt to highlight the magnitude of an unspeakable ethnocide that took place then, and that continues today. To this extent, the colonial archives show that those who survived the toxicity of the indigo mills in central *Kushkatan* chose to 'disappear' by being forced to run or to assimilate. Only a few Indigenous families remained in their towns. I highlight the notion of Indigenous 'disappearance' to speak of a repertoire of Native resistance and survivance that is part of a silenced archive, which I connect to a similar array of brutal living conditions for descendants today. I offer that this muted archive can be recovered through the grammar of the body, of the Nawat-Pipil language, which through epistemologies such as is *ilnamiki* can function as a site for recollection of past events, to help us heal from past and ongoing traumas. For instance, *ilnamiki* makes it possible for us to trace the multiple internal displacements that thousands of descendants have endured to escape from violence and impunity and perpetual impoverishment, before being forced to permanently abandon our homeland in search of a dignified life abroad, which I propose is a continuation of the colonial legacies and the effects of racial capitalism that persists.

As such, being a fugitive, is a praxis of resistance and survivance that lives on in the ancestral memory of Indigenous people and their descendants, in El Salvador. Living in a permanent state of flight, on the run, has ensured the existence of Indigenous communities in a colonized space, against the unending brutality and cruelty of the colonial authority, the repressive tactics and scorch-earth policies of the modern nation-state. In revisiting the past and refusing to forget these woundings, *ilnamiki* helps us shed light on the temporal-spatial distance of/from traumatic events so we can confront them and heal. While the "*peñoles*" or mountains constituted the imaginary borderlands toward which Indigenous families fled to preserve their lives during colonial times (Fonseca Corrales 1993: 127), I offer that for Salvadorans families who are living-everyday-death in the occupied *Kushkatan* territories today, fleeing across international borders constitutes a modern-day codex of the old "*peñoles*", a knowledge recorded in the archives of the land and accessed by the eye (*ix-mati*) through the act of 'being there' and or 'being from there'. In other words, being in a permanent state of flight and approaching life with *ojo de venado* -- always quick on your feet and ready to run for dear life -- as Nahua oral tradition tells us,[367] has ensured the survivance of many Salvadorans, including my own. For those of us, who identify as Indigenous descendants in spite of no longer speaking our mother tongue with fluidity, we have not forgotten that "body and territory" are one sacred entity that cannot be separated[368]. Tata Sebastián Morales, says "*Está en nuestra sangre*" or "It is in our blood", explaining:

> *Fíjese, el cuerpo y el territorio son UNA (su voz enfatiza "una")*
> *sóla entidad y todo a su alrededor está conectado y se mantiene*

[367] The legend of "El Indio Aquino" tells that he had the power to transform into a deer to run from the national guard during the 1833 insurrection. When he was captured and killed, the water of The Chorrera, dried up because he was its protector (Melgar-Brizuela 2007: 26, 156).
[368] I will discuss Nawa-Pipil epistemologies of *ne gitilana ne iyesiu ne tal* (blood of the land) in the next chapter.

> *vivo por la energía sagrada o ijiyu que nos une al universo en UNA (enfásis en su voz) totalidad o tunal, que es como su alma, y que siempre nos mantiene en movimiento. Todos estamos aquí, en tránsito permanente y detrás de nosotros, vienen otros.* (Intrevistas julio del 2019).
>
> Listen carefully, body and territory are ONE (his voice emphasizes "one") entity and everything that surrounds it is connected and alive through a sacred energy or *ijiu* that unite us to the universe in ONE (emphasis on his voice in one) totality or *tunal,* which is like its soul, and that always keeps us in movement. We all are here, in a permanent state of transit and behinds us, there are others that follow[369]. (Interviews July 2029).

In this light, when we speak of Indigenous movements through the land, Nahua Pipil cosmologies teach us that the ancestral memories of those who have died, live on in the land and are connected to the living through a sacred energy which offers us alternatives for collective healing. Tata s Sebas explains, "*nuestros cuerpos llevan consigo los elementos del cosmos, respiramos oxígeno, somos agua, somos fuego, y algún día seremos cenizas*" ("Our bodies carry the elements of the cosmos, we breathe oxygen, we are water, we are fire and one day, we will become ashes" (Interviews 2019). These ancestral ways of understanding the world endow a person's sense of being in a place and belonging to it, with a principle of inviolability that allows us to carry our geographies on our backs, an ancestral praxis of "finding home" where we go, as we transit through life.

For Salvadoran families who are forced to migrate abroad, Nawa-Pipil cosmologies and philosophies, make it possible to develop a new consciousness of Indigenous existence and re-assert a Native identity to reclaim our connections to the land. Only when we recover the living memories of our ancestors and the land, we can exercise our trans-territorial sovereignty and identity, and trans-it through and beyond colonial/modern conceptions of space and time. It is in these liminal spaces that, with the accompaniment of the ancestors, Native bodies can recover past intractable events that must be confronted, to help us heal collectively. In re-membering what has been dis-membered from our Native consciousness, *ilnamiki,* grants us permission to frame the story of Óscar, Tania, and Angie Valeria's journey, as having curative powers and uphold the sacredness of what it means to be Human, to be Native and on the run.

Óscar, Tania, and Angie Valeria's colonial/modern trans-it began one morning in April of 2019, when they left their home in San Martín, hoping for a more dignified life (Reuters 2019). "That was his dream, a good future for his family," his grieving mother said to reporters (Telesur 2019). Óscar and his wife, Tania Vanessa Ávalos, lived in Altavista, a *San Martín* neighborhood dominated by gang violence; both had minimum-wage jobs at a pizzeria and a fast-food restaurant, respectively, and they "struggled to get

[369] My translation, October 2022.

by, living on the edge of poverty" … "on their salaries of about $300 a month" (Semple 2019).

After traveling for several days by bus to *Mexco*, the family spent approximately two months living in various migrant camps before finally arriving to the scorching heat of Matamoros, on the morning of June 24, 2019. According to La Jornada newspaper, the family attempted to seek asylum the same day at the Brownsville and Matamoros International Bridge (B&M) port of entry but were turned away after learning that it was closed. At the time, Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) had been reporting that the U.S.-*Mexco* ports of entry along the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) region were overwhelmed by thousands of immigrants waiting to cross the U. S. border and submit their asylum claims. On the *Mexco* side of the B&M International Bridge alone, there were more than 2,000 immigrants living "in conditions of hunger and overcrowding", in makeshift refugee camps. CNN reported that U. S. agents were granting an average of three appointments per week in the B&M International Bridge port of entry (Maxouris, Almasy and Gallón June 2019). Out of desperation because of the conditions they found on the ground because of U. S. metering policies and the Migrant Protection Protocols, the family decided to swim across the Rio Grande, just hours after having arrived at *Matamoros* (Shoichet 2019).

Based on newspaper reports, Óscar crossed the Rio Grande with his daughter Angie Valeria tucked inside his black t-shirt, first, and then he turned to help his wife Tania, but she had returned to the *Mexco* shore overwhelmed by the strong current. There are conflicting statements as to what happened next, other than it is known that Óscar and Angie Valeria were swept away by the current. Their bodies were found floating on the river about 400 meters away from the B&M International Bridge port of entry they had hoped to cross, only hours earlier. "You can see how he protected her," his mother told the Associated Press. "They died in each other's arms" (Telesur 2019). In the fiscal year 2019, there were 300 drowning deaths recorded in the Rio Grande region, marking a 30-record year for border crossings. (Alvarez, September 2022).

Heading to '*La Nacional*'[370] at the height of early morning traffic, the skies are hazy, and the air carries an acrid smell of fumes that burns deep into my nostrils and makes me cough. The taxi cab's door rattles loudly, until the young man behind the steering wheel, José, looks at me through his rearview mirror and says: "*estos carros están un poco dañados, los trajeron aquí después de Katrina - pero si - nos sirven pa' andar por ay. Déle duro seño, sin miedo*" ("these cars are a little damaged, they brought them here after Katrina - but yes - they do help us get around. Hit it hard miss don't be afraid"), referring to my having to slam shut the car door, again.

We are barely moving. Some drivers are passing from the right on the narrow shoulder that seems to disappear in the overgrown brush that crowds the road. Others are honking their frustrations out, or face-down texting, while Ozuna's lyrics *"Es que me niego a perderte, a más nunca verte, me niego a aceptar que lo nuestro ya se acabó…,"* fades away in the congestion, amid a cacophony of engine sounds and mixed voices. José tells me that he is going to exit off *Monseñor Romero*'s freeway and take

[370] A short name used by locals to refer to the Universidad Nacional de El Salvador (UES).

"*los recovecos*" or less trafficked backroads -- which fills me curiosity and anxiety[371] -- just as a thin young boy who walks between cars selling candy approaches our vehicle. He heads up the line. Behind him a few yards away, an older man with a torn Yankee's hat carries a plastic orange *guacalito*[372] filled with bags of cut up "*mangos verdes con chile y alguashte*" (green mangos with chili and alguashte[373]), while a limping woman in her thirties, wearing a red apron shouts with a piercing voice: "*a dólar, a dólar, está bien heladita, cómprela, cómprela*" ("one dollar, one dollar, it is very cool, buy it, buy it"), referring to the bags of water that she is carrying in a cardboard box on her head. With a swift maneuver, the driver locks all car doors and explains: "*hay que tener cuidado con éstos, porque a cada rato nos roban. Mire, no saque su teléfono*" ("we have to be careful with them because they rob us very frequently. Look, do not show your [cell] phone"). I have heard similar warnings from family, friends, and acquaintances many times, including from the U. S. Embassy personnel who shared safety tips during my Fulbright arrival orientation to my 'post'. They warned us specifically about taking public transportation, citing that fifty per cent (50%) of violent crime happens in buses and taxis, reminding us that crime is rampant in El Salvador[374]. José proceeds:

> *Aquí, yo ando con cuidado, más con las motos, porque estos majes[375] se paran a la par de uno en un alto y de repente le sacan la pistola a uno… y si no les pagamos rápido, allí nomás nos disparan… así como me ve a mí, yo no soy rico ni nada, pero a ellos les vale. Por diez pesos nos matan. A mí ya me han quitado mi pisto[376] varias veces y me han pegado mis buenos sustos, púchica[377]... por eso yo me fui pa' Estados Unidos, ya dos veces. Pero me regresan. Ahora, estoy ahorrando pa' la tercera. (Fieldnotes and observations July 2019).*
>
> Here, I move around with caution, especially with motorcycles, because these fools pull over next to you at a stop sign and they suddenly brandish a gun on you… and if we don't pay them quickly, they shoot us right then and there… as you are seeing me now, I am not rich or anything like that, but they don't care. They kill us for ten bucks. They have already taken my money several times

[371] Travelling through backroads can be dangerous because of the risk of inadvertently entering into a gang's territory and disappearing.
[372] Salvadoran adaptation of *wajkal*, a Nawat-Pipil word for basin or container (Hernández 2019: 239).
[373] Ayujwach: a paste, powder, or sauce made from toasted pumpkin seeds (Nahua ancestral food, time immemorial).
[374] Travel Advisory for El Salvador: Reconsider travel to El Salvador, exercise increased caution due to crime (United States Department of State 2019).
[375] Word vastly used in Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua. It basically stands for "dude", but it can also be used in other contexts. It may also mean dumb, fool, stupid (Urban Dictionary).
[376] Salvadoran slang (caliche) for money.
[377] Versatile Salvadoran slang (caliche) expression of wonder and/or surprise.

> and scared me pretty good, damn it!... this is why I already left twice for the U. S. but, they return me. Now, I am saving for my third time.[378]

He pauses his story to look at cross traffic to the left, the right, and the left again, and he continues:

> *La última vez no me fué muy bien. Ya estando en la frontera, una patrulla gringa nos descubrió y puesí, pegamos guinda pa'l muro con el grupo de muchachos que andabamos… y yo si me pude subir bien, pero cuando salté pa'l otro lado no me fijé que era bien alto porque estaba oscuro y allí mismo quedé colgado del brazo en el muro, y me lo quebré… y así como estaba salté y seguí corriendo con todas mis ganas, con mi brazo colgando de un lado (he giggles), pero ya la migra me estaba esperando al otro lado. Así que cabalito, allí mismo me detuvieron tres días y como dicen que ya me habían deportado una vez antes, tuve que firmar que me venía voluntariamente. Y fíjese que allí nadie me vio el brazo ni nada, sólo me dieron una venda, por eso me quedó panda la muñeca. Eso sí que me dolía. (Fieldnotes and observations July 2019).*
>
> The last time [there], it did not go very well for me. Already at the [U. S.] border, an American patrol discovered us and of course, as a group of young men - we ran very fast toward the wall - and while I could jump up just fine, when I tried to land onto the other side, I did not pay attention that it was very high because it was dark
> and right there, I got stuck on the wall and was hanging off by my arm and I broke it…even then, I managed to jump down and continued
> running with all my might, with my arm hanging to one side (he giggles), but Immigration was already waiting for me on the other side. Precisely
> in this way, I was detained for three days and because they said they
> had already deported me once before, I had to sign that I was returning voluntarily. And notice that there, no one cared for my arm or anything, they just gave me a wrap, that is why my wrist is crooked. That was
> really painful for me.[379]

[378] My translation July 2019.
[379] My translation July 2019.

José raises his arm and shows me his wrist, which has a visible deformity. After a brief silence he adds: "*Pero lo que más me dolió son los $4,000 que le había dado al coyote*[380] *pa'que me pasara. Así que aquí estoy bien fregado por ahora, pero es que aquí sí que no hay vida. Esto no es vida*" ("But what hurt me the most, was the $4,000 that I had paid to the trafficker to help me cross the border. So, here I am, really messed up for now, but it is just that, here, there is no life here. This is not a life"). He sighs.

I arrive at *La Nacional*, contemplating this young man's migration story and trying to make meaning of countless other similar stories that one would hear at the neighborhood's pupusería[381] or at the mercados (plaza markets), or sometimes, read in the newspapers to make somewhat visible the 'caravans' made up of hundreds of invisibilized Salvadoran men, women, unaccompanied minors, and sometimes, entire families who gather at *El Salvador del Mundo*[382] and depart to the United States, every week. Simultaneously, the remains of Óscar and Angie Valeria arrived in El Salvador by ground transportation. They were laid to rest on July 1, 2019, at *La Bermeja* Cemetery in San Salvador, in a small, private ceremony, as more caravans of Salvadoran families departed to the U. S., only a few miles away.

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[380] From the Nawat-Pipil *cuyut* or coyote, which refers to an non-Indigenous person, considered less than reliable.

[381] Place where they sell pupusas or *kukumutzin*, a grilled Nawa-Pipil corn tortilla filled with beans, cheese, pork, greens or a mixture of these and other ingredients (Hernández 2019: 71).

[382] A monument used to decorate the tomb of the late Salvadoran President, Manuel Enrique Araujo (1911-1913), a wealthy coffee grower and founder of the infamous National Guard (1912), which was dissolved during the signing of the Peace Accords (1992), for its historical record of atrocities and human rights violations. This monument was presented to the Salvadoran government in 1942, by the Araujo family and it is now located at the intersection of *Boulevard Constitución* and *Alameda Franklin Delano Roosevelt*, in the *Plaza de El Salvador del Mundo*, in the country's capital, San Salvador. It is the country's most important monument, and it is dedicated to the nation's patron-saint Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World. It consists of a statue of Jesus Christ standing on top of a sphere that represents Earth, which is placed on a four-sided, 18-meter-tall pedestal adorned with Catholic crosses on each of its sides. This landmark identifies El Salvador as a Christian nation (Farah-Robinson 2011: 52-53).

Part III: *El Otro Viaje* (The Other Journey): *Apan / El Río / The River*
***Section 1: Miktan*: *En lo profundo* [*del agua*]**

> *Inat ne xujxulej pan Kushkatan, at nemi yultuk.*
> (Nawa-Pipil understandings of water, time immemorial).
>
> *Cuentan los ancianos en Cuzcatlán, que el agua vive.*
>
> The elders in *Kushkatan* say that water is alive.

Understanding the sacredness of *at* (water) for Nahua Pipil communities in western Kushkatan is critical to the creation of healing spaces, where alternative readings of the tragic deaths of Óscar and Angie Valeria Martínez's deaths in 2019, can unfold. In Nawa-Pipil worlds, *at* is a living entity: it feels, it knows, it sees, it moves, it remembers, it has an intelligence, a sacred energy (*ijiu*), a heart (*yul*), a soul (*tunal*). According to *Tata* Fidel Flores, a spiritual leader from *el Cantón San Ramón,* in the mountains surrounding *San Antonio del Monte,* Department of *Centzunat,* western El Salvador, *at* is not just alive, but is life itself, and thus, central to Nahua conceptions of the world: "*El agua es uno de los cuatro elementos sagrados en nuestra cosmovisión*" (water is one of the four sacred elements in our cosmovision), he says. "*El agua*", "water", he continues, "*representa la ley de causa y efecto, el principio del orden, la justicia, y la seguridad -- el renacer -- y las multas o lo que le debemos y tenemos que pagarle a nuestra Madre Tierra para poder continuar*" ([water] represents the law of cause and effect, the principle of order, justice, and security -- renewal -- and fines or what we owe that we must pay back to our Mother Earth to be able to continue). He adds, "…*pero el agua no es siempre estable, es turbulenta, y puede tener buenas y malas energías para mantener el equilibrio de las cosas*" (… but water is not always stable, it is turbulent, and it can have good and bad energies to maintain the equilibrium of things). He concludes his explanation by stating "…*y la asociamos con Miktan*[383] *-- el inframundo o lugar de los muertos -- pues es pura energía que no se puede crear ni destruir, desde allí se renace. El agua simboliza la fertilidad y está conectada con la luna y las mareas, y los ciclos de reproducción de la mujer*" (… and we associate it with *Miktan* -- the underworld, the place of the dead -- because, well, it is pure energy that cannot be created, nor destroyed, we are reborn from there. Water symbolizes fertility and it is connected to the moon and the tides, and women's reproductive cycles). He continues to flip the pages of his Nawa-Pipil calendar[384], remarking that *at* faces to the east, where the sun rises, and in that way, life begins with each new day (Interviews 2019).

To *Tata* Nicolás Sánchez, from *el Cantón Pushtan in Nawitzalku*, Department of *Centzunat*, *at* is also sacred and life-giving for Nawa-Pipil communities in western *Kushkatan.* As a spiritual leader and protector of the land and water, he states that

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[383] According to Nahua cosmology, *Miktan* is the house of the dead, where everyone who dies must go by starting a long journey and passing through various daunting trials before being granted eternal life (de la Garza Gálvez 2017: 176-182).

[384] See Fidel Flores: Tunalpualli shiwit chikume akat (calendario del año siete caña o 2019, or calendar for the year seven reed or 2019) .

"*Nuestra Madre Tierra necesita mantenerse en equilibrio y por eso, necesitamos aprender a respetar y cuidar de ella*" (our Mother Earth needs to maintain itself in a state of equilibrium and for this reason we need to learn to respect and care for her) (Interviews, June 2029). He explains that without water, life is not possible, mentioning that water provides Indigenous communities with what they need to survive and that historically, they have always established their settlements near sources of water, such as rivers and lakes, co-existing with nature and being keenly aware of the gifts people receive from it, every day. For such reasons, Tata Nicolás adds that today, Nawa-Pipil communities in *Nawitzalku* are facing significant struggles that threaten to disrupt their relationship with water, that are related to private corporations attempting to build more hydroelectric plants in the *Sensunapan* River. He cites that currently, there are seven hydroelectric plants in the river and that these have caused severe harm to the environment, which he reminds me, "*es nuestra casa, hermana*" ("it is our home, sister"). Tata Nicolás states:

> *Si estas corporaciones logran sus metas, el sagrado Río se va a secar y así se terminaría la vida para muchos seres vivientes en sus alrededores, plantas y animalitos, gente; esto también afectaría la sobrevivencia de los pueblos originarios que dependen del agua para vivir, especialmente las mujeres que tienen una relación profunda con el agua. Allí crece el tule que usan para los petates y las canastas. Los niños, que allí se bañan y aprender a pescar. Incluso, esto dañaría el lugar de descanso de nuestros antepasados que yacen enterrados en las orillas del río, desde que fueron masacrados en 1932. El río es un sitio sagrado para nosotros y estamos luchando por él y defendiendo nuestros territorios y espiritualidad, nuestros ciclos de vida.* (Interviews 2029).
>
> If these corporations get their way, the sacred river will dry out and life would come to an end for many living beings in its surroundings, plants, and little animals, people; this would also affect the survivance of Indigenous communities who depend on water for their lives, especially women, who have a deep relationship with water. There, tulle grows, which they use for petates[385] (mats) and basket-weaving. Children bathe in the river and learn to fish there. This, would even harm the resting place of our ancestors, who lay buried in the riverbanks since they were massacred in 1932. The river is a sacred site for us and we are fighting for him and defending our territories and spirituality, our cycles of life. (Interviews 2019).

[385] A petate or petat is a hand-weaved mat of tulle that Nawa-Pipil communities use to sleep, sit on, and to wrap the dead with, before laying them into the ground (Hernández 2029: 107).

Tata Nicolás concludes that "*Las ofrendas que le hacemos a nuestra Madre Tierra en nuestras ceremonias, son una forma humilde de agradecerle a ella, por todo lo que nos da y de algún modo, son una forma de demostrar nuestro respeto y cuidado hacia ella, dentro de nuestra espiritualidad*" (the offerings we make to our Mother Earth in our ceremonies, are a humble way to show our gratitude to her for everything that she gives us, and in some way, they are a way of showing our respect and care toward her, which are rooted in our spirituality) (Ibid). *Tata* Nicolás reinforces what *Tata* Fidel explained above: that, according to Nahua Pipil cosmology, when humankind abuses nature, there are ways in which the universe demands to be paid back for the abuses committed against it, through the power of water.

Citing that water originates in "*cuevas dentro de la sagrada montaña*" or "caves inside the sacred mountain", which *Tata* Sebas describes as "*aberturas hacia el interior de nuestra Madre Tierra*" or "openings into the interior of our Mother Earth", he states that Indigenous cosmovision associates these openings with *Apan* and *Miktan,* "el inframundo" (the dwelling of the dead). He highlights that there are stories that have been told and retold by the *Tata s* of his *Tata s,* about water, using his hand to gently motion to 'the past'. He states that these stories have taught Indigenous communities since time immemorial, to respect water, to reflect about the value of water in our daily lives, and to learn to care for mother nature.

One such story that he shares with me is about the origins of *El Lago de Ilopango,* which is the main source of water for his community in *Santiago Texacuangos; Ilopango* plays a significant role in the geological histories of El Salvador, which impacted Maya migrations in the Early Classic period in this region due to the explosive nature of its eruptions, which deposited ashes as far as Greenland, in 431-2 CE[386]. The elders say that a long time ago, during colonial times, Spanish priests came to a town near *Santiago Texacuangos,* to proselytize to Indigenous people. Those who lived in the town, were not believers, they did not listen and would close their doors when the priests would approach. The town was a big, beautiful place, surrounded by steep hills and greenery. The priests would ring the church bells all the time and do all they could to get Indigenous people to attend mass, but no one would go, except a man, a woman, and their young daughter. One day, a strange man came to town and told everyone to abandon the place in a hurry and to not look back. As people started fleeing the town, they began to hear very loud thundering noises in the background. The family who used to attend mass, running among the crowds, could not help but look back. They saw that the town was flooding. Everything was covered under water. They were instantly turned into rocks. Today, the locals say that there is a place called *Las Tres Piedras* or "Three Rocks" near *Santiago Texacuangos*. According to this story, many believe that these rocks are the family who disobeyed the order given to not look back. The explosive flood gave birth to what is now *El Lago de Ilopango. Tata* Sebas tells me that "*Dentro del lago, hay un*

[386] The *Tierra Blanca Joven* (TBJ) eruption from the Ilopango Caldera in 431-2 CE, deposited thick ash over much of El Salvador when it was inhabited by the Maya and rendered all areas within at least 80 km of the volcano, uninhabitable for years to decades, after the eruption (Smith 2020: 26063). Scientists believe that the eruption killed over 100,000 people instantly, displaced up to 400,000 more, and filled the skies with ash and dust for more than a year. Roman and Chinese accounts have documented a period of global cooling that resulted in cloudy skies, crop failures, and famines (Pratt 2012).

agujero muy profundo que va hasta el centro de la tierra donde se resguardan los conocimientos de nuestros antepasados en un repositorio" ("Inside the lake, there is a profound hole that leads to the center of the Earth, where the knowledges of our ancestors are safeguarded in a repository". Using a soft voice, he adds: "*Mire niña, aquí siempre hacemos ceremonia y le damos ofrendas al agua por que hay que honrar lo que nos enseñaron y no olvidar lo que somos y de dónde venimos*" ("Look young lady, here, we always do ceremony and give offerings to the water, because we have to honor what they taught us and not forget what we are and where we come from"). He smiles.

Noting similarities between the fate of the characters of his story and the biblical story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah,[387] I ask Tata Sebas if the story of *Las Tres Piedras* has any relationship to biblical stories of floods. He looks me in the eye and without hesitation he states: "*Fíjese, nosotros no somos creyentes y sobrevivimos esas inundaciones, y pues, aquí estamos para contar. Asi es.*" ("Look, we are not believers and survived those floods, and well, here we are to talk about. That's how it is.") shrugging his shoulders (Interviews July 2019).

This local story of a flood took place during colonial times. While the precise time of the violent eruption cited in the story is not given, there are geological records that indicate that a massive eruption took place in 1879-1880 in this region, during which a lava dome formed in the center of the lake, creating *Los Cerros Quemados*[388] (Pratt 2012). Other historical records show that around December of 1879, there were over 600 earthquakes registered in San Salvador and the town of *Ilopango*, and soon after, the lake's water reached a boiling point causing great destruction and death, including the demise of thousands of fish and bird species, and the charring of the adjacent flora and fauna. By January of 1880, the lake flooded toward *el Río de Jiboa*, razing many towns in its path, such as *Atuscatla and El Pedregal*, killing thousands of people. This disaster culminated with massive eruptions in the center of the caldera, which remain fresh in the historical memory of *Kushkatan*. Many theorize that the constant state of violence and chaos brought on by colonization, which forced Indigenous communities to relocate to less ideal spaces and places in the mountains, and compelled people to constantly being on the run, contributed to a permanent identity rooted on 'temporarily being out of place' in *Kushkatan*, a dis-membering of the body from its territory that has prevailed, committing Salvadoran families to a life of many "*nuevos comienzos*" (new beginnings) that is unending and that contemporary migrant families continue to embrace (Henríquez Consalvi et al 2008).

It is the spirit of resistance and survivance of Indigenous communities in *Kushkatan* that was documented with such disdain by Spanish chroniclers, such as Cortés y Larraz, whose pejorative writings attest to the natives' indefatigable refusal to being Christianized. In this light, the story of *El Lago de Ilopango*, re-members Indigenous struggles for sovereignty and self-determination and highlights the sociohistorical context of what is like to face simultaneous calamities at once, thus having to live every-day-

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[387] According to Genesis 19, in the Bible, during the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot's wife looked back as Sodom burned to the ground, even though she was warned not to look back, and she was immediately turned into a pillar of salt for disobeying a divine order (The Bible, Genesis 19; Luke 17:32; Wisdom 10:7).

[388] Burnt Hills.

death, *con ojo de venado,* trusting that another day will come, and that another humanity is possible.

As for *Las Tres Piedras* mentioned in the story, it is a geological marker observable in the *Kushkatan* landscape, which has been used as a directional point of reference by travelers for years. It is located southeast of San Salvador, in the *Santiago Texacuangos/San Francisco Chinameca* panoramic route, along the impressively high southern walls of the *Ilopango* caldera (Fieldnotes 2019). In general, there are some elements in the story of *El Lago de Ilopango* that are verifiable, while others may be more subjective to the interpretation of the one who tells the story and the one who receives it, which is characteristic of Nawa-Pipil oral tradition.

Further, water as the main character in this story, may be utilized by the storyteller in consistency with Indigenous understandings of the world -- specifically, Nawa-Pipil cosmovision -- where water represents cleansing, renewal, a way to pay back what we owe to mother nature to maintain the equilibrium of things that has been lost. In the story of *El Lago de Ilopango,* I offer that the volcanic eruption that unleashed the flood that, according to Indigenous communities gives birth to the lake's origins, may be a decolonial counternarrative to the colonial archives of conquest, which surfaces to redeem Indigenous self-determination against the violent imposition of religious beliefs by colonial authorities, a renewal of Indigenous resistance. From an Indigenous gaze, becoming stone for disobeying Eurocentric beliefs may not be necessarily understood as punishment, but as a refusal to disappear completely from the land[389] in a fierce struggle for autonomy, marking an Indigenous presence over an absence in the discursive ground of the West, which deems Native bodies as extinct. *Las Tres Piedras* may then be thought of as a permanent visual re-affirmation of Indigenous existence in a colonized landscape that, despite its wounds and scars, it re-mains. In other words, water, corrected the worst colonial excesses inflicted upon people and the land by Europeans during the invasion and occupation of the *Kushkatan* territories, and the subsequent cleansing that took place through the story of the flood, may be what Indigenous peoples considered necessary to wash out 'filth' from their lives.

An interesting point about the story, is the clear demarcation made by *Tata* Sebas about the "*creyentes*/believers" and "*no creyentes*/non-believers" who, according to the story, suffered a different fate. Those who maintained their traditional beliefs escaped seemingly untouched by the tragedy, while those who converted to Christianity, did not, although they left traces of themselves in the land and never disappeared. Here, the flood functions as the means to a type of cleansing that is necessary for humanity to rid itself of all impurities and evil, an ecology of justice and restoration for Indigenous communities for resisting Christianity.

In this story, I note an underlying theme of referring to wicked [biblical] places to compare *Kushkatan* and its inhabitants with, which I pointed out earlier in the chronicles of Cortés y Larraz, who expressly uses Sodom and Gomorrah[390] to describe *Coxutepequec*. While wicked [biblical] places are not directly compared with the town in the story of *El Lago de Ilopango,* what happened in the story to those who disobeyed an order in *Kushkatan,* is based on the same logic as what happened to those who disobeyed

[389] See Gerald Vizenor (2008).
[390] See The Bible, Book of Genesis 19.

an order during the destruction of Sodom (*The Bible*, Genesis 19). Here, I highlight that the linking of sinful behaviors and wicked places to disastrous events that ultimately threaten to end humanity's futurities, is present in both -- the colonial archives and in Indigenous storytelling [of *El Lago de Ilopango*] in *Kushkatan* -- but they offer distinct outcomes. In general, I could say that Indigenous stories are imbedded in the landscape to help us re-member catastrophic events and that, the possibility of human extinction is averted by the intelligence of water. The visible presence of Indigenous markers in the landscape ensures the re-telling of these stories for generations to come. While scientific evidence about the origins of the *Ilopango* caldera does not conform to the temporalities of the 1979-1880 flood, the story centers water as a formidable, powerful entity that creates conditions of possibility for Indigenous communities. By offering them a way of fleeing or escaping from the oppressions of Catholic indoctrination -- which Europeans represent as a "wicked' spatiality in need of 'saving' -- the flood, despite all the death and destruction it brings to Indigenous communities, restores the possibility of creating life anew. Thus, in this Nawa-Pipil story, water has a cleansing effect that allows them to get rid of what Indigenous communities may consider filth, saving their Humanity, their futures, their lives.

Nantzin Anastasia López, a Nawat-Pipil singer and composer, originary of the *Cantón El Caulote* in Witzapan, Department of Centsunat, in Western *Kushkatan*, tells the story of a different flood that took place in a different place and time. This story, she grew up hearing from her elders in her hometown, which takes place in or around the eve of the Matanza of 1932. She states that during those difficult days, the people of *Witzapan* heard that government troops were indiscriminately killing Indigenous men and young boys in nearby towns and villages because the government believed they were communists. Afraid for their lives, the men and boys in her village ran to the fields and hid in the forests for many days. Soon, the towns and villages nearby *Witzapan* were deserted. Only women and girls were left behind, along with their animals. *Nantzin Anastasia* says that in the days that followed, the women began hearing rumors that troops were getting closer and closer to their hometown and villages. As their waited in their homes, scared for their impending massacre, they learned that *Santo Domingo de Guzmán*[391] himself appeared on horseback wearing a beautiful blue outfit. Taking out his sword from his scabbard, he made a sea of water appear swiftly out of nowhere, flooding the path and preventing the horses of the invading armies from reaching the other side, where their village was located. This, according to *Nantzin Anastasia*, is how the lives of the people of *Witzapan* were spared by water during the 1932 Matanza. Other Indigenous elders in *Witzapan* are eager to tell a very similar version of this story.[392]

The temporal location of *Nantzin Anastasia*'s story is 1932, a time of significant political upheaval for Indigenous communities in El Salvador; the spatial confines where the story happens is in the surroundings of the town of *Witzapan*, known today as Santo Domingo de Guzmán, located in the Department of *Centzunat,* in western *Kushkatan*.

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[391] The patron-saint of Huitzapan or Wixapan, officially known as Santo Domingo de Guzmán, est. in 1572 (Lara- Martínez 2006: 31).

[392] I included a transliteration of this *Witzapan* story (from Nawa-Pipil to Spanish to English), which was compiled by Leonhart Schultze-Jenna in the 1930s, in the Nawa-Pipil Soundworlds chapter, for reference.

The temporal and spatial locations of the story are verifiable and coincide with the 1932 Matanza.

Similarly, to the story of *El Lago de Ilopango*, in the Santo Domingo de Guzmán's story, Indigenous peoples of *Witzapan* are also saved from the violent legacies and brutality of the modern/colonial system, by water -- a flood -- which stops the government troops from inflicting death[393] upon them. Yet, in the *Witzapan* story, it is Santo Domingo de Guzmán[394] himself, a very powerful western religious figure who commands the waters with his weapon to block 'the enemy's' path and by so doing, he averts a tragedy that would have affected their lives and forever changed the futures of Indigenous communities in the region, permanently.

To make meaning of the role of this European iconic religious figure in the *Witzapan* Nawa-Pipil story, I unpack it in the context of the notion of hybridity,[395] thinking from the storytellers' positionally at the margins[396]. The idea of hybridity comes to light in the vertical nature of power relations between colonizers and the colonized in the 'New World', which from the sixteenth century on, forged a structure of privilege that resulted from the violent exploitation of racialized and gendered labor and extraction of resources from the land by European invaders in *Abya Yala*. The vertical nature of modern/colonial power relations also impacted cultural exchange, unevenly. The resulting power inequalities, seen from the hegemonic lens of Eurocentrism, are often referred to as "syncretic processes," which Ramón Grosfóguel argues, only reflect a horizontal landscape of cultural relations, and hides the unequal power that exists between dominant groups and the dominated. He adds that, seen from the subaltern's gaze, these uneven relations of power allow the subaltern -- from their subordinated positions -- to interject their epistemologies, cosmologies, and political strategies as alternatives to Eurocentrism to resist unequal power relations (Ibid 116).

Within this framework, I offer that the heroic actions of the figure of *Santo Domingo de Guzmán* that averted the 1932 massacre of Nawa-Pipil communities in *Witzapan*, according to the elders in town, must be thought of as a subaltern response to the Eurocentric project of modernity that is intent on killing Indigenous peoples. In other words, hybridity allows the Indigenous women of *Witzapan* to tell their 1932 Matanza traumatic story in their own way, by subsuming the liberatory rhetoric of modernity and instead, using their knowledge systems and Indigenous cosmologies and epistemologies about sacred water, which are located within the bodies of the oppressed and in the exploited spatialities of the colonial difference (Grosfóguel 2008: 16). By doing so, the women of *Witzapan*, redefine power relations beyond the narrow definitions imposed by European modernity and highlight their sovereignty and self-determination when the sacred waters prevent the massacre. In the highly religious and conservative

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[393] I mean death in the physical sense, but also in the cultural sense, as in cultural erasure.

[394] Santo Domingo de Guzmán (1170-1221), has been attributed to be "vesperus" or a night star that would shed light to those who dwell in the dark: "[santo Domingo] llegaría a ser luz para los habitantes de la tierra y alumbraría a los que descansan en las tinieblas y en la sombra de la Muerte"; he has been described as having a knife by his side and is the protomartyr of the Inquisition, which was promoted by Gregorio IX in 1231-1232, and exported to the New World in 1566 (Gómez-Chacón 2013: 92-96).

[395] See Ramón Grosfóguel's concept of hybridity (2005).

[396] See Gloria Anzaldúa's Border Thinking (1987).

modern/colonial Salvadoran context, Nahua Pipil women borrow the religious figure of an Eurocentric icon from the past, to tell their story of resistance and survivance against the evils of the modern/colonial state, from their place of precarity and vulnerability, without having to further compromise their safety, while ensuring that the historical memories of their ordeal will be told to the world.

As with *El Lago de Ilopango* story, water occupies a central place in resolving the plot of this *Witzapan* story, when Santo Domingo himself, commands a flood to block the path of soldiers who are heading to kill Indigenous peoples. As a sacred element in Nawa-Pipil cosmovision, water represents the principle of order, justice, and security. It is based on this cosmogenic premise that the *Witzapan* elders cite its heroic presence in the story, to safely resolve grievances that have yet to be adjudicated any kind of justice and reparations, as of today. What more justice can there be, than being spared from death for being unjustly accused of being a communist? By flooding the path of the soldiers, water ensures the return of order in *Witzapan* and it maintains the equilibrium of things, thus saving Indigenous lives and futurities. Beyond cleansing away the fears of being massacred by government troops, the flood offers the possibility of renewing life and Humanity for Indigenous families, who, for now, can look forward to a new day, without further bloodshed.

Although I reflect on the *Witzapan*'s story using hybridity as a framework, some scholars may insist that it encompasses elements of "*Nawatized* Christianity" or a "Christianized Nawa religion" because, at first glimpse, it displays close correlations between precolonial and colonial/modern worldviews (Klor de Alva 1993). However, I propose that a more critical analysis of cultural associations in these stories is needed to reveal a complex entanglement of gender, racial, sexual, class, and other hierarchies within the geo-political, geo-cultural, and geo-economic processes of the modern/colonial system where the accumulation of capital is constitutive of and constituted by these hierarchies (Grosfóguel 2005: 23). For instance, the plot of the 1932 Matanza story in *Witzapan* is about government troops heading to a remote Indigenous settlement in the mountains, to kill Indigenous men and boys who are perceived as communists; this military manhunt forces Indigenous men and boys, who are unarmed, to flee and hide in the forests. Indigenous women have heard about the Indigenous massacres taking place in nearby villages and towns in *Centzunat* and they shelter in place, at home, alone with their young daughters and their animals.

The predominance of gender, racial, sexual, class, and other hierarchies of power in this plot can neither be underestimated, nor ignored. Neither can the privileges of those in positions of power, such as the government troops who are armed, on horseback, and have orders to hunt down the bodies of Indigenous men and boys in the fields and Indigenous women and girls who have sheltered in their huts, and who are disarmed. In this plot, there is no horizontal exchange of cultural traits that can be observed. European hegemonic thinking has taught government troops that Indigenous people in Western El

Salvador -- including ne *Wijwitzapanchin wan metzas nahua*[397]-- are a threat to the nation and therefore, they must be destroyed[398].

In the climax of the story, the patron-saint of the town suddenly appears and prevents Indigenous peoples from being killed by the government troops, by deploying water to save their lives. The cultural relations that can be observed in this exchange between Indigenous people and the modern/colonial system are of a vertical nature, in a relationship of domination-liberation, which specifically highlights the liberal thinking of the nation and the church. Again, the predominance of unequal gender, racial, sexual, class, and other hierarchies of power in the climax of the *Witzapan* 1932 Matanza story, can neither be undervalued, nor disregarded. For these reasons, I argue that Nawa-Pipil women choose to tell their perspective of the 1932 Matanza from their unique positionality, and by so doing, they subvert the domination-liberation rhetoric of the West to re-assert their sovereignty and self-determination, creating conditions of possibility for their futures and redefining their Humanity.

Further, I note that living under conditions that espouse very different socio-political and economic realities than those of their oppressors, storytellers may have established a dialectic between the "we" and the "others" in their storytelling, which is specific to the Nawa-Pipil localities in which their stories take place,[399] to ground their stories in their cultural identity (Lara Martínez 2006: 14-16). This tension may allow Nawa-Pipil communities to define themselves but, most importantly, to elucidate how others define them, without necessarily directly including or excluding the socio-political and economic processes of the modern/colonial system that are responsible for their subjugation. Lastly, I propose that in local Nawa-Pipil stories, it is in the border spaces of the "we" and the "others" that Indigenous storytellers re-insert their ancestral systems of knowledges and their cosmovision to redefine power, thus re-claiming their existence and relationship in/with the land.

Through *El Lago de Ilopango* and the 1932 *Witzapan* Matanza stories, I have shown how Nawa-Pipil systems of knowledge offer the possibility of counter-mapping the discursive ground of the West by re-asserting Native ways of knowing and being in the world, to redefine power. These stories create conditions of possibility for Indigenous communities that unsettle the spatial logics of [the U. S.] empire, altering Western notions of geography and offering us alternative readings of past traumatic events that are recorded in the collective memory, by the glyphs of the earth, to re-envision a more humane hereafter. It is within this framework that I invoke the ancestral Nawat-Pipil story of *Miktan* in mother-tongue, to help us re-member what is like to perish in the sacredness of water, from an Indigenous perspective. By centering this Nawa-Pipil story, I attempt to re-situate the presences of Óscar and Angie Valeria in the land and in water, to recuperate their sense of continuity and permanency in our communities. Simultaneously, I seek to dismantle the modern/colonial system's attempts that forced them to exist and disappear in the temporalities of geographies of inhabitability and anti-

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[397] See Antonia Ramirez's songs *Ne Wijwitzapanchin* and *Metzas Nahua* in the previous chapter, for reference.

[398] See Foucault's concept of biopolitics in "Society must be defended" (2003)

[399] See Barth's Ethnic groups and boundaries (1976: 11).

humanness, that tracked each of their steps, wherever they went, and forced them toward *apan*.

As shared in the introduction, *apan* is a Nawat-Pipil locative for water (*at, atl*) that people compare to Western notions of river, lake, or other bodies of water (Lara-Martínez 2017: 188, 194); *apan* is regarded by the Nahua, as a "living" entity endowed with sacred energies, a soul, a heart, intelligence; it is also a place that shelters life, such as "flora and fauna…" (195), and that "… sprouts, receives water" (199). Beyond a mere water locative term, *apan* is a "… geographic seat where space-time-lived refuses to disassociate events that occur in a place, from the place where they occur...". This Nahua definition implies a counter spatial-temporal reflection that frames the collective history of an Indigenous existence that safekeeps their knowledges from the past, alive, today (Ibid 200).

As seen in the two prior examples, water stories have always been a part of Nawa-Pipil life and cosmovision, where sharing a collective life with deities and other magical creatures is possible, and also a constant communication between humanity and nature that informs the present through the eyes of the past. The stories of creation[400] for Mesoamerican peoples have always been linked to water, for water is understood as the origins of all life. In fact, for the Nahua, the world in which we live rests over water, *the cemanahuac,* which is surrounded by subterranean waters and rain or celestial waters. Water is part of many ancient stories and is full of signification and symbolism (Gonzáles Pagés 2006: 7-9).

In this light, the elders in *Kushkatan* say that to tell a story about *apan* is to knit the past, with the fluidity of water by carefully weaving the threads of memory that slip through seemingly silent spaces and places, which are entangled with time; stories of deities, characters, events, beginnings, and ends… stories about the living and the dead, who must travel to *Miktan,* the place of the dead, and *Tlalocan*, the paradise of *Tlaloc*,[401] where those who perish in water dwell happily for eternity. Both places are associated with regeneration and the redistribution of goods needed for perpetually nourishing life. *Miktan*, is an ancient Nawa-Pipil story, and the following is the only known recording of it, offered as a testimony of the past, in the Nawat-Pipil language:

> *Nemik se, kitskia michin, wan kidak, ka asik se chulet inawak, wan kitskiknimi wan kitilan wan wikak ne inchan*. (57)
>
> *Ne iweyka yasiket miktuk wan kiwikaket ichan wan kidaket, ka miktuk wan tikukaket. (58)*
>
> *Wan kidaket, ka asiyawi wan kimatit, ka kipeya yey imey xiwit, ka miktuk: (59)*
>
> *kidaket ka yajket kalkwit, kiwikaket ichan, wan kidaket, ka kitukaket! Wan ken ka*

[400] The Legend of the Fifth Sun (de los Arcos 1967: 183).
[401] Nahua lord of the waters (Gonzales Pagés 2006: 57).

walmukwepki? (60)

Yeka kan ne kidaket, nakaket kixpelwiat, wan
kan kidaket, ka yaja ne kisketmutaluwat. (61)

Wan yaja kan kidaket, ka mualujket, yaja kalak-
kalijtik. Kwakuni pejket asit chiujchupi, tachiat.
Wan kidaket ka yaja, kisket sempa mutaluwat. (62)

Kwakuni kiski yaja, Wan kan kidaket
yemet, ka yek, nian kukuxtuk, yek nesi: kwakuni
weliket ki nutsat wan kilijket: (63)

"Temet tikmatik, ka taja timiktuka! Tikidaket
tiajket talmetskwit kanne tiatukuk; wan tikidaket,
ka timetstukaket, - wan ken, ka unkan tiwits?". (64)

"Su naja inte nikmati,su naja ni atukuk? Naja
semaya tey nikidak: asik nunawak se chulet
wan kitskit ne numey, nechtilan tik ni at". (65)

"Wan ka pejket tinejnemit tik ne at, ne nikidak:
kanne nijnemi, muchayawi ne ujti, kan
panu; wan yaja wajtuk, -inte ajwi ne chulet". (66)

"Wan nikidak, kanne tiasiket nikidak, ka kitapuk
ne tenkal. Wan tikalajket wan nikidak,
ni wan tatentsakwa, -ya san at! Wan kan tikalajket,
mukwepki sempa tatentsakwa". (67)
"Wan ne nikidak, ka ne musentepewat: ne
nemi chujchuletket wan lajlamachichinmet,
wanne tejemet kwatne techwikat, muchi
munujnutsat, pal yawit techidat". (68)

"Kan tamiasit muchi yemet, kwakuni ki nutsat
muchi mijmichin, - wan ne pitujchin kipitsa
yaja". (69)

"Ne nikidak, kwakne asit yejemet, yemet asitsan
ne tenkal, techixpelwiat; wan ne chujchulejket
muketsat kinilwitiliat, kwane
techwikatiwik se ne ken temet". (70)

***"**Muchi yemet ne nemit tik ne sejseyuk wan kipiat*
ni at, -yajaya, ne kikwit palne tey ne yemet

munekit: pal yunit wan pal mumapakat". (71)

"Ne tikpakat ni inikxi wan ne imey; semaya tey yemet mupakat ne ixkaliu, yaja ne kipakat yejemet". (72)

"Kan tamit tikpakat ni inmejmey wan ne iikxi, kwakuni timutaliat tikatinwiat; wan ne mal nemi ne sejseki, temit kenaya nemit ka tikatinwiat; -wan ne muchi ne pepeyna tiwit." (73)

"Ne kipiat sejse ne teyijtik mutalilia kanne nemit chiujchiupi at chichin; wan uni ne tey ijtik, ne tiktaliliat, muchi oro". (74)

"Wan ne tey uni tiktaliliat, inte tikidat, asu yunit: kwak yaja wits tayuwaki, intia kipiat ni ajatchichin; want inte tiidat kemanne yunit". (75)

"Wan nikidat, kan tatuwi, ka naka istak nujme: yaja kwat ne tunal pewa tachia ijtik ni at, yeka istaya ni at". (76)

"Wan uni kanne tiutikwit uni at, yajaya ne kwak yawit yemet yenchat". (77)

"yajane munununutsat, -ya kwakne yawit kitaliat ne in mey: yajane kwalne mukaki, ka tikwini tik tal". (78)

"Ne inte kichaluwat, ne semaya n(e) imey kitaliat Wan kipachuwat pal katani". (79)

"Wan yemetne palne takwat, -inte takwat ken temet -ne kipiat se kwawitchin. Ne kichiwa ni takil, tey ne yawit takwat uni tunal". (80)

"Kwat tayuwaki; inte nesi, su naka se itakil. Wan kan yawi tatuwi, kipeya tey ne tiawit tikwat uni tunal". (81)

"Wan ne i-(u)a-yu inte nesi, ux xuxukna- nian nesi tey? -wan ne muida, ka nesi kunyuwa-chin". (82)

“Wan uni kwawit-chin, kipia yej-yey iswayu, wan kiuni yawi pal kajku, wan ne iswayu kipia tech ni kuyi: kenaya ken nesi se kutejkuni, axta tani kipia ne se wan kipia ne seyuk, -ijkwini yawi pal kajku”. (83)

“Nemik se tunal, nikidak, ka welik nikwi se ne iwan tanutsat yemet, -wan yaja kikwi ne chulet, pal asit muchi ne mijmichin wan pal kichat kan panu”. (84)

Inte se-san- nemi miak pituchin, wan welik nikinaya se”. (85)

“Wan kan muketski ne chulet, welik nik pitsa naja: kwakuni tapwik ne tenkal wan muchiuki ni ujti kanne welik nikisa”. (86)
(Schultze Jenna in Lara-Martínez 2016: 71-73).

Spanish translation:

Había un hombre que se hallaba pescando, cuando notó que se le acercaba un anciano a agarrarlo y lo succionó hacia su morada al interior del agua. (57)

El cuerpo lo encontraron muerto y lo llevaron a su casa. Ahí notaron que efectivamente estaba muerto y lo enterraron. (58)

Al tiempo vieron que iba llegando, pero sabían que tenía quince años que había muerto. (59)

Ellos mismos lo habían traído y llevado a casa. también ellos vieron que lo enterraron, y por eso, ahora se preguntaban, “pero ¿cómo volvió?” (60)

Por ello, al verlo, se quedaron observándolo y cuando advirtieron que era él, salieron corriendo. (61)

Por su parte, al ver que se corrían, él entró a casa. Luego, se inició que poco a poco llegaban a observarlo. Comprobaron que era él y salieron de nuevo corriendo. (62)

Él también salió a llamarlos. Y al notar que estaba en buenas condiciones, que tampoco estaba enfermo

sino bien parecido, se decidieron a hablarle y le dijeron: (63)

"Ciertamente, nosotros sabemos que estás muerto. Fuimos a traerte hacia el pueblo cuando te ahogaste. Y sabemos que te enterramos. Pero ¿cómo vienes de regreso?." (64)

"Yo no lo sé. Ni siquiera sé si me ahogué. Yo solo sé lo que percibí. Llegó a mi lado un anciano y me agarró de la mano. Me succionó hacia el interior del agua". (65)

"Y al iniciarse que caminábamos en el agua, ahí observe que se hacía camino al andar. En el agua al andar, se iba haciendo el camino, mientras transcurríamos. Y se hallaba seco. Por eso, el anciano no se mojaba". (66)

"Y adonde llegamos, vi que se abrió la Puerta. Y entramos y vi el instrumento con el cual se abría la puerta que es solo de agua. Y al entrar, volvió de nuevo a cerrarse la Puerta." (67)

"y ahí vi que se reunían ancianos y ancianillas que vivían en el interior de las aguas. Y ahí estabamos nosotros en el sitio en el cual nos habían secuestrado. Todos se llamaban entre sí para ir a vernos (como si fuésemos seres extraños)". (68)

"Al terminar de llegar los ancestros, llamaron a todos los peces con un pito que tocaban". (69)

"Ahí, observe su llegada. Se arrimaban a la Puerta y nos espiaban. Los ancianos se levantaban a mostrarles a los demás, hacia donde conducían a uno de los nuestros." (70)

"Todos ellos vivían en su respectiva casa con servicio de agua potable, la cual ocupaban para lo que desearan, sea para beber o sea para lavarse". (71)

"En ese recinto les lavamos los pies y las manos. Ellos solo se lavaban la cara. Esto era lo único que ellos se lavaban por sí mismos". (72)

“Al terminar que les lavábamos las manos y los pies, nos sentábamos a despiojarlos. Y aunque había gente de sobra, igualmente a nosotros nos tocaba despiojarlos. Y todas las mañanas retomábamos la misma labor”. (73)

“Ahí, cada quien contaba con su propia vasija, la cual colocaban donde había agua. Y estas vasijas que ponían en su lugar eran todas de oro”. (74)

“Aun si las colocábamos en su sitio, no advertíamos cómo hacían para beber. Al caer la noche, no tenían agua ni notábamos cómo la bebían (sin que la tocaran sus manos)”. (75)

“Al anochecer observaba que todo el recinto emblanquecía al salir el sol el cual blanqueaba el agua. En verdad, por su reflejo se blanqueaba el agua”. (76)

“el agua que acarreábamos ellos la examinaban al tacto.” (77)

“Así sucedía cuando se llamaban sin cese. Sucedía que colocaban la mano. Sucedía que se escuchaba que la tierra tronaba.” (78)

“Pero no la golpeaban. Solo colocaban la mano y la apoyaban hacia abajo.” (79)
“Y ellos para no comer, no se alimentaban como nosotros. Ahí tenían un arbolito que dana los frutos que comían día a día”. (80)

“Al oscurecer no resultaba evidente si quedaban frutas. Pero al amanecer, había lo que comeríamos ese día”. (81)

“Tampoco su follaje se evidenciaba si era verde ni de qué color era. En cambio, aparecía oscuro”. (82)

“Al arbolito le crecían tres hojas junto al tronco por las cuales ascendía. Parecían como si fuesen escalera. Unas le crecían desde abajo, mientras otras iban en ascenso”. (83)

“un día advertí que era posible robarme un

(instrumento) con los cuales el anciano llamaba
a todos los peces que acudían a construir (el camino)
al andar". (84)

"No había uno solo sino muchos pitillos de los
cuales me fue possible seconder uno". (85)

"Al levantarse el anciano me fue possible pitarlo. De
inmediato se abrió la puerta, se trazó el camino y
me fue posible salir." (86)
(Lara-Martínez 2016: 71-73).

English Translation[402]:

There was a man who was fishing, when
He noticed that an old man was approaching to grab
him and he sucked him into its dwelling in the water. (57)

They found the dead body and they took it to
his house. There they noticed that it was indeed
dead and they buried him. (58)

With time they saw that he was coming back, but they knew that
it was fifteen years ago since he had died. (59)

They themselves had brought his body and carried it home.
They also saw that they themselves buried him, and therefore,
now they wondered, "But how did he come back?" (60)

For this reason, when they saw him, they stayed watching him and
when
they realized that it was him, they ran out. (61)

On his part, seeing that they were running out, he entered the
house. Then, it began that little by little they came to
look at him. They verified that it was him and they ran out again.
(62)

He also went out to call them. And noticing that he was in
good condition, that he was not sick either
but rather, good-looking, they decided to talk to him and
they told him: (63)

"Certainly, we know that you are dead.

[402] My translation (2019).

We went to bring you back to the town when
you drowned. And we know that we buried you. But
how do you come back? (64)

"I do not know it. I don't even know if I drowned. I only
know what I perceived. An old man came up to me and
grabbed by the hand. It sucked me into the water." (65)

"And when it began that we would walk in the water, there
I observed that a path was being made when walking.
In the water, when walked, a path was being made, while
we would spend time there. And it would be dry. That is why
the old man would not get wet". (66)

"And where we arrived to, I saw that a gate opened. And
we entered and I saw the instrument with which the gate,
which is made only of water, would open. And when entering,
the gate closed again." (67)

"And there I saw that old men and little old women would gather
that lived inside the waters. And there we were
in the place in which they had us
kidnapped. They all would call each other to go
look at us (as if we were strange beings)". (68)

"When the ancestors finished arriving, they called
all the fish with a whistle they would play". (69)

"There, I observed their arrival. They would lean on the door
and they would spy on us. The old men would get up to
show others where they were taking one of ours." (70)

"All of them lived in their respective houses with
drinking water service, which they used as they
desired, be it to drink or be it to wash themselves". (71)

"In that room we washed their feet and hands.
They would only wash their faces. This was the only thing
they would wash on their own." (72)

"When we would finish washing their hands and feet,
we would sit down to delouse them. And although there was
plenty of people, we were charged with
delousing them. And every morning we would resume the
same job." (73)

"There, everyone had their own vessel, which
they would place where there would be water. And these vessels
that they would put in their place were all made of gold." (74)

"Even if we would put them in their proper place, we would not notice
how they would do to drink. By nightfall, they would not have
water, nor we would notice how they would drink it (without their
hands touching it)". (75)

"At dusk I would observe that the entire compound
would be whitened when the sun rose, which would whiten the
water. In truth, by its reflection, the water would be whitened." (76)

"The water that we would carry they would examine it by
touch." (77)

"This would happen when they called each other incessantly.
It would happen that they would place their hand. It would happen
that it would be heard that the earth thundered." (78)

"But they would not hit her. They would only place their hand and
lean it down." (79)

"And they, in order to eat, they would not eat like
us. There they had a little tree that would bear the fruits
that they would eat day to day. (80)

"At dusk it would not be evident if there would be any
fruits left. But at dawn, there would be what we would
eat that day". (81)

"Neither it would be evident if its foliage was green or
what color it was. Instead, it would appear dark." (82)

"The little tree would grow three leaves next to the trunk
by which it would ascend. They would seem as if they would
be a ladder. Some would grow from below, while
others would be climbing up. (83)

"One day I warned that it was possible for me to steal
an (instrument), with which the old man would call to
all the fish that would come to build (the path)
when walking". (84)

> "There would be not just one but many little whistles of which it was possible for me to hide one". (85)
>
> "When the old man got up, I was able to blow the whistle. Immediately the gate opened, the path was laid out, and it was possible for me to get out." (86)[403]

As a time immemorial Nawa-Pipil story, *Miktan,* was told in the oral tradition by the elders of Itzalku when it was first compiled and transliterated as "testimonio", from Nawa-Pipil to German, by Anthropologist Leonhard Schultze-Jenna[404] in the 1930s, in *Mitos en la Lengua Maternal de los Pipiles de Izalco* (Lemus 2014: 141; Lara-Martínez 2010: 8). Salvadoran linguist, Jorge Lemus, and Salvadoran linguistic anthropologist Rafael Lara-Martínez[405] state that there is no other work about Nawa-Pipil cosmovision and mytho-poetics that exists, other than the Schultze Jenna's collection, which Lara-Martínez compares to the *Popol Vuh*[406] and the *Cantares Mexicanos*[407] (Ibid 6).

Mitos was translated to Spanish in 1977, by Gloria Menjívar Rieken and Armida Parada Fortín, and interpreted linguistically and in literary/poetic terms in 2009, by Lara-Martínez (Ibid 16, 17). In this study, I offer an English translation of *Miktan,* from Spanish, focusing on making the existing text accessible to this language, for this study's purpose. I do not focus on revising or analyzing the various translation iterations done overtime to the first known compilation of this Nawat-Pipil story. From having heard the story being referenced by elder Nahua speakers in *Kushkatan* during my fieldwork in recent years, it appears that *Miktan* retains a permanence in the collective memory of the community, despite the dynamic nature of oral tradition and the multiple external influences and internal changes that active maternal Nawat-Pipil speakers have endured and continue to endure today[408]. It is possible that the story has continued to evolve[409] by storytellers, who may be incorporating changes to it, to deal with their contemporary concerns, without reaching a point where they consider it complete. The cultural continuity of *Miktan* is beyond the scope of this study, but it is an interesting topic for future research.

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[403] My translation (November 2022).
[404] Leonhard Schultze-Jena, Mythen in der Muttersprache der Pipil von Izalco in El Salvador (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1935).
[405] Rafael Lara-Martínez is a linguistic anthropologist in the U.S., not to be confused with Carlos Lara Martínez, an anthropologist in El Salvador.
[406] Maya myth of creation. See Sam Colop (2008).
[407] The largest collection of Mexica poetry from the sixteenth century. See León-Portilla (2011).
[408] According to Lemus, the Nawa-Pipil elders, who were children in the 1930s, still recall the stories told by their parents, despite the 1932 Matanza and decades of repression that followed (2014: 144).
[409] For cultural continuity, see van der Loo (1987: 18).

To situate *Miktan* historically, both Lemus and Lara-Martínez reference its Mexica linguistic roots[410] and pantheon[411]. They also cite the Nahuatl version of the Miktan story -- *Mictlan*[412] -- for cultural context, which according to Nahua oral tradition is the counterpart of *Tlalocan*, where those who perished in water dwell happily; *Tlalocan* is also inhabited by deities and magical beings, slightly comparable to Western notions of heaven and hell. In Nahua cosmovision, when someone dies, they must start their journey to the underworld, *Miktan*, which can only be accessed through openings in caves[413] or volcanos, lakes, and rivers[414] (Lemus 2014: 142). Given that in El Salvador there are no codices or colonial texts that survived the colonial encounter to access descriptions of the underworld according to the Nawa-Pipil historical memory, scholars believe that it is a valid assumption - based on linguistic and archeological evidence, and oral traditions that have survived - to accept that the Nawa-Pipil and the Mexica peoples share a similar cosmovision, cultural traditions, and spiritual practices (Ibid 143).

Using this approach, Lemus proposes that the Nawa-Pipil underworld is a magical place where time is relative, meaning that one's permanency in it, is not forever given that a person who drowns can escape the water and return to the world of the living after a while. The living can only enter *Miktan* after death. However, in Nawa-Pipil stories, it is possible to enter the underworld while alive, through rituals that witches and sorcerers perform or through a pact with *kuhkul*, a figure similar to the devil, which is often embodied by a *nahual*[415] or an animal, or by a White person referred to as *istak takat/tzunxilut*,[416] who is evil and known for telling lies, and deceiving and luring innocent people to enter into the dwelling of the dead (Ibid 144).

The opening to the underworld is usually a cave (*shaput*, *xaput*). Caves in Mesoamerica represent the sacred womb (*xinach, shinach*), a passage to and from Mother Earth, associated with that which is feminine, because of its fertility and nourishing energies, and because it allows all beings to be born, to emanate from within it, such as plants and agriculture, maize (corn). When living beings die, they must return to Mother Earth's sacred womb through openings into the ground as a symbol of gratitude for all the gifts that she has given us. Thus, caves are considered the beginning and the end of life, and they possess a mythical character in Nahua worldviews because of their association with spiritual realms. In *Witzapan*, where many of the Nawa-Pipil stories about caves are still being told today, the caves are real. For instance, *El Arco*/The Arch and the *Cueva del Diablo*/Cave of the Devil are located around town and those who visit these spaces can observe remnants of candles, flowers, spices, and other materials used

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[410] Nahuat and Nahuatl come from the same Uto-Aztecan linguistic family (Lemus 2014: 142).

[411] *Tlaloc, Xipe Totec, Quetzalcoatl, Ehecatl* and other Mexica deities are found in archeological sites in Kushkatan (Lemus 2014: 142). It is important to note, that León-Portilla (2011) refuted the idea of multiple deities in Nahua cosmovision, based on their notion of *ometeotl* and the principle of duality.

[412] The Mexica version of *Miktan* in the Nahuatl language.

[413] *Chicomoztoc:* According to Nahua cosmovision, it is the place of the seven caves; it has an equivalent to the seven openings of the body, from where everything that is alive, emanates. It is described as a mountain filled with water (Lara-Martínez, 2016: 9).

[414] See the definition of *apan* given in the introduction of this study for making meaning of *Miktan*.

[415] *Nahuales* are the alter-ego animals of a human being, a living presence (López Austin 1973: 118).

[416] Hair/head of baby corn, used in Nawat-Pipil to refer to a "chele" or fair complexion person (Lemus 2014: 147).

for rituals done to access the underworld or to obtain favors about love, illness, money and more. These caves represent a type of portal that allows for contact between the world of the living and the world of the dead (Ibid 147).

Additionally, when people enter a cave, they enter a world in which the laws of physics do not apply. In some of the stories collected by Schultze-Jena, there are magical beings living in caves such as snakes, deer, jaguars, dogs, monkeys, rabbits and more[417], that can transfer their powers to human beings[418] (Ibid 148). In other ones, witches and sorcerers who made pacts with *kuhkul (kujkul)* or a devil-like figure who can travel between these two worlds, which gives them enormous power and makes them be feared by everyone. Unlike in Western stories, in Nawa-Pipil stories it is always possible to win a pact with *kuhkul* and come out of the underworld safely. Indigenous tenacity is always present in Nawa-Pipil stories (Ibid 148).

In general, Nawa-Pipil stories about the underworld teach us that it is important to avoid contact with strange beings - animals, men, women - and especially "*cheles*", who appear in the forests and deceive innocent people, taking them to the underworld (Ibid 151). Although, Mexica deities no longer appear openly in Nawa-Pipil stories, there is a great deal of Mexica symbolism[419] that is present in them, such as the *nahuales* and white devils dressed as powerful, attractive people. These magical beings often appear near caves, rivers, lakes, mountains, and lead innocent travelers toward the underworld. Yet, the underworld is not always a dark place to be feared; sometimes, it is an attractive place where everything needed to be at peace with oneself and the universe exists in harmony, such as trees and fruit (Ibid).

Lastly, Lara-Martínez offers that to understand the notion of the underworld for Indigenous communities, a re-encounter with the dead, through storytelling is necessary. In other words, he proposes that Nawat-Pipil mytho-poetics are a window into the past that tell the living experiences (*yul*/corazón/heart, lo humano/the human) of the dead, through our re-membering (*-ilnamiki*) of their lives in the present. To recover their memories, is to revive ancestral knowledges. Similarly, to forget them *(-eltapach*/*elkawa;* el hígado/liver/forgetting, the fantasmal/ghostly) is to condemn the living and their dead, to an invisible life in exile, which is consistent with the legacies of the modern/colonial system of denying Indigenous communities their Humanity and their land. Further, he adds that "*mati - iix-mati -yul-mati"* or "saber - *ojo/conocer - corazón/conocer*" or "to know - to recognize - to believe" are philosophical processes that the Nawa-Pipil language conceives as deeply ingrained in the human body, which is a living, palpating archive of written memories (*ilnamiki*/pectoral/re-encontrar). Supported (*-ketza*) by the psychic energies endowed to the body by the universe, *mati - iixmati - yulmati* become "living" spoken knowledges, inherent in language and words (*-taketzalis),* thought *(iixketza),* and reflection *(yultaketza*) that are recovered from the stories of the dead. As such, all traces of the dead, (such as their ashes or *nexti* and bones or *-umit*[420]) teach us

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[417] These animal figures can represent deities such as Quezalcoatl y Tezcatiploca (Lemus 2014: 151).
[418] A practice known as *Nahualismo* (Lemus 2014: 150).
[419]Animals such as shrimp, iguanas, fish, alligators, turtles are related to water, and they can be associated with Tlaloc and Chalchiuhtlicue (Lemus 2014: 151).
[420] Humanity was born from the bones and ashes of the dead (Códice *Chimalpopoca*, 1945: 120-121; Garibay, 2005: 105-106; Torquemada, 1975: iii, 120-121).

(*enseñar* or -*munextia*) to discover (*des-cubrir* or -*ki-nextia*) future trajectories from the stories of the past (2016: 8-10).

In this light, words in Nawat-Pipil lift the world when they name it. Stories, which are made of "living words" thus support the universe and make culture real and alive. From words -- which are endowed with sacred energies -- to the realm of the divine, there is a very narrow liminal space in which, what is alive resuscitates all that exists[421] (Ibid 2014: 15). Lara-Martínez concludes that for the Nawa-Pipil, there is no present without a past, and there is no past without a descend of the living, into the world of the dead -- to the depths of Mother Earth -- where the experiences of our ancestors are kept alive and are re-generated (-*xuchikisa*) to the present, by our collective re-membering. The dead, he concludes, are the seed of the present (2016: 8-10).

As I have shown above, *Miktan,* is an ancient Nawat-Pipil story about a man who drowns while fishing (see stanza 57), who does not know he died (see stanza 65). People in his village find his body and bury him, but after 15 years, he returns to his community in good condition, surprising many (see stanzas 53-64). He describes his descent into the interiority of water as walking on a dry path, inside the water, accompanied by an elder (see stanza 66), and reaching a door made of water that opened and closed for them. Behind the door, he tells of the gathering place of the ancestors, who are curious about him (see stanza 68). The elders use a whistle to call the fish to see him (see stanza 69). The elders live in their own houses in the water, where they have everything, they need to sustain themselves (see stanza 71). The man recalls caring for the elders (see stanza 73), who keep the water they drink, in pots made of gold (see stanza 74) and they drink it at night without been seen (see stanza 75). The elders make the earth tremble when they touch the water that the man fetches for them (see stanzas 77-79). The story mentions how the sun rising changes the color of the water (see stanza 76). They also have a tree that gives them fruit to eat each day (see stanzas 80, 81). The tree had three leaves to ascend (see stanza 83). One day, the man escapes the water by calling with a whistle, the fish that build a path for him to walk on (see stanza 84). The door opens and he walks free back to his community (see stanza 86).

In the *Miktan* story, water plays a central role. For the Nawa-Pipil, it is a space where our ancestors and those who drown dwell peacefully; water is a gathering space where all occupants have access to what they need to be well. Life in water is devoid of any traumatic recollections, ill feelings, fear, violence, and evil. In water, according to the *Miktan* story, there appears to be a sense of calmness that comforts its dwellers. Water is a sacred space that affords to all who live there --humans, animals, plants, and others -- an experience of sharing 'life' together, peacefully. Most importantly, for the man who drown in the *Miktan* story, water represents his rebirth and his chance to start life anew with his community, his new beginning. Ultimately, in the *Miktan* story, the man who drowned was able to emerge from the waters, redeemed, returning to his people, reclaiming his sovereignty.

Unlike Indigenous understandings of water, the narratives of the West about those who drown, particularly at border-rivers, are extremely gruesome and violent, as seen in

[421] The application of the laws of physics ($E=mc^2$), which states that energy cannot be created nor destroyed, it can only be transformed (Lara-Martínez 2014: 15).

the news coverage of the tragedy of Óscar and Angie Valeria. Their demise in the Rio Grande waters in 2019, was highly publicized by the news media around the world in cruel, appalling detail. Ghastly images of father and daughter were shown repeatedly in newspaper and television reports, accompanied by hegemonic discourses about the dangers of irregular migration and 'illegal' border crossings. As I have shown in several segments of news articles cited in the introduction of this study, from north to south, report after report highlights 'danger and death', criminalizes migration and migrants, blames the dead, and uplifts the benevolence of the West, by underscoring how its militarized rescuers consistently pull dead bodies out of the water to 'safety'. To shed light on the savagery through which U. S. empire kills Indigenous children and their families by enacting the policies that puts them in the water, at its border sites, and then consumes their lifeless bodies through the media, I cite anthropologist Michael Taussig, who uses Karl Marx's notion of *commodity fetishism* to interrogate the idea of cannibalism (2008). Taussig reminds us that by western definition, cannibalism is the consumption of the Other, which he states, is enacted by the colonizers' fears of being consumed by difference (105). He proposes that cannibalism, as a modern/colonial trope, is the single most important symbol and signifier of European notions of 'barbarism' and 'savagery', that fictionalize all that is "grotesquely different about the Indian", thus making the colonizers' speech, as deadly as the weapons they deploy today, to kill Indigenous peoples. These hegemonic narratives, Taussig argues, reveal a modern/colonial racist capitalist desire for the consumption of the fetishized Native body and manifest through ritualized reenactments of their [own] colonial violence against 'the savagery' of the 'Indian', on which their world depends on, to thrive economically (107). Taussig explains that in condemning cannibalism, the colonizers are deeply complicit with it, because their storytelling hinges on ritualistic death and body parts that are "embellished in a memory-theater of vengeances, paid and repaid to denigrate, construct, and consume the Other", reconstituting the consumer with Otherness, thus, effecting colonization (105). In this context, the images of Óscar and Angie Valeria that are still actively circulating around the world today, show the ritualistic "memory-theater of vengeances" in which the West consumes [dead] Indigenous bodies at its border sites, and beyond. This evidences that colonialism - as Walter Mignolo states - is "not over but, it's all over" (López-Calvo 2014: 173).

To counter-map the hegemonic discursive of the West, Nawa-Pipil communities in *Kushkatan* center their epistemologies, cosmologies, and political strategies such as *ilnamiki,* as alternatives to the European modern/colonial project, resisting unequal power relations and re-asserting their Humanity. In this sense, re-membering -- from a place of subalternity -- what has been dis-membered by the legacies of colonialism, is the ultimate act of decolonial love, that recovers our 'Indianness' from the past and carries it forward, without talking about it or having to justify it thus, ensuring our futures. By confronting the present with the eyes that saw the past, Indigenous communities continue to exist and reclaim life through ancestral knowledges and the grammar of the body, which recovers the experiences of the dead, to keep them alive in the collective memory. For those who grieve the drownings of Óscar and Angie Valeria in the Rio Grande's water, re-membering them in a sacred space of life is the most radical act of decolonial love that they can offer, which restores their Humanity and presence in the land.

Section 2: *Michcuicatl / Canto de Peces* / Fish Song

To accompany Óscar and Angie Valeria's footsteps in their journey from *Kushkatan* across the unceded Mexica territories, to the U. S. border, and to shed light on the prevalence of the colonial past in their present-day experiences as Indigenous descendants transiting through occupied land, in this section, I have included a critical analysis of a few stanzas of a sixteenth century Mexica poem song of lamentation, an allegory titled *Michcuicalt*. It is believed that this powerful poetic discourse detailing the prolonged Spanish invasion and occupation of *Tenochtitlan* in 1520-1521, and its durable aftermaths, was originally written in Nahuatl by [Nahua] poets who make memory of the violences of the violences of the Spanish conquest, when thousands of Mexicas perished in the waters of Lake *Texcoco*, courageously defending their right to exist. The performers of this allegory are thought to have been dressed as fish and to represent Mexica warriors who drowned in battle (Garibay 1965: XIII), documenting for posterity, the anguish and devastation that Europeans brought to Indigenous communities in this part of the world, from the perspective of the defeated (Klor de Alva 1997: 108).

In this light, I offer that the drownings of Óscar and Angie Valeria in Rio Grande waters in 2019, are an enduring resonance of the colonial past that is not over, which intensifies our need for re-membering past disappearances of Indigenous people in the land and water. As such, I link the violent aquatic disappearances of Óscar and Angie Valeria in Rio Grande waters to those who disappeared under water in Lake *Texcoco* near *Tlatelolco* in 1521[422]. I rely on the generous testimony of those who bore witness to European heartlessness through their compelling poetry[423] and metaphor[424] then, in the poems songs we have inherited today, such as *Michcuicatl,* to pay homage to what remains of those who continue to vanish -- the blood memory[425] of descendants -- which keeps these and other stories alive through *ilnamiki.* By re-membering past and present stories of Indigenous life disappearing in the land and under water, we are summoned in an instant, to un-map the cartographical discursive of the West -- *con ojo de venado* -- to recuperate the drowning of a collective history that has been misattributed to the danger and ferocity of *apan* and to the victims's disregard for their own safety. Only then, the glyphs of the land become visible, exposing the scars of trauma on its grounds, and showing us that as space-time-lived refuses to disassociate events that occur in a place, from the place they occur. In this way, the *ijiu* (life force) of the land, permanently upholds Indigenous ways of re-membering traumatic events, where they occur,

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[422] See Octavio Paz's comparison of the Tlatelolco 1521 and 1968 massacres, which created a foundation for viewing *massacre* as a symbol of long-lasting, interconnected violences and, José Emilio Pacheco's poem 'Lectura de los "Cantares Mexicanos"', in which a narrative of the Spanish conquest of the Mexica empire is used to tell the story of the 1968 massacre by metaphorically summoning history to serve the present (Carpenter 2018: 451).

[423] Nahuat poetry can be divided into three kinds: *cuauhcuicatl* (cantos de águila/eagle songs), *yaocuicatl* (cantos del guerrero/warrior songs), and *teuccuicatl* (cantos de los principales/deity songs) (León-Portilla 1992: XI).

[424] The most salient metaphors in *Cantares* include flora and fauna, colors, gems stones, precious metals, and symbols of war such as smoke, fog, water, fire, and obsidian to guide the poem song toward the emotions of combat (León-Portilla 1992: 243-244).

[425] Cumulative, lifespan trauma in the collective. See Brave Heart (2003; 1998).

preserving in this manner, the sovereignty of our stories into the future. As such, Nahua embodied knowledges, make it possible for those who have disappeared in *apan* to reemerge, bearing witness to an Indigenous presence that it is rooted in the land and water, and giving evidence[426] of a Native refusal to be removed from the territories, safeguarding the collective memory of a people in *apan*.

According to historical accounts, the poems songs in *Cantares Mexicanos* -- such as *Michcuicatl* -- along with an impressive array of Indigenous cultural production of the epoch, were compiled by Indigenous scholars who were trained by Franciscan missionaries in the Imperial College of Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco (1547) and *Tepepulco* (1558 and 1561). They transliterated these works from Nahua oral tradition to Castilian and some Latin, for Friar Bernardino de Sahagún, who incorporated these ethnological data in *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España* (circa 1545-1590)[427]. At the time Sahagún compiled these data, he was motivated to understand Indigenous religious beliefs, convinced that Christianization was being carried out too superficially and that to combat Indigenous idolatry, it was necessary to develop a basic Nahuatl vocabulary and a deep understanding of Native rites and culture (Barbero Richart 1997: 249, 350). In this context, Nahua scholars wrote the Florentine Codex in two columns, Castilian (and some Latin) in the left and Nahuatl in the right. However, the contents of these columns do not always have concordance, as the Nahuatl part is much more extensive than the Castilian part (Ibid 351).

Historical records also show that the ethnological data gathered by Sahagún's informants were meticulously collected through a series of inquisitorial techniques deployed centuries earlier by Spanish crusaders against Muslims in North Africa, who were considered 'infidels' for their dire refusal to convert to Christianity. The Spanish exported war tactics from Africa to *Anahuac*, to interrogate a topic in depth and gain as much information as possible directly from the oral testimonies of Indigenous elders, who were the keepers of Nahua knowledges and histories contained in the ancient picto-glyphic codices that had been or were being destroyed by the invading armies during this time[428]. Nahua elders used drawings to retell their cultural traditions in their mother tongue and these data were then validated more than once, by Nahua scholars, who subsequently transliterated Indigenous knowledges to Castilian, to constitute what we now know as the Florentine Codex (Ibid 351). Sahagún writes about the process of extracting information from Indigenous knowledge-keepers who provided testimony for his extensive compilation work:

> *Estas gentes no tenían letras ni caracteres algunos, ni sabían leer, ni escribir; comunicábanse por imágenes y pinturas, y todas antiguallas suyas y libros que tenían de ellas, estaban pintados con*

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[426] See Perera's "'They give evidence': Bodies, borders and the disappeared." (2006).

[427] La *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España*, is also known as the Florentine Codex since it was recovered by European scholars from the Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana in Florence, Italy, after it had been confiscated by religious authorities during colonial times, who considered it a dangerous manuscript containing sacrilegious practices (Barbero Richart 1997: 350).

[428] First bishop and first inquisitor of Mexco, Franciscan Friar Juan de Zumárraga's (1468-1548), strategy of spiritual conquest of Indigenous people was to destroy all cultural traditions and beliefs, as he believed that a people without a culture and without roots, does not have an identity of its own (Barbero Richart 1997: 349).

> *figuras e imágenes, de tal manera que sabían e tenían memoria de todas las cosas que sus antecesores habían hecho y dejado en sus anales, por más de mil años atrás antes que vinieran los españoles a esta tierra. Todas las cosas que conferimos me las dieron por pinturas, que aquella era la escritura que ellos antiguamente usaban.* (Ibid 351).
>
> These people did not have any letters, or any characters, nor did they know how to read,
> nor write; they communicated through images and paintings, and all of their antiques and books they had, were painted with
> figures and images, in such a way that they knew and had memory of all the things that their ancestors had done and left in their
> annals, for over one thousand years before the Spanish came to this land. All the things we conferred they gave them to me by paintings, as that was the writing that they used in the past[429].

In this setting, some of the oldest Mexica literary texts documenting the Spanish conquest of Tenochtitlan are found in *Cantares Mexicanos*, a Nahua manuscript made-up of 91 folios, containing 97 poems songs that express the popular historical consciousness of the times and offer us the possibility of locating with great precision, an event in space-time-lived (Garibay 1962: ix; León-Portilla 1992: 242; Reyes 2022: 58). These Nahua historiographies come primarily from the testimonies of informants from Tlatelolco (1528) and Tenochtitlan (1523) that were gathered by the same Nawa scholars who memorialized the contents of Book 12 of the Florentine Codex, for Friar Bernardino de Sahagún, (León-Portilla 2003: 12). According to records, the poems songs collected in *Cantares*, appear to have been inscribed in alphabetic Nahuatl, starting as early as the 1550s and ending in the early 1580s, becoming the most significant source of Nahuatl oral tradition and picto-glyphic documents from the preconquest, conquest, and subsequent periods available in European script, today (Klor de Alva 1997: 106, 107). Friar Bernardino de Sahagún, writes in the introductory volume of the Florentine Codex: "this history… was written at a time when those who took part in the very Conquest were alive… And those who gave this account [were] principal persons of good judgment, and it is believed they told all the truth" (Ibid 107, 108).

The poems songs in *Cantares* are known as *cuicatl* -- a rich genre of pre-Hispanic expression[430], which one of the most respected Nahua poets of the times, *Ayocuan Cuetzpaltziztin*, describes as, "*del interior del cielo vienen*" ("they come from the interior of the heavens"). In other words, for pre-Columbian Mexica society, poems songs

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[429] My translation (2022).

[430] Among the various kinds of *cuicatl* recorded in *Cantares* are *teocuicatl (cantos divinos or divine songs)*, *cuahcuicatl* (cantos de águila or eagle songs), *ocelotcuicatl* (cantos del jaguar or jaguar songs), *yaocuicatl* (cantos de guerra or war songs), *xochicuic atl* (cantos de flor or flower songs), *xopancuicatl* (cantos de primavera or spring songs), *icnocuicatl* (cantos de tristeza or sad songs), teponazcuicatl (cantos con acompañamiento musical or songs with musical accompaniment), ahuilcuicatl (cantos del placer or songs of pleasure), *cihuatcuicatl* (cantos de mujer or songs of women), and more (León-Portilla 1984: 30-32).

functioned as inspiration, feeling, a dialogue with the heart, and poets were held in high esteem and were deeply respected and cultivated (León-Portilla 1984: 30):

> *Esforzábanse los nobles y aun los plebeyos, si no eran para la guerra, para valer y ser sabidos, componer cantos en que introducían por vía de historia, muchos sucesos prósperos y adversos y hechos notables de los reyes y personas ilustres y de valer. Y el que llegaba al punto de esta habilidad era tenido y muy estimado, por que casi eternizaba con estos cantos la memoria y fama de las cosas que en ellos componían y por esta razón era premiado, no sólo por el rey, pero de todo el resto de los nobles.*
> (Juan Bautista de Pomar in Garibay Ed. 1964, Número 168, página 190 in Garyibay 1965: VII).

The above testimony gathered by Indigenous descendant and historian, Juan Bautista de Pomar (1535-1601), regarding Nahua cultural expression prior to the European encounter, captures crucial information about the significance of poetry and song in Mexica daily life. This testimony affirms that poets and singers were well-supported by rulers, who had established communal institutions designed to teach young people how to compose and sing songs. Thus, poets played very important roles in the political and religious affairs of Mexica cultural centers, as their creative production helped preserve and commemorate the collective historical memory of notable events in war poems, and to honor deities through religious hymns. Simultaneously, poets maintained a strong sense of autonomy and creative power in their expression of collective thought. In this way, poets and singers exercised great influence through their ability to communicate with the people. Their cultural production was considered of great importance, and it was highly honored within the community (Garibay 1965: VIII).

To corroborate further, the following speech found in folio 72r of the Florentine Codex, is given by a ruler to his sons -- according to Sahagún's informants -- and it constitutes powerful testimony of the importance of poetic expression in Nahua life, whose ends were to give people hope, gratify the ruler of the universe, and reveal his divine intentions:

> *Xic caquican: Izca in amotequiuh:*
> *Xic mcuitlahuican in huehuetl in ayacachtli:*
> *Anquixitizque in atl in tepetl, auh ancahuiltizque in Tloque Nahuaque.*
> *Anquitlatoltemozque ixillan itozcatlan,*
> *Amamamahuizque ca itlaniloca in itlatoltemoca in torecuiyo.*
> (Garibay 1965: VIII-IX).

> *Oíd, este es vuestro oficio:*
> *Cuidad del tambor y la sonaja:*
> *despertaréis al pueblo, y daréis placer al dueño del Universo.*
> *Por este medio buscaréis el designio de su interior y lo tendréis a vuestra disposición. Esta es la forma de pedir y buscar al señor.*
> (Garibay 1965: VIII-IX).

> Hear it, this is your duty:
> take care of the drum and the rattle:
> you will awaken the people, and give pleasure to the Lord of the Universe.
> By this means, you will seek the plans of its interior and you will have it
> to your disposition. This is the way to ask and seek the Lord.[431]
> (Garibay 1965: VIII-IX).

With this understanding, the poems songs in *Cantares Mexicanos* express the collective memory of the times, even though most of them are written in the first-person singular; they preserve in vivid detail, the agony of the Spanish invasion and occupation of Tenochtitlan in 1520-1521 (Klor de Alva 1997: 106-108). Further, some of the historiographies of death and destruction at the hands of Hernando Cortés' armies, were captured with such lyricism in *Michcuicatl,* from a Native's eye and ear witness testimony, relying on allegory, Christian symbology, and interpolation to speak[432] metaphorically of Nahua resistance (León-Portilla 1992: 243). From this perspective, the shared emotional domain in these poetic discourses comes from Nahua embodied knowledges, which are inherent in the language, and they unequivocally communicate *el sentir y pensar* of their collective traumatic events. For instance, as explained prior, Indigenous epistemes such as *ilnamiki* (re-membering), have been referred to by modern-day linguists, as examples of the "grammar of the body", for their unsurpassed ability to produce knowledges that can express ideas from the concrete corporeal experience to abstract thinking, connecting in an instant the mundane with the sacred, in the realm of the quotidian (Lara-Martínez 2012: xii). Thus, the strong emotions expressed in poems songs such as *Michcuicalt* -- which include fear, anger, disbelief, shame, grief, sarcasm -- resonate with the *sentir y pensar* of the people at the time of the Spanish invasion and occupation and are believed to "supplement or at times replace the lived experience of genocide" (Carpenter 2005: 504, 510; 2015: 41). To further elaborate on Carpenter's theorizing, I highlight the radical work of one of the most prominent Salvadoran authors, Roque Dalton, who observes[433] for the historical record, the universality and relevance of Mexica historiography of the conquest of Mexico, on the experiences of colonized subjects who live every-day-death and fight to stay alive -- at all costs – anywhere in Latin America, as it happens in the story of Óscar and Angie Valeria. Dalton remarks about Native literary historiographies:

> …their typicality is such that they constitute a valid
> testimony of the general conquest of the American continent…
> [Indeed,] the set of confusions, acts of cowardice, heroisms, and
> resistances of the Mexicans is very representative of the corresponding
> attitudes of all the American peoples in the face of the arrival

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[431] My translation (2022).
[432] Nahua poetry was never recited, but rather sung and danced, combining picto-glyphic writing, singing, drumming and dancing into a theatrical performance (León-Portilla 1992: XV).
[433] See Prologue of *Visión de los Vencidos* (*Vision of the Vanquished*). Habana: Casa de las Américas, 1969 (Klor de Alva 1997:102).

> of the conqueror .... [And] these indigenous accounts and poems can contribute valuable data to use in locating the roots of the historical violence of Latin America. (Klor de Alva 1969).

Although Nahua literary historiographies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are considered of great cultural value, they have received little attention in the Western canon. As such, the *Cantares* manuscript remained 'lost' and without translation for over three centuries, in the shelves of the *Biblioteca Nacional de México*, until José Joaquín Pesado (1854), used known sources such as *Historia general de la Nueva España* (Sahagún 1829), as inspiration for his own literary creations in *Los Aztecas: Poesías Tomadas de los Antiguos Cantares Mexicanos* (Reyes Equiguas 2022: 59). A few years later, Paleographer José Fernando Ramírez identified the *Cantares Mexicanos'* manuscript in the shelves of the library at the old university of Mexico. Out of fear that it would be lost again, he sent a copy of the booklet to the *Biblioteca Nacional de España* (Spanish National Library), for protection (Ibid 60). In 1866, Charles Étienne Brasseur de Bourbourg acquired a copy of the manuscript, which Daniel Brinton used to translate fragments of it to English in 1887 (this copy is in the Brinton Collection of the Museum of the University of Pennsylvania). During this time, the *Cantares*' manuscript was thought to have been lost, again. It was not until 1897, that José María Vigil, the director of the *Biblioteca Nacional de Mexico*, located it among piles of older books in the library. This news generated great interest among literary scholars, such as Antonio Peñafiel, who did several translations and paleographic work for his book *Colección de Documentos Para la Historia de México* (1899), *Cuauhnahuac* (1900); he also published a photographic reproduction of the *Cantares Mexicanos* (1904) (Ibid 61). In 1918, Juan Bautista Iguiniz published a paleographic and photographic version of *El Calendario Mexica* (folios 95r-100r). Luis Castillo Ledón published *Antigua Literatura Indígena Mexicana* (1917). Other works published at the time include Rubén N. Campos' *La Producción Literaria de los Aztecas* (1936), and Ermilo Abreu, Jesús Zavala, Clemente López y Andrés Henestrosa's translation of Jacobo Rojas' *Cantos* (Abreu et al. 1936) (Ibid).

It was not until the second half of the twentieth century that Father Ángel María Garibay began working extensively on Nahua literature, publishing *Poesía Náhuatl: Romances de los señores de la Nueva España* (1964), *Poesía náhuatl II: Cantares Mexicanos* (1965), while the third volume of his *Poesía náhuatl* was interrupted by his death in 1967, but published by his pupil, Miguel León-Portilla, in 2000. It is the third volume of *Poesía Náhuatl* which contains the poems songs in *Cantares* that Garibay had classified as Christian, among them, *Michcuicatl* (Ibid 62). The *Cantares* manuscript was translated to English by John Bierhorst in 1985. While Bierhorst is not a Nahuatl specialist, but a Native (American) Literature specialist, his Nahuatl to English translation of *Cantares* offers new perspectives in the translation of ancient Mesoamerican literary texts; yet, his English translations have been critiqued for turning away from the Garibay/León-Portilla's interpretation of the concept of 'flower song' and focusing instead on the warfare aspects of the poems, leading him to classify *Cantares* as

a collection of North American "ghost songs"[434], which has created a controversy in the field (Payás 2004: 554). Other authors, such as Amos Segala[435], Serge Gruzinski[436], and Jorge Klor de Alba[437] have also departed from the existing translations of *Cantares* and have voiced the need for new ways of reading the classic Nahua texts, pointing to the existing "sources" of translation (Garibay and Miguel León-Portilla) and interpretation of Nahuatl literature, as a problem. Both, Garibay and León-Portilla are considered "the sources of literature in the Nahuatl language" and therefore, "the source of Mesoamerican literature", and as such, their translations and interpretations of ancient Nahua texts constitute the 'official' historiography of the Mexica canon and of the Mexican nation (Ibid 545-549).

These new and divergent interpretations of ancient Nahua texts and the controversies exposed, highlight the importance of translation for this and other studies of Indigenous literature and point to valid limitations in all the translations and interpretations sources that exist, that any author chooses to use and analyze. While in general, the challenges about interpreting ancient literary texts may be in part about negotiating "cultural" and "interlinguistic" translation of competing but very different languages -- and five centuries between the authors and the interpreters -- there is also the issue of the politics of translation that deserves careful exploration, which in this case, it is beyond the scope of this investigation (Ibid 550).

In 2011, León-Portilla and Moreno de Alba led a group of scholars to translate to Spanish, the entire *Cantares Mexicanos,* which I cite in this study for my analysis. Despite the issues of translation and interpretation that surround *Cantares*, I selected the León-Portilla and Moreno de Alba (2011) Spanish translations of *Michcuicatl*, over other translations for this study, because they are an interpretation of Nahua ancient texts from well-established sources within the Mesoamerican literary canon and a starting point for this and future investigations on the subject. However, I also include Bierhorst' English translations of the *Michcuicatl* verses I selected for this analysis, for the sole purpose of showing a variation in interpretation of this Nahua text and illustrating the importance of issues related to translation and interpretation of ancient works. In general, I offer that while I do not engage Bierhorst's translations directly in my analysis, they do not change my literary analysis or the way I use this poetic corpus in this study. Lastly, in 2022, Salvador Reyes Equiguas published one of the first analysis of *Michcuicatl* in 2022, with light translation and paleographic changes to the version that León-Portilla and Moreno de Alba published in 2011, which I utilize in this study, as a guide to provide valuable context for my analysis.

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[434] According to Bierhorst, the *Cantares Mexicanos* are a collection of "ghost-songs": "musical performance in which warrior singers summon the ghost of ancestors in order to swell their ranks and overwhelm their enemies. […] in response to the music, ghost warriors from paradise, led by ancestor kings, supposedly came 'scattering', 'flying', or 'whirling' to earth in the form of flowers or birds…" (Bierhorst 1985: 4 qted. in Payás 2004: 554).

[435] See Amos Segala: La littérature náhuatl: sources, identités, representations (1989).

[436] See Serge Gruzinski: La colonisation de l'imaginaire. Sociétés indigènes et occidentalisation dans le Mexique colonial (1992).

[437] See Jorge Klor de Alva: Sahagún and the Birth of Modern Ethnography (1998).

Michcuicatl, is dated approximately in 1550, is classified as an allegory filled with irony that reveals the Mexica world during the conquest. This poem song is situated in a lacustrine waterscape, where everything is expressed through fish images. The fish represent Nahua people who are captured by fisherman – the conquistadores – who are led by Santiago, the saint warrior[438]. This scenario evidently centers the spatial circumstances of life for *Tenochcas* and *Tlatelolcas*, who sustained themselves from the waters that surrounded them (Lake Texcoco) and considered them sacred, as expressed in their myths of creation[439]. From this perspective, we can begin to make meaning of the symbolism of this poem song, which is focused on water and on the life that it sustains, through a symbolic encircling of Mexica history from beginning to end (Reyes Equiguas 2022: 63). For instance, the descriptions of *Aztlan*, where Mexica life originates in their myths of creation, define it as an island or a place surrounded by water; the place where the Mexica empire culminates with the conquest -- *Tenochtitlan* -- is an island surrounded by water. Yet, historical records show that the last place that stood free from the invading forces of Cortez was *Tlatelolco*. For this reason, in his reading of the poem song through historical and geographical markers, Reyes Equiguas (2022), places the location of *Michcuicatl* in the waters of Lake *Texcoco*, where *Tenochtitlan* and its extension to *Tlatelolco* are (Ibid 64).

In this light, the subaquatic spaces of the great Mexica metropoli uphold the cultural identity, power, and continuity of Mexica history from its origins until genocide unfolds with the arrival of the Spanish, when the world as they knew it began to transform radically (Ibid). The waters of Lake *Texcoco* are considered brackish, which in *Michcuicalt* are described as *teocuitlatl* or yellowish (as in the color of gold); other lacustrine waters in the region were deemed to be fresh waters from springs and described as *chalchiuhatl* or greenish-blue waters. In folio 16v of the *Toltec-Chinamec* History (Kirchhoff et al. 1989 in Reyes Equiguas 2022: 65) the toponym of the sacred city of *Tollan*[440] appears and it is located where tulle grows -- between two bodies of water -- one yellowish and red and another greenish-blue and black. These two types of waters, when they merge and interweave, are important for the growth of tulle. Further *Michcuicalt* describes the settlement of *Mexco-Tenochtitlan* as a place of weaving waters (Ibid):

atly a y xictli manica
timexica
timimitzitzinti
atl ymaxaliuhca
(Cantares mexicanos, 1994: 46r).

Donde está el ombligo del agua,

[438] Santiago is depicted in religious texts as the oldest and most beloved of Jesus Christ's apostles (González Reyes y Jarquín Ortega 2021: 51). An experienced fisherman, he is the Patron Saint of Spain, associated with peregrination and the dissemination of the gospel and a great warrior, known as the slayer of Moors (Elliott van Liere 2006: 349).

[439] See the Codex Boturini (Tira de la Peregrinación), Codex Aubin, the Sigüenza Map, and Codex Azcatitlán for a description of Aztlan (Reyes Equiguas 2022: 63).

[440] Tollan means "place of reeds" or "multitude congregated in one" as tule grows (Reyes Equiguas 2022: 65).

estamos nosotros los mexicas,
nosotros pececillos.
En la encrucijada del agua,

Where the navel of water is,
We the Mexicas are,
We little fish.
At the crossroads of water.[441]

"My hearts are grieving where waters and the navel lie:" Ah, we Mexicans are little fishes'" But there! Where water.
(Folio 46r, Line 5, Bierhorst 1985).

Additionally, the climate in Lake *Texcoco* is humid and ideal for the growth of tulle, which played a significant role in Anahuac life, as it was used for weaving baskets and *petat/petates* (mat), and the *icpalli* (seat) or emblem of power for the *tlahtohqueh* (rulers). I note here that Nawa-Pipil leader, *Tata* Nicolás Sánchez-Vides, has previously explained that tulle also plays a very important part of everyday life for Nawa-Pipil communities in *Kushkatan,* for similar reasons. In general, the ecological surroundings where tulle grows are considered sacred in Nahua cosmovision, as they function as spaces of life for a diverse assemblage of fish, amphibians, insects, and birds. In a more symbolic way, for Mexicas, tulle environs conform to the cosmogenic conceptions of *Tlalocan,* which is an ideal metropoli that was imagined as Tollan (Ibid). In this way, ancestral texts, such as the Chronicle *of Mexicayotl,*[442] show that the place that was revealed to the high priests who founded the city of *Mexco-Tenochtitlan,* was situated in "a place inside the reeds", and it would be there, that the diverse peoples from the four corners of the world would reunite. The place where the yellowish and greenish-blue waters merge, in *Michcuicalt,* also represents the place where a new authority figure would emerge, who historians identify as Padre Pedro de Gante (ibid 66).

Unlike the authority of the king of Spain and Hernando Cortés -- his viceroy -- the authority of Padre de Gante is recognized in *Michcuicatl* and held in high esteem. As such, he is represented as fish – accepted as part of the Mexica lacustrine world – given that historical records show that Padre de Gante devoted many years of his life in *Texcoco*, working on Nahua evangelization and taking advantage of the rich Mexica's musical repertoire to teach them how to read, write, and sing Christian thought, and make musical instruments. In a letter to S. M. Carlos V, Padre de Gante writes: "*En este hábito de nuestro P. S. Francisco con esos naturales, que los tengo a todos por mis hijos, y así ellos me tienen por padre*" (Códice Franciscano, 1941: 181 in Reyes Equiguas 2022: 67). His primary labor consisted of introducing the alphabet to indoctrinate Indigenous peoples and using his vast knowledge of Indigenous languages to write the *Doctrina cristiana en la lengua mexicana* (Cir. 1553), a fact expressed in *Michcuicalt,* through sadness to convey acceptance of being converted to Christianity (Ibid).

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[441] My translation (2023).
[442] See *Chimalpahin* (1579–1660) in Reyes Equiguas (2022: 66).

The inhabitants of Lake *Texcoco* in *Michcuicatl* include all the animals that lived in the brackish and fresh lacustrine waters -- seasonally or permanently -- such as amphibians, reptiles, birds, insects, and fish. As described in the Florentine Codex, the relationship between human beings and other Earth beings, was crucial to the physical and spiritual sustainability of Mexica society, similarly as it has been described in the origins of *Aztlan*, where human beings fulfilled their tributary duty to the great lords by offering their prey (Ibid 68, 69). In *Michcuicatl*, the characters who give their testimony, are aquatic beings, who establish a dialogue among themselves to define the contents of the poem song and leave a permanent memory of the events, along with an account of ritual during a time of unrelentless change, brought on by the conquest (Ibid 69).

In this context, *Michcuicatl* takes place, in specific moments of Nahua civic and religious life, and it recreates the sacred elements of Nahua cosmovision and the *sentir y pensar* (the feeling and thinking) of the elders, contained in a collective sacred space, water. Further, the lacustrine environs functions in *Michcuicatl*, as a stage for Nahua poets to reproduce their interpretation of the Spanish siege, which is the space where the battle for *Tenochtitlan* took place. Water, in this instance serves as a container of the defeat and of the defeated, expressed in the poem song as the capturing of fish (Nahua people) by the fisherman (Spanish) in the interiority of water, where there is no escape. As the object of the hunt, the fish in *Michcuicatl* accept a new role, no longer being the tributaries to the Mexica lords, but the object of tribute to a new God imposed by the conquerors, reminding us of a popular biblical parallelism about Jesus asking his disciples to follow him to become "fisherman of men" ("Follow me and I will make you fishers of men". *The Bible*. Matthew 4: 19 qtd. in Reyes Equiguas 2022: 70). In this manner, those who are not Christians, are presented in the poem song as fish that will be captured and converted, or they will not survive.

From this perspective, water takes on a new meaning in *Michcuicatl*. The brackish yellowish and fresh greenish-blue waters that sustain life become now, a space of purification where baptism redeems sin and brings happiness and salvation to new converts. This emotional turn -- from devastation to joy -- culminates with the acceptance of defeat and of being sentenced to a state of permanent subjection under Christianity, which can be understood as a critique of the new political reality of Indigenous peoples following the conquest.

Unlike the pre-Columbian Nawat-Pipil story of *Miktan* -- where those who drown can emerge from the waters at any point -- in *Michcuicatl*, a story of the Mexica defeat, those who drown must accept their new permanent colonial condition and live perpetually in the interiority of water, where they are subject to being captured and killed by those who hunt them. The integration of Indigenous history and cosmovision with European history and Christian beliefs in this poem song, is a notable point of departure from pre-Columbian Native stories. However, it is important to highlight that the Mexica poets who wrote these lyrical historiographies of conquest did not necessarily abandon their sacred understandings of the world and cosmovision to accommodate the changes they witnessed and lived through (Ibid 72-74).

For the survivors of this larger story of defeat that is not over, but that has been told to us from the perspective of the defeated, the following five selected stanzas[443] of *Michcuicalt* offer Óscar and Angie Valeria, ancestral accompaniment in their treacherous journey through occupied land and help them re-encounter the footsteps of those who walked a similar path centuries earlier and entered *apan*, where by way of *ilnamiki* we now know, that they were inevitably never meant to survive; instead, they were caught as the fish in the poem song did. From *Miktan*, we know that once we enter and cross the water, we cannot uncross its threshold. Once there, we will be forced to leave parts of ourselves behind. Yet, those who have crossed it before us, know the ways out and can help those who enter it, re-emerge, making a return home possible -- despite our losses -- where we can tell new stories of ourselves, of our journeys, of our lives, that embody alternative possibilities for being Human. During our return home, we can then re-envision "us" not being separate and or divided from "them" by an angry river border that swallow and disappear us in an instant, but rather, we can imagine ourselves restored and healed by an ensouled and wise, spirited *apan*, who endows us with the gifts of poem and song, and metaphor to live again, under a willow's embrace. I offer the following *Michcuicalt* stanzas, as a space to reflect about what it means to be on the run, in flight, hunted, and hoping to evade capture:

Michcuicatl

Yn iquac omotlali yn oiuh tompehualoque
yntlanepanhuil mexica yhuan tlatilolca

Se compuso cuando fuimos conquistados.
Alegoría de los mexicas y los tlatelolcas.

It was composed when we were conquered.
Allegory of the Mexicas and Tlatelolcas.

854
o an niquetzalmichin i
atliyaytec niyanemi
chalchiuhacaxochitl o ytlan
onquiztinemi
nicyatemoa
ytlalol ye yehuan Dios a.

854
Yo, pez precioso,
dentro del agua vivo.
Junto a las flores de los carrizos color de jade

[443] According to Miguel León-Portilla's *Paleografía y Notas* (2016), *Michcuicalt* was written in 59 stanzas, numbered from 832 to 891 (See Cantares mexicanos. Volumen II. Tomo 2. Del folio 42v al 85r). For this study's purpose, I offer a close reading of five selected stanzas (845, 860, 866, 867, 884).

anda brotando,
la busco,
la palabra de Dios.

854
I, precious fish,
within the water I live.
Next to the flowers of the jade-colored reeds
it is sprouting,
I search for it,
the word of God[444].

I'm a plume fish, running through the waters, passing among jade reed
flowers, seeking the songs of God.
(Folio 44v, Line 3, 281. Bierhorst 1985).

This stanza is a testimony that conveys Nahua understandings of water worlds, constituted by a *convivir* among plant and animal species who are conceived as being part of each other, and not separate, showing that fish are as an important and valuable part of life, as aquatic plants are. Reeds are likened to precious stones, specifically jade,[445] which is sacred. In Nahua understandings of water worlds, what makes up the color of jade or the colors blue and green cannot be separated because they are found mixed in the essence of nature and represent the intersection of water and plants or that, which is fertile; for such reasons, they have mystical qualities that convey the notion of a heart that gives life and drops of water, which fertilize the earth; thus, color is a fundamental part of Nahua philosophies of life (Ferrer 2000: 216). In addition, in Nahua cosmogonies,[446] those who drown become fish and live in the interiority of water forever. The stanza shows that these riparian and lacustrine living systems are also aware of and connected to the divine, possessing their own intelligence and agency. These ancestral words offer a contrasting view of water worlds to Western perceptions, which, as seen in the *New York Times* article accompanying the image of father and daughter in the water, it describes reeds as "littering" the water (see Gallón June 26, 2019). This rhetoric contributes to creating a haunting, macabre scene where the reeds are part of a decaying space, in their own natural habitat. For Nahua communities, reeds are sacred, and they don't adorn and embellish water, they fill it with prized delights and constitute the place where the Mexica edify their metropolis; they are also a living home to the fish and many other species. As we read earlier on, *Tata* Nicolás explained, that for his community, the reeds that flank the *Río Sensunapan's* banks are a precious source of life that gives them the materials they need to make baskets, *petates*, hats, bags, and many other crafts that they use in their daily lives.

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[444] My translation, 2023.
[445] *Chalchiuhtlicue* is the goddess with the jade skirt of that, which is green and of the living waters (Ferrer 2000: 216).
[446] See *Los Cinco Soles Cosmogónicos/The Legend of Fifth Suns* (de los Arcos 1967: 192).

860
Can niquitohua ya
nichalchiuhatopinatzin
campa tiazque in moztla
huiptla
tlanel tolmatlatitlan ticalaquican
ye y i acomo nocniuhtzine
y ma timellaquahuacan yiahue.

860
Solo lo digo,
yo, pececito de jade,
¿a dónde iremos mañana?
¿pasado mañana?
¿a caso en las redes de juncias entraremos?
¿a caso no, amigo mío?
Esforcémonos.

860
I just say it,
I, jade little fish,
Where will we go tomorrow?
The day after tomorrow?
Will we enter the networks of sedges?
Isn't it, my friend?
Let us strive.[447]

I, a little jade marsh crab, say, "Where shall we go—tomorrow the next
day? Let us be trapped in the bulrush net! Not so, my friend? Let us be
cheered!" (Line 18, 238. Bierhorst 1985).

This Nahua memory voices the distress of a now vulnerable yet exalted warrior, a being of this Earth. His anguish about being forced to flee his dear home and not knowing where to go, can be sensed through the power of his words. Forced displacement hurts him deeply. His torment about his uncertain future is equally palpable and agonizing. His fears of being caught, entangled during his 'refuge-ed flight' seek the reassurance and comfort among trusted ones. This telling of heartbreak and *desesperanza*/hopelessness arising from the colonial wound is frozen in time and re-lived many times by thousands of Salvadoran families -- including my own, who have faced a violent, unstoppable uprooting. It reminds me of the *USA Today*'s description given about Óscar and Angie Valeria's demise: "…it encapsulates the danger and desperation surrounding the exodus of immigrants, primarily from Central America" (see García,

[447] My translation, 2023.

June 26, 2019). Despite the agony and despair it emanates, it ends with one resolute word of refusal that declares that the fight must go on, urging each other to never contemplate defeat, to “keep our heads up” as we now say.

866
ca niqualitttoa yehuaya
ye niquetzalxiuhcayolini
toconcecehtlamitoque tlacoyolt
tequiyolt
tamilome
ohuaya in iztec y ye cecec
o cuel achic onnetotonilotoca
timexicacueyame
cenmanca ye nelli yahue
y mach oc techalmati
tachcahua
ye omotecato quenonamican i
yn Axayacatzin yn teuctli yehua
ohualla yn itztec y ye cecec.

866
Solo vengo a decirlo,
yo, mosca preciosa,
estamos acabando con nuestro corazón;
estamos acabando del todo por la esclavitud,
por el tributo,
nosotros peces blancos.
Ha venido ya lo frío, lo helado.
Por breve tiempo se busca el calor,
nosotros ranas mexicas,
por siempre en verdad.
¿Acaso aún saben de nosotros
nuestros hermanos mayores
que han ido a yacer en el Quenonamican,
el Señor Axayacatzin?
Ha venido ya lo frío, lo helado.

866
I just come to say it,
I, precious fly,
we are destroying our heart;
we are ending it all because of slavery,
because of tribute,
we white fishes.

The cold has already come, the icy.
For a short time, the heat is sought,
We, Mexican frogs,
Forever in truth.
Do they even know about us
our older brothers
who have gone to lie in the *Quenonamican*,
Lord *Axayacatzin*?
The cold has already come, the icy.[448]

A turquoise fly-plume am I, and I'm saying it here, here on earth: "O
hearts, we're ending it. Ah, we dance are ending this slavery and toll.
Comes the cold, the ice. Ah, brief is the warmth.
We Mexican frogs have been scattered. Truly, alas. Do our elder brothers
greet us, even the lord Axayacatl, who went to lie down in the place
Unknown? Comes the cold, the ice. Ah, brief is the warmth.
(Folio 45r, Line 5, 283. Bierhorst 1985).

The living words of *Axayacatzin* or *Axayacayalt* in this poetic re-collection, come from a beloved humble witness, one who has the face of water[449] and of life, and who knows how to survive in harsh circumstances and misery, but is capable of sustaining many; this small aquatic insect has arrived to name and denounce the legacies of colonialism that are destroying the lives of innocent beings in their lacustrine home[450]. The words of this aquatic being express a period of difficulties and challenges that has brought fear and uncertainty to all who live in the surroundings. They emphasize the transient, cyclical nature of life -- in this case, the season of winter -- that offers opportunities for renewal. Grieving their losses in the aftermath of the colonial encounter, the King of *Tenochtitlan* and or possibly the Tlaxcalan commander, *Axayacatzin Xicotencatl*[451] asks profound questions about their [Mexicas] place in the world, of their dead -- who, after having completed a difficult journey and being killed in

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[448] My translation, 2023.

[449] *Axayacayatl* or *axayacatl* in Nahuatl means "face of water" (see Nahuatl Dictionary 2000). Also, "It is also a small and lacustrine fly, whose face is of a whiteness like water… At certain times, is collected with nets in the Mexican lake so copiously, that crushed in large quantities and intermingled are formed with them balls, which are sold in the markets throughout the year; they are cooked by the Indians wrapped in ear leaves of corn and nitrated water, and thus constitute a good, abundant and not unpleasant food; They also feed with them innumerable species of domestic birds that, caged, delight those who hear them with their song" (Hernández 1959).

[450] *Aztlan*, it is described as a place of whiteness, where willows, tulle, reeds, fishes, and frogs are described as a replica of *Aztlan*. In other words, to fuse the place of origin of the pilgrimage with the place of its destination, a circular conception of time and space, without beginning and end, implies that Mexco is twice an ancestral land
(Florescano 19990: 642).

[451] See Bierhorst's translation in (1985: 47).

battle -- have reached a privileged place[452] where they have learned to transcend it all from the heart or *toltecayotl* (mentioned by *Tata* Fidel in his interviews)*;* this is an ancient Toltec philosophy that they are prepared to speak and reveal the mysteries of the world through *xochitlcuicatl (*flower/song or poetry); and so, they ask the great warrior Lord *Axayacatzin*[453], who -- although accused of betraying Tlatelolco in 1473, in some chronicles -- according to other accounts, he sacrificed his life to defeat the invaders. Accepting that death is near, *Axayacayalt*'s words are a meditation arising from the calamity brought on by colonialism to remind everyone that life on Earth should be considered more precious than ever, and that this cycle of anguish and tears will end one day.

When I think of *Axayacayatl*'s recitation, visions of a little fly talking back to empire conjures up images of Indigenous migrants, the little people, the vulnerable, the masses, the caravans, who dare to cross empire's borders and by so doing, they defy the power of this 'great' White ethno-nation, unsettling its inhumane and uninhabitable geographies, as migrants wet their feet in *apan*. Among them, Óscar and Angie Valeria, and thousands more, whose names we will never know, are the little oness embodying *Axayacayalt* poesis and re-living past battles today, with *ojo de venado*. By their crossings and transits through occupied land, the little flies denounce human rights abuses, repressions, violations, exploitations, extractions, displacements, dispossessions. Ethnocide. Like *Axayacayatl*, the little ones today, also know of it and they talk back. *Ilnamiki.*

867
O anca nicahuanee
acatitlan tonoque
man titotlatican
ye no cepa huitze
amoxtli yn cue can nohuiya
tlaxixiltihuitze
can nelpa toyazque
yn nepapa atlan tonoque yyancayome o ahua yyahue
ma xinexyayttacan y natepocatzin
ma ya oc nicaan
onehuato ya
nictlanquiquizcuicatia ahua teuctzintle Jesu Christo
in Ipalnemohua ya
yxquich tiyanemi hue.

867
Mis hermanos menores,
estamos entre cañas.

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[452] *Quenonamican* (See Reyes and Abraham 2014: 355-360). An unknown place; the hereafter (Bierhorst 1985: 279).

[453] Lord *Axayacatzin*, was sixth ruler of Tenochtitlan, installed in the year Three House or 1469-1489. His glyph was water (Codex Chimalpahin 2016).

Escondámonos, ya vienen otra vez;
el musgo acuático está por todas partes,
ya vienen oprimiendo;
¿A dónde en verdad iremos?
En distintas partes del agua estamos.
Vedme a mí, renacuajo,
que no en la guerra, aquí
estuve sentado,
le canto con silbidos al señor Jesucristo,
dador de la vida,
por él, todos vivimos.

My younger brothers,
we are between reeds.
Let's hide, they're coming again;
aquatic moss is everywhere,
they come already oppressing;
Where will we really go?
We are in different parts of the water.
Look at me, tadpole,
not in the war, but here
I was sitting
I sing with whistles to the Lord Jesus Christ,
giver of life,
by him, we all live.[454]

Do we lie among reeds, 0 younger brothers? Then let us be put away!
Once again come the pictures. Woe! They come stabbing from every
side. Where can we go, we that lie crammed in the water? Alas.
Look at me! A mere tadpole am I, but let Him arise here among us, for I
have a whistling song for Him! Hail, 0 precious lord, 0 Jesucristo Life
Giver! We're all alive, ah!
(Line 10, 283. Bierhorst 1985).

In this ancient remembrance, a leader recounts to his descendants how his community had to hide in the lacustrine spaces among the sacred reeds, when they were being persecuted, time after time. They were fugitives. They knew of the danger, they felt it, they lived it, and many died by it. They sought shelter among aquatic plants -- the liquid *peñoles* (mountains) of the old *Kushkatan* -- where Indigenous families could hide and perhaps escape death. They lived under oppression, being hunted constantly. They

[454] My translation, 2023.

asked each other for a new destination, time and time again, which was always uncertain in their hearts. There was no answer. Perhaps exile. They were scattered, separated, but caught in the interiority of water -- once a space of life, awaiting renewal -- now, a space of death, destruction, and war where they are trapped. They sang songs to the giver of life, Lord Quetzalcoatl interpolated as Jesus Christ[455], to whom they count on to survive.

In a distant space and time, our ancestor and good mentor, "Tayo" - Omotayo Jolaosho (2022), helps us make meaning of the power of song through a kind of South African *Toltecayolt*, from the hearts of those who have been resisting oppression for so long. She says, "You can't go to war without song …that's the only thing that will keep you going". These trans-oceanic Afro-Indigenous ontologies of the past-present, re-activate poetic embodiments as a collective archive for Black and Indigenous futures to help us think of singing as refuge, sustenance, re-configuration, and community to continue resisting the modern/colonial systems' oppressions that persist (Ibid 29). This is especially symbolic when we re-member (*ilnamiki*) that many Africans ancestors perished in their forced transatlantic voyages and they remain in the interiority of our shared histories with water.

884
Ynn ahua tomachuanee
otechahuatz
ypalnemoa
can ca ye onca Coyonacazco
timimitzitzi ne
ya ca tlami no
campa oc nen tonyazque
hui xamelaquahuaca ye nella.

884
Sobrinos nuestros
nos ha quitado el agua
el dador de la vida,
allá en Coyonacazco
a nosotros que somos pececillos.
En verdad ya es el fin.
¿A dónde en vano iremos?
En verdad esforzaos.
884
Our nephews
He has taken away our water
the giver of life,
there, in *Coyonacazco*
to us, who are little fish.
It really is the end.

[455] See Louise Burkhart (1996) and Pablo Escalante (2000) for an exploration of the symbolism between Ce Acatl Topiltzin Quetzacoatl and Jesus Christ.

> Where in vain shall we go?
> Really try hard.[456]

> Hail, nephews! Yes, Life Giver has dried us out, us little fishes, there in
> *Coyonacazco*. And so the end has come. Where might we go, alas?
> Truly, take heart!
> (Folio 45v, Line 27, 287. Bierhorst 1994).

What is a fish without water? This living lamentation screams suffocation. Death. There is no sacred air to breathe. Their gaspings for dear life are audible. Death is audible for the little fish, the helpers of the gods, the courageous Mexica warriors, who must now perish. The fire that surrounded *Coyonacazco* -- a neighboorhood in northeastern *Tlatelolco*, where the Mexicas finally surrended to Cortés -- is highlighted in the Florentine Codex as the culminating event of *La Noche Triste* or the Night of Sorrows (Sahagún Cir. 1540-1587), a precursor event of the fall of Tenochtitlan described as "divine intervention where the pagan's devil confronts Christianity". In Sahagún's chronicles of this event, as told by Segundo Guzmán (2016), God states: "*Nunca más haré cuenta de México, para siempre os dejo, no tendré más cargo de vosotros, ni os ampararé, apartaos de mí, lo que queréis no se puede hacer, volveos y mirad hacia México*" ("I will never deal with Mexico again, I leave you forever, I will no longer take care of you, nor will I protect you, get away from me, what you want, cannot be done; turn around and look toward [the destruction of] Mexico") (Ibid). The fire and smoke of the events in *Coyonacazco*, which were disguised as a 'cosmic' event, suffocate life of the Mexica empire, taking thousands of Indigenous men, women, and children, and depositing their bodies in the subaquatic depths of Lake *Texcoco* for eternity. Segundo Guzmán proposes that these first theological memories that were implanted in the historical record reflect the spiritual colonization of Mexicas and as such, must be considered as "foundational memories" (Ibid).

Further, he posits that the extraordinary work in the Florentine Codex that was compiled by Sahagún, must be seen from a subaltern gaze, which understands that these writings are part of the intellectual project led by the Catholic church to purge any lasting recollection of a great Indigenous past, in an effort to thwart any possibility to rebuild a society left in ruins by a genocidal war. In this light, the lamentations of the minnows, caught in these few lines of *Michcuicatl,* that attest to the horrors of those last few suffocating hours in *Coyonacazco,* alludes to Sylvia Wynter's geo-racial analysis of European teleological conceptions of the world. According to Wynter, these unquestionable divine desires to keep the tropics permanently "submerged underwater" to cleanse and purify the spiritually degraded elements that inhabited them, justify the heteropatriarchal, racialized, and religious taxonomies imposed on the defeated by the conquerors (McKittrick 2015).

These foundational memories of the past, according to Guzmán (2016), are re-activated to justify the permanent state of submersion of undesirable bodies, such as the

[456] My translation, 2023.

refugee-ed figure, the crimmigrant, the 'rapists and drug lords', the 'bad hombres', who must be banned forever and or be exiled to unnamed enclosures, contractions, and containment zones in forgotten spaces devoid of any humanity. Life, which is now deemed death, becomes perpetually trapped in murky river waters by a camera's lens, circulating the globe, without much fanfare or condemnation.

In meditating about Indigenous transits through the border sites of U.S. empire, I offer that through *ilnamiki,* the inexorable and sacred eye and ear witness' testimonies, and the steadfast storytelling embodied in *Miktan* and *Michcuicatl,* help us transcend these foundational myths through time-space-lived in *apan, con ojo de venado*. We know that neither the Lake *Texcoco* 1520-1521 ethnocide, nor any of the many unnamed aquatic disappearances of thousands of Indigenous bodies that have followed -- from *Mexco* to *Kushkatan* and *Kushkatan to Mexco* -- such as the massacres of *El Río Sumpul, El Mozote, Las Hojas, Lempa, Sensunapan*, and Río Grande, to name just a few, happened by divine intervention, but evil. Further, stories such as *Miktan* continue to remind us that prior to the colonial encounter, Indigenous ways of being in the world, saw it possible for those who drown to re-emerge safely from the waters; yet, since the 1520-1521 ethnocide by Cortés' Spanish forces in Lake *Texcoco*, the testimonies that Indigenous survivors entrusted us in *Michcuicatl,* offer intimate understandings of their new colonized realities or what it is like to live a captive life, awaiting the certainty of death in the confines of river borders -- an allegory of the affects and the effects of colonialism on our daily lives, which constantly prey on suffocating out of our lungs the sacred air that we need to live. Yet, *ilnamiki*'s insistence on recalling what is like to live as fugitive minnows in the interiority of *apan, con ojo de venado,* makes it possible for Óscar and Angie Valeria -- and all of our ancestors who inhabit these subaquatic spaces of life -- to safely re-emerge through the poesis of their wet feet, every time the sun rises.

Section 3: ***Project 1521: Dear Little Fish (A poem by Diana Magaloni-Kerpel)***

In this section, I summon the contemporary poesis of Indigenous descendants in the diaspora -- the modern-day *tlacuiloqueh* (painters/scribes) -- to hold an interminable, forceful vigil of re-membrance through poems songs for those who took their last breath in the inauspicious, unfamiliar border spaces of U.S. empire, as they transited north. I center those who entered the sacred, now heavy militarized and nearly impassable waters, and remain recondite in its depths, awaiting to re-emerge. I rely on the living *xochilt tlahtolli* [457](flower speech, poetry) of Indigenous descendants in the diaspora, as a radical act of love and political affirmation of the continuation of our stories and ancestral systems of knowledges to resonate our truths and to intentionally extend a safe passage from the other side of the border to our dead, bridging many divided worlds into a differently imaginable realm of decolonial possibility for planetary inhabitance, as a prerequisite for justice.

In this light, a vigil for the alien, anonymous, migrant other – rather than compelling us to dutifully view or visit [dead] bodies – becomes an act of collective resistance that requires us to be present and to listen through the eyes of the one who speaks with the heart (*yultaketzalis*) and the eyes who saw the past (*ilnamiki), con ojo de venado (cuauhixti).* It is through Indigenous epistemologies and the grammar of the body of the Nawat-Pipil and Nahuatl languages, that the sacred energies (*ijiu)* inherent in the living words of modern-day *tlacuiloqueh*, will continue to name things, to disrupt the teleological silences of displacement and dispossession of Indigenous communities and the discursive ground of the West. Only then, we can recover-our 'Indianness' and our sovereign right to exist in this land and in this water,[458] where we go, where we are.

In the spaces between the borders of the living and the dead, the poesis of modern-day *tlacuiloqueh* confronts and fills in the voids etched deeply on the blood memory of our communities, by the corroding permanence of loss, grief, anger, disbelief, hopelessness, the anguish of not-knowing, and the trauma of other colonial dis-memberments that persist, so we can re-member the stories of our dead, and heal. I propose that the modern-day *tlacuiloqueh* do so, with a deliberate understanding that those for whom they write, who embody the heart (*yul*) and soul (*tunal*) of their poetic verses, can no longer exist outside of their living words and of us, who read their poems.

In this context, I highlight *Project 1521 and the Florentine Codex*, a contemporaneous art exhibit showcased via Zoom at the Fowler Museum of the University of California, Los Angeles, in the Fall of 2020. Lead artist, Sandy Rodríguez, of Los Angeles, California -- who works on both sides of the U.S. - Mexco border -- along with a group of about ten Chicana/o artists, writers, and scholars who co-created

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[457] See Alonso de Molina. Tlatolli: palabra, plática, o habla (Vocabulario en lengua castellana y mexicana y mexicana y castellana, 1571, part 2, Nahuatl to Spanish, f. 141r. col. 2). Frances Karttunen: TLAHTŌL-LI word, speech, statement, language (An Analytical Dictionary of Nahuatl. University of Oklahoma Press, 1992: 267). L

Lockhart, James. Tlahtolli: word(s), statement, what one says, language, speech, news, lawsuit, etc. patientive noun from ihtoa (Nahuatl as Written: Lessons in Older Written Nahuatl, with Copious Examples and Texts. Stanford University Press and UCLA Latin American Studies. 2001: 239).

[458] See Chapter 1 of this study, for a discussion of Nawa-Pipil Sound worlds.

the *Codex Rodríguez-Mondragón* (*"*De los Child Detention Centers, Family Separations, and Other Atrocities", 2017-2018). This project is a polyphonic[459] collection of maps[460] and botanical/mineral specimen-paintings inspired by pre-colonial knowledges preserved in the Florentine Codex (Sahagún Cir. 1575-1577).

The maps and illustrations of the *Codex Rodríguez-Mondragón* are made with hand-processed colorants, transferred onto sacred ceremonial paper, (*amatl*[461]*),* which contemporary Chicana/o artists have learned to re-create from ancestral memories recorded by Nahua intellectuals in the Florentine Codex. On her November 19, 2020 remote talk, Rodríguez explains that *Project 1521,* more than an artistic display, is an act of reclamation and re-affirmation of Indigenous practices, such as medicinal plant material and mineral dyes, which compelled her to situate her artistic representations of the "forced migrations and deaths of Indigenous descendants" and the "ecological destruction happening in the twenty-first century" on the historical context of *amatl,* to follow on the footsteps of her ancestors, who were also artists (Ibid). She points out that the political intervention through color, of the *Codex Rodríguez-Mondragón,* not only radically disrupts western notions of space and time in the twice-stolen territories of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo and the Indigenous peoples of Mexco, making visible the seldom talked about, colonial histories of California and northern Mexico. It also allows her to reinterpret, juxtapose, and re-envision Indigenous conceptions of place and belonging at the intersections of history, social memory, and contemporary politics and cultural production to denaturalize Eurocentric cartographic traditions and master narratives of discovery, and delink territorial expansion as part of the civilizing project in *Abya Yala*.

Scholars Cohen-Aponte and Díaz's conduct an analysis of the *Codex Rodríguez-Mondragón's* (2019), and remark that the *tlacuiloqueh* who painted the images and recorded their histories in the Florentine Codex were "critical interlocutors" between Indigenous elders and Spanish colonial administrators, given their remarkable intervention during a time of crisis. She highlights the importance of capturing in vivid color, the violent transition of one world that ended and another one that rose on its ashes, during a pandemic that killed millions of Indigenous peoples in 1576 (Ibid 23). Despite facing a crisis of humanity of unprecedented proportions, the *tlacuiloqueh* tasked with completing the Florentine Codex, met their challenge. In their study, they highlight art historian, Diana Magaloni Kerpel's[462] reflections about the profound meaning and legacy of the sixteenth century Indigenous intellectuals' quintessential work, emphasizing the *tlacuiloqueh's* foresight and urgency of tracing the dimensions of power[463] and the struggles over land that set forth the colonial relations that continue to define us today (Ibid). As such, Cohen-Aponte and Díaz observe that the Indigenous descendants living

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[459] See Miguel León-Portilla for how the ancient Mexica pictoglyphics could be read or sung (1992: 5).
[460] To date, the *Rodríguez-Mondragón Codex* includes three maps, two of which, are listed here: the Mapa de la Región Fronteriza de Alta y Baja Califas (2017), and the Mapa de las Señales y Pronósticos & ICE Raids en el Sanctuary State of Califas (2018) (Cohen-Aponte & Díaz 2019: 28).
[461] A special paper produced from the bark of fig and mulberry trees of pre-Hispanic origins (Cohen-Aponte & Diaz, 2019: 22).
[462] See Magaloni Kerpel's Colors of the New World (2014: 5).
[463] See Goeman (2013: 4).

in the U. S. diaspora, who co-created the *Codex Rodríguez-Mondragón*, also produced an exemplary modern-day contact zone[464] artistic project, surrounded by a similar set of circumstances -- a modern-day crisis of humanity[465] that encompassed global conflict, climate change, and a deadly pandemic (Ibid).

I call attention to the past-present continuities in the *Codex Rodríguez-Mondragón* and the Florentine Codex, to heighten the prevalence of the colonial past as rendered through *ilnamiki* by the eyes who saw the past -- the *tlacuiloqueh*, then and now -- to speak of the power of re-membering, *con ojo de venado*. In these instances, *ilnamiki* sheds light on the tenacious spirit of resistance and survivance of Indigenous descendants in the diaspora, who – *through yulatketzalis* -- speak their truths in the face of the multiple and simultaneous layers of colonial violences that are not over, such as the newly adopted ethnocidal immigration policies, the COVID-19 pandemic, ICE raids, migrant arrests, family separations and detentions at the border, sprawling refugee camps, mega droughts and fires, etc. all which Rodríguez depicts vividly in her map collection, tracing on *amatl*, the devastation that animals, plants, and other forms of life -- beyond humans -- are suffering.

These artistic representations of space have a curative power because they not only recover sacred historical spaces and its constitutive parts, but they also imagine new worlds where humanity's relationship with the land is re-envisioned without borders.

One of the panelists in the *Project 1521* remote exhibit at the Fowler Museum[466] in the Fall of 2020, is Diana Magaloni Kerpel, whose modern-day poetic discourse embodies the prophecies of 500 years ago, found in Books XI and XII of the Florentine Codex. These prognostications foretold the calamities that Indigenous peoples and their descendants would be living today. Magaloni Kerpel rendered a poignant reading of her poem, *Dear Little One/Canto de Peces* (2019), which she explained, is based on *Michcuicalt, (Cantares Mexicanos* Cir. 1550). In her talk, she described *Michcuicatl*, as a lyrical Mexica and *Tlatelolcatl* poem song, that speaks of Indigenous resistance through fish images, which according to the Legend of the Suns -- the Mexica myth of creation -- during the fourth sun, when people drown after a flood, they became imperfect fish and lived forever in the sacred interiority of water. Magaloni Kerpel read her poem that day, to honor and affirm the lives of Central American Indigenous children who have perished during their forced migratory journeys along the sacred lands and waters of the U.S.-*Mexco* border.

By summoning Magaloni Kerpel's poem to these pages, I attempt to amplify the living words of her poetic discourse, knowing that no one can burn or destroy their sacred energy. I make meaning of the poem, by juxtaposing Nawat-Pipil ways of understanding death and the dead, to recover the stories of those who drowned, which remain fixed on the archives of the West, as narratives of migration and death. According to linguistic anthropologist Rafael Lara-Martínez (2022), Nawat-Pipil mytho-poetics help us

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[464] See Mary Louise Pratt's Contact Zone (1991) and the Chicano Codices of the 1992 as examples of contact zone Chicanx cultural production (Cohen-Aponte and Díaz 2019).

[465] See the COVID-19 pandemic (Velavan et al 2020: 278).

[466] See Curator's Choice at the Fowler Museum, Fall 2020. www.youtube.com/watch?v=EAAa_9KKm14or's

understand that when our bodies are delivered to the surface of the Earth (*taltikpak)* at birth, they resemble parchment, where a primordial epigraph containing the traces of our elders who have passed before us is inscribed on it (Ibid 164). The land -- its geographies -- are a living entity, he explains, endowed with a living language (logo) that safeguards these historical archives, which are recorded on its hard living matter: seeds, bones, plants, animals, rocks. Thus, what is natural, is alive, and it tells the stories of our ancestors, as in the talking rocks inscribed with the glyphs of the past (Ibid 165).

Revealed in the Nawa-Pipil mytho-poetic works gathered by Leonhard Schultze-Jena (1930-1935), are stories about the dead that give evidence that death is not a mere biological event that can be reduced to ritual. On the contrary, death establishes a system of knowledges that affects how the living understand the past. The living speak of the past, with evidence of that which has not been a part of their own lived experience (Ibid 166). From this existential dilemma, for Nawa-Pipil communities, the past is always recovered from death by the present, through the collective memory in the archives of the body and of the land, and the living who seek to re-member their dead (Ibid).

Memory, according to Nawa-Pipil understandings of death, not only commemorates the dead, evokes, and re-lives the past, but it also memorizes it. It records the past by attesting of the paradox between a living presence that speaks of an absence, without admitting to the irreparable loss that has taken place and without accepting the existence of the ghost (*kujkul*), who haunts the narratives of death, of the living (Ibid 166). In this context, I situate Magaloni Kerpel's poem, *Dear Little One/Canto de Peces* (2019), at the crossroads of an existential dilemma, seeking to memorialize the past in the geographical temporalities and spatialities of the 'here and now' and the 'then and there' where death has taken place, to maintain a living presence over the absence left by those who have departed.

Further, Lara-Martínez (2022), explains that the primordial archive implies a search, whose eye/seed (-*ix*) harvests what is seen and found in it, to complete the story (logos or t*apixca*). Present in almost all Mesoamerican tongues, (Campbell 1985), the similarity between eye and seed highlights a concordance between sowing and re-searching. Sowing (*tuka*) spreads the seed (-*ix*) in the arable land and it feeds and waters it, until the fruit produced by the sacred womb (*xinach*) of the land can be gathered. Thus, according to Lara-Martínez (2022), being on Earth -- on the land -- safeguards the primordial archive. Research spreads the gaze of the eye on the paper (*amatl*) that is preserved in the archives. The eye (-*ix)* examines the archives (-*ix-temua; -ix-ketza*) until obtaining the information from the glyphs (logo), which are recorded in the plant world, given that *amatl* comes from a sacred tree. So, from the talking stone carved with ancestral glyphs to the talking plant (amatl), the recollection of the past and of the grain that nourishes our bodies, comes from the archives of the land. Yet, without the narrative character of the Nawat-Pipil language (-*ina*), there could neither be a human being, nor a historical archive that can interpret the traces of the dead (Ibid 167).

Narratives also interrogate what is absent in the archive. In the case of the events of *La Noche Triste* or better yet, many *noches tristes,* spoken of, in Magaloni Kerpel's poem, the lacustrine environs of Lake Texcoco become the geographical seat -- *apan* – where space-time-lived cannot be separated from the place where they occurred, functioning as the archives that gathered this story from the perspective of those who

died. For Óscar and Angie Valeria, the riparian cartographies of Rio Grande become their archive of life and death, which keeps their story safe in the depths of *apan.*

Re-membering (*ilnamiki*) is rooted in *el sentir* (feelings), which reads the human body as a historical document inscribed at birth by its maternal tongue, Nawat-Pipil or Nahuatl. The mother tongue also interprets the body as a geographical place, naming it. *Mexco* or *Mêxïhco* is not only a toponymic locative of the Central Mexican Plateau; it also represents the entrails of the person who inhabits the body. If, its translation from Nawat or Nahuatl is "in the place (-*co*) of the umbilicus (-*xïh*-) of the moon (*mê*(*tz*)-)", this refers to the human body being marked at birth, for being born attached to an umbilicus (-*xik*) and a placenta which depart from the maternal womb *(xinach*). The womb is ruled by the moon (*mêtzti*; *metztli*), given that women's menstrual cycle recognizes the four phases of this celestial body. In the mother tongue, *mêtzhuia* (or "*lunear*", "to be in one's moons"), refers to "menstruate". Menstruation not only alludes to the "blood that emanates from the sacred womb cyclically", but -- *-tzinh-es-kisa* -- simultaneously exports the maternal body toward the celestial. From here, a child (*pil-tzin*; *pi-pil*) arrives (-*pil-ua*). So, naming our place of origin is critical to confirming our human identity as being engendered by the moon in the maternal womb. When we exit from our maternal enclosure, the names of our mother, and the mother of her mother, and so on, are inscribed in our bodies, making it possible for the ghosts of the past (*kujkul),* to dwell deep within our own entrails. A sacred collar (-*kuska*/*koska*-) wraps around the body of every newly born child. The primordial story of this arrival experience is inscribed in the human body at birth, making it a codex where re-membering those who came before us is possible (Ibid 167).

Narratives of death and of the dead, are not neutral, given that the living chooses those who will be re-membered and those who will be forgotten. Death is not associated with a state of lifelessness for the Nawa-Pipil. The similarities between burying (*tuka*), sowing (*tuka*), and the sexual act (*tuka*) in Nawat-Pipil and Nahuatl – entering a cave or tomb (*xaput*) – mimic the action of a seed entering a groove. If a plant is born from a seed, and a child is born from the reproductive act, then we can argue that from a [dead] body, the historical narrative of the present emerges. The collective identity of a people surfaces from memorializing, archiving, and remembering their dead. In such light, Nawa-Pipil mytho-poetics, whose symbol is associated with the flower (*xuchit*), continue to flourish (*xuchi-kisa*) from the living words of the dead that resonate in the mother tongue of the living, through time and space-lived (Ibid 169, 170).

Between burying (-*tuka*) and sowing (-*tuka*), there is a symmetry. Both, the plant and the cadaver, are thrown dirt on them (-*ki-ma(ka)tal*), the living energy (-*yul*) of the land (-*tal*), which is associated with life itself (-*yul-tuk*), resurrection (-*mu-yul-ku/kwi*), thinking (*yul-ta-ketza*), and believing (-*yul-mati*). Relatives are given (-*yuj-yulma(ka)*) or a vital energy for their dead to depart toward *Miktan* to find an ideal permanency in the underworld (Ibid 170), where the Nawat-Pipil oral tradition gifts speech to human remains and hard matter such as seed *(-ix*), rocks (-*tet*), bones (-*umit*) to safekeep the collective memory (Ibid 171). In return, t*unantzin* (our mother Earth) returns flowers (-*xuchit*) and thorns (-*witzti*) to the dead whose destiny is pre-determined by the way they die and the care they receive from the living (-*yulu*). The destiny of the dead then, perdures in the narrative (-*ina*) of the living. To reiterate, in the Nawat-Pipil oral tradition

grants seeds (-*ix*), rocks (-*tet*), and bones (-*umit*), the role of archiving the historiography of the past, which is transcribed by the geo-graphy (graph) and geo-logy (logos/*taketzalis*) of the land (*tlal*) where our dead reside. (Ibid 172-173).

In other words, our histories are living, sacred ecologies of intertextual spaces, where -- from Kushkatan to Aztlan -- the living locate the words of the dead to speak of the past by embracing re-membrance (-*el-namiki*) over forgetting (-*el-kawa*). In these sacred spaces, the connections between the past and the present, the here and there; the within and beyond; the between and around; the over and under; the on and in; the land and water; the visible and the invisible; the human and the (in)human; the colonized and the colonizer illuminate the path forward for the next generation and beyond, by re-telling an ancient story about what it means to be human and to re-construct life anew to return to our roots.

I close this chapter with Magaloni Kerpel's poem, *con ojo de venado,* from the other side of the border, to reckon with the weight of an interminable uncertainty for the future of my children and their children's children, and hope and healing for the future of our planet.

Dear Little One/Canto de Peces

Dear little one,
you took it upon yourself to carry
the burden of our destiny.

You scream your lungs out
with courage,
as we were burnt
by an unfathomable blaze.

Midnight turned into midday.
As night dawned,
you were turned into fish,
to swim across
the cold, murky, waters
of lake Texcoco,
filled with blood and human flesh.

This is the task
you took upon your shoulders.
To be fish and carry the sun.
To be fish and worship a new god.
To be fish and plow the earth,
with flowers.
To be fish and spread
the ancestral seeds of our future.

Like fish,
you are prey of the greedy.

Like fish,
you are ignored and consumed.
But you continued swimming
together, like fish.

You cleared the water,
to turn it
into the crystalline living substance
that sustains us.

Like water,
you are eighty percent
of our blood.
Like water,
your death
means our creation.
(Magaloni Kerpel 2019 in Cura et al 2021)

Tanwaketzalis

Iyulu ne ka ikajku, iyulu ne tepet, iyulu ne ejekat, iyulu ne at, shikpia tejtetzilnaj ijinikshi ne tajtasujtuk tumanuwan wan tueltiwan, melka kwak nejnemit tik tajtal tesu kimatit wan yawit ka ijtik ne ajat. Ajajwituk ijinikshi, ajajwituk ijinteputzta, ajajwituk ijinweyka.
Yey ujti ajajwituk. Kia né tinesik. Kia né timikit. Ne neshti muyulkwi wan Taketza. Ne nejneshti mukwepat pal inat tay panu katka tuwan. Pal muchi ne tujtunanchin, ken Rosita wan Tania Ávalos, ka kikinakat tajtapululis ka tesu welit kiekchiwat wan nemit insel wan iwan ne tajtaelnamikilis ipanpa ne ijiniknewan yejemet kinekit ka yajtiwitha. Shikinmaka, yejemet yajtiwitha, inchan pal sejsenpa ka ijtik mukal ka ikajku; wan ka yejemet nakat insel, tapajpawilis wan intetzilnakayu. Tijtimimil ka ajkuyawi sujsul ajku. Ne ipuputulis ne ukut, ukuiayu, romeroj wan chankaka nemi tik ne shalnaj ejekat. Ijikshi pejpetznaj kichijchimit ne talchi. Se talkwachti ipal shujshuchit chijchiltik, tujtultik, ijistak wan kujkuchiltik mupiki sejsen iwan se yawal yek muchiwtuk ipal majmanguj ujuksik, ajawakat, kujkushi, tzajtzaput, ijishnekwil, wan kujkuyul. Titajtanit pal tujtunoymet, ka an nemit tuwan tik né ka ijtik ne apan. Padiúsh, padiush, padiush ika annemit tik tujtunemilis. Ne teutilwit yawi tuishpan. Ninemi pal nitakaktua.

Invocation/Invocación

Corazón del cielo, corazón de la montaña, corazón del aire, corazón del agua, keep the feet of our beloved brothers and sisters strong, as they trek unfamiliar lands and enter the waters. *Umeteut.* Wet feet, ‘wet backs’, *mojados. Tres veces mojados. Así nacemos. Así morimos. Umeteut. Nexti muyuulkwi wan taketza/La ceniza revive y habla/*ashes come back to life to tell. *Umeteut. Por todas las madrecitas, como Rosa Martínez y Tania Ávalos, que sufren pérdidas irreparables y viven en la soledad y en el*

recuerdo de sus seres queridos que ya se han ido. Dales a ellos refugio infinito dentro de tu casa celestial, y a ellas consuelo y fortaleza, Tuteku. Flames soaring high. The scent of *estoraque, copal, romero, y piloncillo* is in the air. Bare feet touching the ground. A carpet of red, yellow, white, and purple flowers weaves through a neatly aligned crown of *mangos, aguacates, paternas, zapotes, y marañones*. *Pedimos por nuestros ancestros Óscar y Angie Valeria, que hoy nos acompañan desde el interior de la gran abuela agua. Gracias, gracias, gracias por su presencia en nuestras vidas. Umeteut. Umeteut. Umeteut. La ceremonia continua. Debo guardar silencio.*

Chapter 3: Indigenous Lifeworlds

Introduction

Tamuyautin

Gente desaparecida

The disappeared

"Es que aquí a los desaparecidos uno no los vuelve a encontrar…
Estoy destrozada… y no dejo de pensar en que no la voy a
encontrar… Me paso las noches llorando queriendo saber qué le hicieron.
Carla Mayary se vistió con una licra azul y unos
zapatos de tacón color café… Se peinó el cabello negro y esponjado.
Se aplicó crema en la piel y luego salió de su vivienda…" dice
la madre de la mujer desaparecida, María Isabel Palacios (Barrera 2018).

"The thing is that here the disappeared are never found again…
I'm *shattered*[467]… I cannot stop thinking that I'm not going to find her...
I spend my nights crying wanting to know what they did to her.
Carla Mayary dressed in blue lycra and brown high heels...
She combed her black and fluffy hair.
She put cream on her skin and then she left her home…" states
the mother of the missing woman, María Isabel Palacios (Barrera 2018).

The discovery of the remains of Salvadoran police officer Carla Ayala was made in an unmarked rural grave on San Francisco Xavier, in Usulután, Eastern El Salvador, on September 6, 2018, almost nine months after her disappearance. Months earlier, in February of 2018, the government of El Salvador had dissolved the infamous Grupo de Reacción Policial (GRP; Police Reaction Group), a highly trained an armed elite force, similar to the U.S. Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team, where Carla Ayala's killers worked. In its place, the Salvadoran government created La Unidad Táctica Especializada Policial (UTEP; Specialized Police Tactical Unit), known as "Jaguares"[468] or "Jaguars," another specialized force with the same objectives, features, and even some

[467] I italicize this adjective to highlight how a grieving mother describes her pain upon losing her daughter, which I later connect to the physical impact of bullets on body parts.

[468] According to Fidel Flores, a well-respected Nawa-Pipil spiritual guide from San Antonio del Monte in Centzunat, a jaguar or *ocelot* (in Nawat-Pipil) is a sacred entity or *nahual* in Nahua cosmovision that represents the principle of cosmic unity and fortitude, political and spiritual leadership and vigor, women, Mother Earth, fertility, abundance, and it is connected to the cardinal north and the mountains -- the birthplace of corn – which benefits and gives life to humankind (Flores 2019). I note this sacred Indigenous knowledge in this context to point out the audacity of the Salvadoran government in naming a police specialized unit and coopting the symbol of a Nahua sacred spiritual being that represents the sanctity of women, specifically after a woman police officer was brutality executed and disappeared by fellow male policer officers. For context on the popular meaning of a *jaguar* for Salvadorans, see Pedro Geoffroy Rivas's poem *Los nietos de jaguar or The Grandchildren of the Jaguar (1996),* a term of endearment claimed by Salvadorans to identify themselves as Indigenous descendants and heirs to the land.

of the same GRP police officers, who were transferred to the UTEP (DW 2020; Archyde 2020; Puerta 2018). This police re-organization happened in connection with Carla Ayala's disappearance. According to reports, the GRP has been repeatedly linked with massacres, extra judicial killings, and death squads (Cristosal 2018; Griffin (2018); Puerta 2018; InSight Crime (2017).

The Chicago Reader (Brozost-Kelleher et al, February 20, 2020) reports that there are disturbing connections between the Salvadoran police unit that killed Carla Ayala (GRP) and the U.S. Department of State and Department of Defense, through a small private contractor known as the International Tactical Training Association (ITTA), which trains police officers in various countries, including Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Colombia, Dominican Republic, and South Africa (Ibid). Most relevant, ITTA trained one of Ayala's killers. ITTA is made up of police officers and federal agents from across the U.S. and uses a post-9/11 military model of counterterrorism. According to the *Chicago Reader*, its president, Aaron Cunningham, is one of the police officers in the Chicago Police Department with the highest number of complaints from citizens for excessive use of force against Blacks, unconstitutional policing, illegal entry, stealing property, verbal abuse, planting drugs, false arrests, assault, and other serious violations for which he has only been disciplined four times between 2000 and 2016 (Ibid).

Since the signing of the 1992 Chapultepec Peace Accords, the Salvadoran police relies on foreign aid for its training. For this reason, when ITTA offered to train them for free (minus the cost of travel, food, lodging, and other logistic expenses or about $6,840 per one week of training) in 2015 – a time when Salvadoran police was experiencing massive losses due to low morale retirements and officer killings by organized crime -- the Salvadoran government accepted ITTA's offer. Although U.S. Leahy Law[469] requires all U.S. contractors to have government oversight of training done for security forces in countries such as El Salvador that have well documented records of extreme human rights abuses with impunity, the *Chicago Reader* reports that because ITTA appears to have tight federal connections and claims to do its work *pro bono*, ITTA has no official relationship with any U.S. agency on record. Further, it is unclear who pays for what in this strategy. Therefore, no one oversees the training that Salvadoran police receives from U.S. police and federal agents (Ibid).

From 2014-2018, 119 persons were executed by Salvadoran police, ages 13-46, mostly from poor communities, with an average of nine bullets per body. Sixty percent of the killings happened in plain daylight and one third of those were tortured before being killed (one was decapitated). Many of these were not gang members. Police also subjected the families of those killed to threats, if they voiced any complains. Most disturbing, no police officer was prosecuted or found guilty of any crimes. According to Arnau Balenas, a human rights attorney from the Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas (UCA), between 2013 and 2020 the number of killings by police increased; and, in 2016 -- one year into ITTA's use-of-force trainings -- 59 alleged gang members were killed for every one police or soldier killed by gangs (ibid). In a

[469] "Leahy law" (1961), refers to statutory provisions prohibiting the U.S. government from using funds for assistance to foreign security forces where there is credible information of violations of human rights. These provisions apply to the State Department and the Department of Defense. (U.S. Department of State).

commentary posted in June 2016, Cunningham stated that policing should not be a "simple matter of killing and capturing gang members" but that "cruelty against the wicked on the behalf of the public is necessary in certain situations. . . . there can be no rest for the wicked in #ElSalvador" (Ibid).

Under a culture of silence and impunity that is all too familiar with histories of state-sponsored violence in El Salvador, *FACTum Magazine* highlights that the totality of circumstances surrounding Carla Ayala's death and disappearance remains unclear as of today. However, what is clearer is that she appears to have been shot in the head -- execution style -- in the early hours of 29 December 2017, by a fellow male police officer in front of two other male police officers who were driving Ayala home in a police truck, after a Christmas party they all attended. The report states that after the two police officers heard a shot inside the vehicle, they asked, "What was that commander?" The killer, whose call sign was *Samurai*, responded: "This is what this bitch wanted… go, go, go, go…" (Avelar 2018). Accordingly, none of the men inside the truck offered aid to Ayala, which suggests that they acted with contempt and indifference toward her as a victim of a violent crime, instantly invisibilizing her humanity, her suffering, and even her death and what remained of her on this Earth, following her brutal execution.

What happened to Ayala after being shot is not fully understood, either. For nearly nine months, her body was missing. News reports state that, according to forensic documents obtained, her remains were first buried in an unknown unmarked grave and then transferred to a second, shallow, unmarked grave in a remote hamlet in Los ríos, in El cantón los hornos, in Usulután, where it was found on 6 September 2018 (Archyde 2020; UCA 2018). Prior to the discovery of her remains, there were many irregularities uncovered by the media regarding her killing and disappearance, as well as the police investigation of her killing. . In a letter published by *La Prensa Gráfica*, dated 18 January, 2018, and addressed to El Salvador's President, Salvador Sánchez-Cerén, Ayala's mother makes a public pleading for her daughter:

> *Le pido y le suplico que haga valer todos sus medios y esfuerzos como presidente de esta nación para que mi hija sea encontrada… no es posible que personas de la misma institución en la que ella laboró durante más de 19 años, como Agente de Seguridad pública, la haya hecho desaparecer. … Soy una madre desesperada…* (Barrera 2018).
>
> I ask and beg you to use all your means and efforts as president of this nation so that my daughter be found... it is not possible that people of the same institution in which she worked for more than 19 years, as Public Security Agent, have disappeared her. …I am a desperate mother… (Barrera 2018).

Two years later, 14 persons -- 11 members of an elite police unit and three civilians -- were charged with *aggravated femicide.*[470] Each was sentenced between six months to eight years and fined between $1,000 to $3,000 for assisting and/or covering up her killing and or neglecting their duties (ANF News 2019; Barahona 2020). In other words, the sentences that Ayala's killers received signal that the lives of Salvadoran women have little to no value in society and point out to a complete breakdown of social values, including a lack of respect for the sanctity of women's lives.

On 21 September 2018, a news media report states that Ayala's remains were escorted by one hundred policemen at the cemetery. Yet, it also notes that nine months earlier, on 29 December 2017, --– when she was shot by the police, no one protected her. Immediately after her fellow police officers executed her, they paraded her bleeding body in a police vehicle throughout San Salvador streets, for several hours, and no one assisted her. Howard Cotto, the director of the PNC who attends Ayala's burial at the cemetery, is quoted as telling the victim's mother, husband, and her two children with vehemency: "I fulfilled my promise to you, I have returned the body of your loved one, and I have not rested a single day to accomplish this". He continues, "She was killed because she was a woman," adding that in 2017, 214 police officers were sanctioned, and 114 others were fired for perpetrating violence against women. Ayala's mother, according to news reports, is seen surrounded by many people who approach her to hug her, including a medical doctor. The news article states, "The woman cries, cries, cries, inconsolably and seems as though she is going to faint," remarking that nine months ago, there were no hugs, no police escorts, no doctors to assist Carla Ayala. Now, somehow Ayala's corpse is very important (Avelar 2018).

While Ayala's vicious murder and disappearance took place a few months before I travelled to El Salvador to conduct research in 2018. Upon arriving, I quickly became familiar with her case through numerous local news reports and ongoing coverage of the police investigation into her tragic disappearance. The levels of mortal violence against women, exposed during the Ayala investigation through a few other prominent cases featured in the news media, highlight the deplorable conditions of insecurity and impunity on the part of the Salvadoran state, that women and girls are forced to endure every day. For instance, the killings of Dr. Rosa María Bonilla, 45, beaten to death and left unrecognizable by her husband (teleSur January 2018); the killing of Graciela Eugenia Ramírez, 22, stabbed to death 56 times by her fiancé as she shopped for her wedding shoes (The Guardian June 2018); and the killing of journalist Karla Turcios, 33, strangled, disfigured, and suffocated with bags over her head, and then dumped on the side of a road by her husband (The Guardian January 2020), support claims that statistically speaking, in 2018, El Salvador was identified as one of the most dangerous countries in the world to be a woman or girl (Dennis 2020). Closest to me, were the hand

[470] See Crawford and Gartner (1992) and Crawford et al. (1997), for a definition of femicide. In El Salvador, femicide is defined as the murder of a woman where "the motives [of her murder] are hatred or contempt for her status as a woman [by men]" (Article 45, *Ley especial integral para una vida libre de violencia para las mujeres* (LEIV), 2011) and it is a crime prosecuted under this special law. Since the passage of LEIV in 2012, there are over 3,012 killings of women by men registered as femicides by the Salvadoran government. Yet, according to the United Nations, over 80 percent of them were never investigated or prosecuted, condoning a climate of shocking impunity for women (The Guardian 2020).

stabbing of a dear friend and cultural consultant and a near-fatal stabbing of my 24-year-old niece, whose face, throat, and back were severely and viciously cut. Both stabbings happened in plain daylight, in buses, and in highly trafficked areas in San Salvador.

In 2019, the *Yale Review of International Studies* (Huttner 2019), reported that in 2018, there were 3,034 registered femicides in El Salvador, or the equivalent of 8.31 women being killed by men because they are women -- every day -- or one woman killed by a man/men because she is a woman almost every 3 hours (every 173 minutes). While believed to be a conservative estimate, these sobering statistics have made El Salvador the country with the highest femicide rate in the world, more than once, in the last decade (13.49 deaths per one hundred thousand women in 2018). The grim reality of femicide highlights a continuity of the past -- the colonial encounter, the 1932 Matanza, and the 1980s war -- when thousands of Salvadorans, mostly women and men from marginalized rural communities, were brutally murdered by government forces: bodies tortured, bodies raped, bodies dismembered, bodies burned, bodies forcefully disappeared, bodies buried unidentified -- in mass graves, in clandestine graves -- bodies submerged… while their families were left s h a t t e r e d [471].

In this context, I seek to answer how Nawa-Pipil women's experiences of "living everyday death" confront, subvert, and resist European conceptions of race, gender, sexuality, and state formation tied to notions of territory and what is being served by femicide/femi(ni)cide in El Salvador; I also explore how the Nawat-Pipil language informs embodied cosmogonies of the sacred to resist the patriarchal attitudes of Mestizo and Indigenous men deployed against Mestiza and Indigenous women, and how racialized women and girls' social intersections and spatialities protect them or not against the hyper-masculinized violence of state institutions; what are the gendered implications of land dispossession and struggles for territory on Indigenous women in Kushkatan; and how Indigenous traditions reconceptualize our understandings that life without European conceptions of race, gender, sexuality, etc. affirms lifeworlds.

To answer these questions, in this study I highlight the brutal murder and disappearance of police officer Carla Ayala in 2017 by her fellow male police officers. I center Ayala's killing, as a signifier of femi(ni)cide at the hands of the Salvadoran state. I do so, to trace the violences of European colonization on Indigenous women's intersectional identities and spatialities today that rendered Ayala, undeserving of life, less than human, disposable. I juxtapose this heinous crime with *Nusihuapiltzin*, a contemporary Indigenous play that re-tells the time immemorial Nawa-Pipil story of creation – *Nanahuatzin* – where a woman's body is fragmented to give life to several boys, to underline how Nahua knowledge systems frame the concept of womanhood and connect it to the sacred. I use ethnographic methods, Indigenous epistemologies, and Nawat-Pipil cosmology and ceremony to make meaning of the sacred connections that emerge between a woman's body-as territory and land, which continually honors and affirms the sacred genealogies of corn, humankind, and the universe that sustain Indigenous' claims to life in Kushkatan.

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[471] I intentionally score white spaces within this word to invite a pause upon receiving a grieving mother's utterances from the heart, about her missing daughter.

I argue that feminist decolonial responses from below,[472] such as *Nusihuapiltzin*, are a continuation of Nawa-Pipil stories, a living text that exposes and confronts the perdurability and violence of European thinking manifested in the modern/colonial gender system, which is responsible for engendering deathworlds in El Salvador. A sacred homecoming, *Nusihuapiltzin* is a site of Nawa-Pipil resistance and survivance, where women's embodied connections to the land and the cosmos situate them with a critical double-gaze to the past and the future at once, as protectors of land and water, and as a revered sources of life in the universe, however life manifests.

Section 1

In the first section of this study, I explore the definitions of femicide (Lagarde y de los Ríos 2006) and feminicide (Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos (CIDH) 2009)[473], to establish the connections between femicide/feminicide and colonialism (García-del Moral et al 2023) in the Latin American context and situate the alarming number and vicious nature of "public" murders and disappearances of women and girls by men in El Salvador. I examine the psychology of *machismo* and *hembrismo* proposed by the late social psychologist Ignacio Martín Baró (qted. in Gaborit 2003), to understand the centrality of Spanish patriarchal ideologies at the local level and the lasting implications of the violent racialized and sexualized nature of European colonization in Mesoamerica (Musalo 2018). I borrow sociologist Cecilia Menjívar's theorizings on the instrumentality of violence and terror in El Salvador (2000; 2005) to elucidate about the socio-historical continuities of colonization through the experiences of Indigenous women in El Salvador during the 1932 Matanza, the 1980s war, and the postwar period.

I borrow María Lugones's theorizing on the colonial/modern gender system or coloniality of gender (2007) to shed light on the nuanced intersectional relationship between race, gender, sexuality, and power, specifically highlighting her interest on the indifference of men who have been racialized themselves to the violences inflicted upon the racialized, gendered, and sexualized bodies of women and their struggles to resist and survive. Amplifying Lugones's analyses, I borrow Lorena Sosa's intersectional approach to analyzing colonialism (Crenshaw [1989] qted. in Sosa 2023), and Lorena Fuentes's colonial socio-spatial scripts (2023), to make meaning of the circumstances surrounding Ayala's death -- based on newspaper reports. In this section, I argue that the heinous killing of a policewoman by her peers and the ensuing disappearance of her body function as a signifier of the unrestrained excesses of femi(ni)cide in El Salvador, for their proximity to state power, for the state's indifference to the persistent killing of women and girls in shockingly cruel and "public" ways, and for the state's repeated failures to protect the dignity, humanity, and life of women and girls. These systematic disavowals of a female body's right to full personhood reveal intimate connections with the Spanish colonial logics of deathworlds, for they are written on the territory and on the bodies of women. Given the present challenges with Western notions of law and justice[474] endured by racialized, gendered, and sexualized women, I propose that Western

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[472] The voices and experiences of Indigenous women and girls from the global South and North (García-del Moral et al 2023: 60).

[473] See Caso González y otras ("Campo Algodonero") vs. México. Sentencia, Serie C No.205 (2009).

[474] Rita Segato and Lívia Vitenti (2023) have proposed the legal category of "femigenocide,," a crime against humanity under the genocide category, which they defined as a crime of systematic and public

manifestations of deathworlds on the territories and bodies of women must be met with the full force of feminist decolonial responses from below to subvert them.

Section 2

In the second section of this study, I turn to the only written account of *Nanahuatzin*, the Nawa-Pipil myth of creation, known in the West as *La mujer en fragmentos* (The Woman in Fragments), first gathered by German anthropologist Leonhard Schultze-Jena in 1930 in the Itzalku region of Kuhskatan. It was first translated from German to Spanish by Armida Parada Fortín (1977) and Gloria Menjívar Reiken (1982). I utilize the first literary and philosophical interpretations of *Nanahuatzin* based on Schultze-Jena's work, carried out by linguistic anthropologist Rafael Lara-Martínez (2010), to shed light on how the human body is central to the production of knowledge in the Nawat-Pipil language. From this premise, in the story of *Nanahuatzin*, Lara-Martínez highlights that embodiment and lived experience manifest in agricultural and astronomical knowledges to explain the first appearance of Maize and the connections between all that is living -- which are part of the cosmos -- and therefore, sacred.

I borrow Ruud Van Akkeren's (2006) theorizing about the significance and connections of the gourd in Mesoamerica, through various mythopoetic stories of creation in the region. He proposes that the gourd was an important symbol in Mexica, Maya, and Nawa-Pipil oral traditions linked to the first appearance of maize and agriculture in the preclassic period, which was expressed in the Mesoamerican tradition of the ball game (Ibid 36). Through interviews with Indigenous leaders *Tatjzin Tamachtiani* (the elder who knows) Fidel Flores and *Tajtzin Tamachtiani* Nicolás Sánchez-Vides, and memory-making of childhood experiences with my elders in Tamanique, I make meaning of Indigenous epistemologies of *ne gitilana ne i yesiu ne tal* (sacred connections between blood and land), to propose that Nawa-Pipil mythopoetics continue to affirm Mesoamerican women's body-as-territory and land, in a sacred relationship to the cosmos, by enacting genealogies of corn, humankind, and the universe as lifeworlds. By reclaiming body, territory, and life through *las historias de los más viejos* (the stories of the elders), the Nawat-Pipil language unsettles the violent logics of colonial deathworlds and helps us illuminate a path to recovering ourselves from the colonial experience.

Section 3

In the third section of this study, I bring attention to *Nusihuatpiltzin*, a 2018 play performed in El Salvador by *Las tres prietas (The Three Colored*[475] *Women)*, an insurrect

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violent aggression, generally followed by death, mutilation of the body, or reduction to conditions of existence against women by men, including members of an armed group of a criminal or paramilitary type (342-44).

[475] Emphasis is made by the young women artists on using this word to reclaim the politically-loaded meaning of the word "*prieta*," which has been used in El Salvador in pejorative ways to refer to people of dark/darker skin (similarly to the term "colored" used in the United States to refer to Black, African-American people), to center a Central American, decolonial, feminist approach that celebrates the beauty and power of Black and Brown/people of color.

theater company founded by three young women of color who collaborate with Nawa-Pipil elders to co-write and perform their plays in Nawat-Pipil and Spanish, based on Indigenous oral/aural traditions and the current realities. I frame the 2018 performance of *Nusihuapiltzin* as a metatextual "gender- and genre" decolonial discourse from below,[476] through Gloria Chacón's notion of the Kab'awil (2018: 69, 70), which makes possible the re-telling of an ancient sacred story – *Nanahuatzin* -- to break the silence against the harsh socio-political and economic realities that Salvadoran families are facing today. *Nusihuapiltzin* responds to femicide from an Indigenous perspective by conjuring up Mesoamerican *Kab'awilian* strategies (Chacón 2018: 13-19) to critically examine the notion of womanhood as it transits through time and space on the bodies of Indigenous women, to reclaim a woman's body-as-territory and land, and its sacred relationship with the cosmos.

Through interviews with members of Nawa-Pipil communities in Western El Salvador, field observations, and ceremony[477] as methods, I document Indigenous recognition of the other (*ixmati* is a Nawat-Pipil phrase that means "what the eyes know"), as a *Kab'awilian* strategy to invoke and connect with multiple dimensions simultaneously, such as time and space, and different knowledge systems, "gender and genre,," to decolonize our ways of being and understanding the world through a grounding of Indigenous epistemologies as the canon. These sacred ancestral understandings of the origins of life, as diverse as they may be in various Mesoamerican regions, continue to be foundational to Indigenous women's contemporary claims of body and territory, signaling the living energies of ancestral continuities that create conditions of possibility for new worlds where women and girls' futurities are uninterrupted by the violences of the West.

[476] See Gérard Genette (2014).
[477] At the request of Nahua Indigenous leaders and only when approved by the community (Fieldnotes 2019).

Section 1: The Femi(ni)cide of Carla Ayala

Male violence against women and girls is not inherent in Salvadoran society (Dawson and Vega 2023: xl). Violence is a learned behavior that can be unlearned states *Tata* Fidel Flores (My interviews with Flores 2019). Understanding the root causes of male violence against women and girls, its typologies, diversity of exposures and experiences, the short and long-term impacts and implications for individuals, families, and communities, and the state's responses to bring justice and eradicate it, is paramount. Equally important to these, is our understanding of what women and girls at the margins in El Salvador do, to resist and survive in violent contexts, especially if the state's response is inadequate, nonexistent, or complicit with femicide/femi(ni)cide, and women and girls are forced to endure male violence alone.

The violent deaths of Carla Ayala, Rosa María Bonilla, Graciela Eugenia Ramírez, and Karla Turcios that I mentioned in this study, are only four of the 152 women brutally killed by men, between January 1 to May 1, 2018, according to El Instituto Salvadoreño Para el Desarrollo de la Mujer (ISDEMU) (Salvadoran Institute for the Development of Women). These four cases may be the only ones featured by the news media during that span of time (Griffin 2018). Telling their stories or what can be gathered about their lives through their senseless deaths in a dignified manner is critical to the prevention of *femicide/femi(ni)cide.* Yet, this may be challenging when all we know about these women is their violent death and the main signifier of their lives, may be a corpse. We know very little about them when they were alive.

While each of these stories may have a unique set of circumstances, their deaths are intimately connected to each other and to the other 148 women and girls who were murdered in that span of time, through their gender, revealing significant power imbalances between female victims and male perpetrators. In this instance, power determines if a woman or girl lives[478] or if she dies[479] and how, when, where, and why she dies, and what happens to her body afterwards, how she emerges or not, after death (Dawson and Vega 2023: 3). These 'public' racialized, gendered, and sexualized deaths are also connected to the thousands of women and girls who remain unnamed in this study, but who have been killed by men, prior to 2018 or that will be killed by men, thereafter.

Women and girls have different intersectional identities that ascribe their social and institutional relations in the community and with the state; they typically experience various forms of violence, at the hands of men, that escalate in frequency and severity[480], prior to being killed. These deaths are also spatially constituted through colonial logics that enact -- through official discourses -- how gendered, sexualized, and racialized violence unfolds in particular bodies and geographies. These violences are usually

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[478] See Michel Foucault's notion of biopower (1990).

[479] See Achille Mbembé's notion of necropolitics (2019).

[480] See Monárrez Fragoso (2002 qted. in Sosa 2023: 50). Feminists emphasize that femicide/feminicide involves the progression of violent acts that leads to a woman's murder such as emotional, psychological, and financial abuse, beatings, insults, torture, rape, sex trafficking, sexual harassment, child abuse, domestic violence, and institutional violence which includes depriving women of color of their education and life chances.

normalized, tolerated, and supported by patriarchal[481] ideologies and hyper-masculinized social and state institutions (Ibid). For these reasons, it is urgent to understand and document the stories of missing and murdered Salvadoran women and girls, and to nuance, through their lived experiences and perspectives, how others survive. Even though we know that nothing we do from this point forward, will bring back these women from their deaths, perhaps understanding what happened can help shed light to prevent the next death.

1.a Operational Concepts

Femicide and femi(ni)cide

For the purposes of this study, it is important that I clarify the following operational definitions, which I utilize in this chapter to speak of the violent killing of women by men, and of the state indifference to prevent these violent crimes and to deliver justice to victims and their families when they happen.

The concept of femicide, was first coined by feminist writer and activist Diana Russell in 1976, to bring attention to the violence and discrimination perpetrated by men against women. In 1990, she defined this phenomenon as "the murder of women by men motivated by hatred, contempt, pleasure, or a sense of ownership of women" (Caputi and Russell, 1990: 34). Years later, Radford and Russell (1992) defined femicide as a misogynistic killing of women by men, with a three-fold purpose: (1) to document the pervasive violence women and girls experience from men, (2) to address the problem collectively, and (3) to urge governments to pass legislation against femicide and to sentence these killings appropriately. By 2001, the definition of femicide evolved to the killing of females by males for being females, and it encompassed all forms of male sexism, including entitlement, pleasure, or expectation of compliance (Russell, 2001). In this definition, Russell argued that using "female" instead of "woman" and "male" instead of "man" acknowledged that infants, young girls, and adolescents are also killed for sex- or gender-related reasons (Dawson and Vega 2023: 5, 6).

In 2006, anthropologist Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos introduced the term "feminicide" (or *feminicidio*) in the Latin American context, specifically of Mexico, given the killings in Ciudad Juárez, to highlight the state's role in omitting, neglecting, and even colluding in these violent killings against women and girls, particularly those who are more vulnerable. Thus, feminicide centers around the patriarchal domination and impunity of state's institutions, which often fail to deliver justice to the victims and their families (Ibid). Using "feminicide" instead of "femicide," not only underscores the state's oppression of women and girls, but also encompasses "the death of a female being or one with female characteristics, whether or not she is a woman" (Monárrez Fragoso 2019: 89). Simultaneously, by framing male violence against female persons, as the obligation of a state to prevent misogynist actions that can culminate in homicide and in other forms of violent death for women, feminicide also functions to interrogate society for tolerating male impunity. From this perspective, feminicide is co-constituted by a form of gender-based discrimination and unequal protection for female beings under the law and, therefore, it is grounds for international accountability of states for human rights

[481] Patriarchy is defined as a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women (Walby 1989).

violations against women (Interamerican Court of Human Rights, 2009 qtd. in Grzyb et al 2018: 20, 21).

While the definitions of femicide/feminicide are evolving, one commonality that exists in these concepts is the presence of sex or gender-based elements (Dawson and Vega 2023: 6). Further, all definitions concur that these killings are not "isolated, sporadic, or episodic cases of violence; rather they represent a structural situation and a social and cultural phenomenon deeply rooted in customs and mindsets" (CEDAW, 2005, 27). As such, the "Latin American Model Protocol for the Investigation of Gender-Related Killings of Women (Femicide/Feminicide)," recognizes that these killings are rooted in sex and gender discrimination and intersect with other social identities like race, religion, sexuality, and ability, etc. supported by colonial notions of women and girls as property or objects owned by men (Ibid). In this study, I will use the term "femi(ni)cide," using parenthesis, to highlight the state complicity with these violent killings, but I will also resort to "femicide" or "feminicide" when an author chooses to use that term.

Salvadoran Machismo and Hembrismo

According to legal scholar, Karen Musalo (2018), in El Salvador the exceptionally high levels of femicide/feminicide are associated with various forms of historical and current state-sponsored violence. such as structural violence, economic inequalities, and the proliferation of gangs and organized crime in the postwar period. She states that these factors combined do not account for an in-depth understanding of the prevalence and severity of male violence against women and girls at the local level (Ibid 32). Thus, Musalo proposes that understanding machismo, which she defines as a particularly aggressive manifestation of patriarchy in El Salvador, is central to the phenomenon of male violence against women and girls. Citing the work of Michael Hardin (2002), Musalo describes machismo in Latin America as a "stereotype that emphasizes hypermasculinity" (Ibid 2). Musalo points out that "machismo in El Salvador, is even more intense and lethal within gang culture because gang members have access to deadly weapons and vast criminal networks" (2018: 30). She adds, "women and girls are considered to be the property[482] of gangs and may be killed for refusing to become the sexual partner[483] of agang member, for being suspected of cheating, or simply for being seen accompanied by other men.[484] Women are used for whatever purposes[485] gang

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[482] In the eighteenth century, El Salvador's single mothers, widows, and abandoned women were not seen in good light and were subject to persecution for transgressing the social order (Castellón-Osegueda 2019: 290). In the twentieth century, women in El Salvador did not enjoy full citizenship. A women's identity was entrusted to the men in her life: her father, her husband as her proprietors, and she did not have the right to vote (Salamanca 2018: 42).

[483] For centuries, Mestizas, Indigenous, and enslaved women, among others, were considered inferior in El Salvador and hunted by *peninsulares* for extra-marital sexual relations, . This was legitimated by patriarchal codes to restraint European women's sexual activity, as they were considered the weak gender (Castellón-Osegueda 2019: 284).

[484] "*Las malas mujeres*" (bad women), "*libertinas*" (libertine), "*las abandonadas de rubor dañan con sus insolencias, a otras ignocentes…*" (those without shame harm others with their insolence). The punishment of women in El Salvador in the eighteenth century was seen as "*desgracia*" (disgrace) and attributed to "*la relajación de la impureza*" (relaxation of impurity) (Castellón-Osegueda 2019: 288).

[485] Gangs use women to carry out extortion, to deliver drugs, to serve as the sexual partner to imprisoned gang members. Vendettas between warring gangs are also played out on the bodies of women and girls, who may be killed as a way of exacting revenge on an opposing gang member (Musalo 2018: 30).

members dictate" (Ibid).

Salvadoran women have been an active organizing force in El Salvador since around the 1840s, playing key roles in various social movements[486] and public spaces, such as in syndicates, schools, and in the home (Navas 2018: 67; Salamanca 2018: 42). According to Patricia Alvarenga (1994), an ethics and culture of violence[487] has prevailed since the early twentieth century, aimed at maintaining the status quo of the Salvadoran oligarchy and to silencing the voices of dissent about the political and economic instability of the nation, through repressive military tactics (Ibid: 12). Women have not been exempted from the impacts of this ethics and culture of violence. According to Menjívar, violence is instrumental for the state use of terror against civilian populations, especially women (2005: 87, 92).

In this light, the 1932 Matanza and the 1980s (un)civil war, have left deep scars on Salvadoran families who struggle to overcome the overwhelming historical trauma of state-sponsored violence, which continues during peace time. Since the signing of the Chapultepec Peace Accords in 1992, El Salvador has experienced some of the highest levels of violence in the world. Specifically, femicide data show that gender-based violence has increased, not only in numbers, but also in the frequency of racialized, gendered, and sexualized killings of women and girls. More disturbing than the hard data is the extreme cruelty and public display of these killings, which leads to the popular saying that in El Salvador "peace is worse than war" (Musalo 2018: 6). In this sense, political science scholar Mo Hume (2004) reminds us that, "El Salvador is a post-war country, and it is important not to underestimate the extreme repercussions that over a decade of armed political conflict have had on the development of society, affecting levels of tolerance and inculcating a certain social respect for authoritarian measures" (Ibid 31).

1.b Gendered and Sexualized Violences in the 1980s (Un)civil War

Sociologist Jocelyn Viterna (2013) documents, through interviews, that prior to the 1980s war young girls in El Salvador were told that being a good woman meant being "decent,",' hardworking, and obedient.[488] Decency refers to a woman's sexuality. She explains that although formal marriages were not common in rural communities, "*acompañarse*"[489] or having a partner, meant for a woman that she was morally expected to live with him for the rest of her life. Birth control was unacceptable as it was believed to encourage promiscuity; abortion was and continues to be illegal, inaccessible, and a sin; and leaving the home could only be done with approval of the man and when necessary for completing domestic tasks, as leaving the home for other reasons leads

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[486] In the twentieth century, Salvadoran women organized for the right to vote, just maternity laws (health care), education, and organized labor (Salamanca 2018: 43. 44).

[487] See Patricia Alvarenga (1996).

[488] *La Pureza de la mujer* (the purity of women) especially among the elites, was part of the social imperative of El Salvador in the eighteenth century. Fathers and husbands were invested in protecting a woman's honor (Castellón-Osegueda 2019: 284).

[489] *Amancebamiento* or *concubinato* (informal cohabitation) in El Salvador during the eighteenth century was very common among peninsulares, mulatos, mestizos, and Indigenous peoples, despite pressures by the church and the authorities. Under these arrangements, men were free to abandon their partners without fearing consequences from the state (Castellón-Osegueda 2019:85).

people to question a woman's decency.[490] Additionally, domestic violence was common, and women were expected to endure whatever life their partner gave them. Leaving a partner because of domestic violence and or abuse was not acceptable (Ibid 28).

Viterna documents that during the early part of the war, Salvadoran women reported experiencing fear, forced displacement, rape, death, disappearance, family disruption and loss, typically at the hands of men, mostly government soldiers, members of the national police and national guard, and members the death squads. Many women became heads of households during this time because their partners were killed or disappeared. Girls as young as ten or twelve years of age were often recruited by the guerillas to help with domestic tasks in the field and or sometimes were trained to fight (Ibid. 31). Accordingly, women were encouraged to join the guerillas to protect themselves from rape (Ibid. 112). Toward the end of the war, women reported experiencing life in refugee camps with other women and their young children, or in repopulated communities, as well as in guerilla camps after surviving massacres at the hands of male government troops and being forced to flee across the country (Ibid 34).

Anthropologist Lynn Stephen (1994) documents the war experiences of María Teresa Tula, a Salvadoran human rights activist who was politically imprisoned and tortured by the Salvadoran government after killing her husband. Stephen captures in vivid detail the experiences of violence and terror that Tula and many other Salvadoran women endured during this time. For instance, Tula recalls seeing the dead tortured body of union organizer Silvia Olán dumped on La Laguna, near the town of Lake Coatepeque. This is one of many violent occurrences that she had to witness daily, stating that "There was evidence that she (Silvia) had been raped before she died. They (two members of the death squads) had cut off part of her genitals and stuffed them into her nose. They cut off her breasts and fingers as well. They had burned her eyes with acid, pulled out her tongue, and strangled her (1994: 79, 80).

On another occasion, Tula attests, "They (a civil defense patrol dressed in civilian clothes) killed and dumped their bodies in a place called Panchimalco that is near the Planes de Renderos. They raped Delmi (referring to Delmi González, the daughter of another human rights activist that worked with Tula, about 22 years of age). They tortured her by pulling out her tongue and her fingernails. After she was dead, they cut out her head. She had a lot of wounds on her body… This is how her mother found her," Tula stated (Ibid 104).

Tula also recalls what happened to Ofelia -- a third human rights activist that worked with her -- after being captured: "They (men from the National Police dressed in civilian clothes) rammed their rifle butts into her breasts and burned her (with cigarette butts). They took off all her clothes and she was raped by seven men. Then, they burned her body some more. What they did to her was horrible. Horrible". Tula testified that Ofelia was tortured by male government troops to force her to identify other women who were human rights activists from CO-MADRES, an organization made up of the mothers and relatives of those who have been illegally captured, tortured, killed, and forcibly disappeared by the government of El Salvador (Ibid 111).

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[490] In El Salvador, in the eighteenth century, it was not tolerated for a woman to leave her home without being accompanied by her father or husband. Under patriarchal norms, women were always under the tutelage and vigilance of a man (Castellón-Osegueda 2019: 286, 287).

The testimonies of Tula, an Indigenous woman from Itzalku, who survived forced disappearance, political imprisonment, torture, the killing of her husband, and other atrocities during the 1980s war, are not isolated or disconnected from the pain and the violences that Indigenous women suffered during the 1932 Matanza. Indigenous women in Western El Salvador not just witnessed the mass murders of their loved ones, but they were also killed, raped, persecuted, and subjected to starvation and deep poverty, and to live under sheer terror for decades. Because of their audacity and refusal to remain silent and disappear, Salvadorans today are recovering the Nawat-Pipil language, cosmologies, and cultural knowledges and traditions, which these survivors safeguarded in the intimacy of their homes and communities in the aftermath of genocide.

1.c Gendered and Sexualized Violences in the 1932 Matanza

Menjívar (2005) reports that the violence and terror that Salvadorans experienced during the 1980s war, particularly people from marginalized rural communities, have roots in the massacres of Indigenous communities in Western El Salvador, during the 1932 Matanza (Ibid 90). She proposes that these continuities of state-sponsored violence and terror between the 1932 Matanza and the 1980s war are tied to the everyday historical constructs of social control that emerged from the colonial context in the last century (Ibid. 106). According to Bermúdez (2017), the role of women[491] and the impact of this ethnocide that killed between 7,000-50,000 Indigenous men and boys in a matter of weeks (Ching 1998: 126) is understudied.[492] Yet, Indigenous survivors are now speaking of La Matanza of 1932, through the blood memory of their mothers and grandmothers, who survived ethnocide to tell their stories.

For instance, one Indigenous man that I interviewed in Itzalku in 2019, at *El Llanito* -- who asked to remain unnamed -- recalls that many Indigenous boys survived the Matanza of 1932 because their mothers dressed them with *refajos* (wraparound skirts) and *huipils* (blouses), passing them as girls to protect their lives. He also shared that national guardsmen would take the *refajos* of women they raped and brandish them in the air as trophies of war. Nawat-Pipil instructor Alexander Tepas Lapa recalls the memories of his *abuelas* in his Nahuat manual *Nawamatzin* (2014), stating that his grandmother Dolores Sheshe believed that her daughter Elisa del Carmen Tepas Sheshe, would not survive as an infant because of the widespread effects of 1932 on Indigenous women. According to Tepas Lapa, Sheshe describes her experiences as a young mother who survived the ethnocide, stating: "*Yo creí que ella no se iba a criar (referring to her infant daughter Elisa) porque le di leche asustada de 1932, en la mera época de la guerra contra los indios, era que se combatía contra el comunismo, pero ella (Elisa) es de espíritu fuerte*" (I believed that she was not going to make it (referring to her infant daughter Elisa) because I gave her scared milk from 1932, during the exact time of the

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[491] Afro-Indigenous organizers, such as Amparo Casamalhuapa and Julia Mojica, were among the women leaders who marched along with 544 other women in Nawitzalku, in 1922, to protest the substandard working conditions that they were subjected to, in the coffee plantations (Gould, Consalvi, and Salmon 2002: 40 qted. in Bermúdez 2017: 7).

[492] See Bermúdez's critique (2017) regarding the epistemic blindness in the historiography of 1932, which denies Indigenous women's lived experiences a space on the production of knowledge about their own stories.

war against Indigenous peoples, they also fought against communism, but she has a strong spirit" (Tepas Lapa 2014: last page of the *Nawamatzin* manual, unnumbered).

Menjívar's documentation of racialized, gendered, and sexualized violence against Nahua women during that time notes that "In Chanmico and Las Granadillas, the National Guardsmen burned all the ranches in an area of twenty square kilometers and raped all the women over 10 years old" (2000: 157). Lauría-Santiago (1999) exposes that a local newspaper, *El Diario de El Salvador*, reported on 5 February 1932, that "At the moment in the department of Sonsonate, and in many places in Ahuachapán and some in Santa Ana, pork meat has become so discredited that it has almost no value… All of this is the consequence of pigs eating in great quantities the flesh of corpses that have been left in the fields," to allude to the mass starvation that took place in the aftermath of the killings (Ibid 242-44). Further, Lauría-Santiago and Gould (2004), highlight that "many women found themselves destitute and their children facing starvation. Some went to the local *patrones* (bosses) asking for food. A bag of rice would be granted in exchange for their [land] deed" (Ibid 55).

1.d Gendered and Sexualized Violences During the Spanish Colonization

Aracely Bautista Bayona, a Salvadoran lawyer and expert on women's rights, has traced patriarchy and machismo in El Salvador, to the early 16th century and the Spanish invasion and occupation of Kushkatan: "Conquistadors subjected Indigenous groups to the patriarchal Spanish imperial order. The conquistadors systematically raped Indigenous women…". She adds, Spanish colonialism also brought with it the Roman principle of the *paterfamilias* (the rule that a male head of household owned legal title to all the women in his family)" (Musalo 2018: 33). Citing the work of Salvadoran philosopher José Humberto Velásquez, *La Cultura del Diablo*/The Culture of the Devil (1997), to highlight that machismo in El Salvador has its roots in Christianity and it was"strengthened by the brutality of Spanish colonizers," Musalo points out that many Indigenous groups may have exhibited patriarchal tendencies, but that there is ample evidence that colonization itself contributed to a particularly vicious form of sexualized violence (Ibid). Michael Hardin (2002) theorizes that machismo in Latin American is connected to "the degree to which sexuality was made part of the [Spanish] conquest," linking the colonizers' need for Indigenous bodies for slave labor and sex, which resulted in the rape of Indigenous women and the genital mutilation and sodomy of Indigenous men by Spanish colonizers[493] (Ibid 6). He points out that since colonizers did not view Indigenous men and women as human beings,[494] but as property to be bought and sold, the Spanish colonization is responsible for the culture of sexual violence and oppression in Latin America, by the colonizers' formulation of the male sex organ as the site of contest, for both conqueror and conquered (Ibid 6).

The manuscripts[495] of Raphael Lemkin, the pioneer scholar on genocide, support the idea that the logics of colonialism, including rape, are central to the process of dehumanization that leads to genocide. This method of warfare, he says, impacted

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[493] See Bartolomé de Las Casas's *Horrors of the Conquest* (1992b) for more about sodomy and genital mutilation of Indigenous men by Spaniards.

[494] In 1537, Pope Paul III declared that Indigenous peoples were human beings and had souls (Hardin 2002: 5).

[495] *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (Lamkin 1944).

directly Indigenous women because it affected the biological reproduction of family and community. Mass rapes and the separation of children from their parents fell under this practice. Indigenous women were not only violated indiscriminately but also forced to fill the harems of Spanish colonizers (McDonell and Dirk Moses 2013: 501-508). Although Lemkin's work shows awareness that the Spanish Crown attempted to protect Indigenous peoples by instituting a system of "*encomiendas*,"[496] these policies were not effective in stopping the exploitation and slavery of native bodies either because the stipulations of the Crown were ignored by colonial authorities and or they were too difficult to enforce, given the geographical distance between Spain and the 'New World'. To illustrate the impact of the colonial logics, Lemkin cites, among other archival evidence, Las Casas' claim that the total number of Indigenous people killed in Spanish America is greater than 20 million (ibid).

While Lemkin praised the efforts of the clergy, such as Las Casas, to learn Indigenous languages and denounce the depredations of the Spanish soldiers, he also holds the clergy responsible for "a subtle kind of cultural genocide". Conversion by coercion, through baptism, implies a clear case of cultural genocide, according to Lemkin, because Indigenous peoples became "virtual prisoners" of the Spanish clergy and had to endure the violent enforcement of European religious practices (Ibid). Lemkin states that the perpetrator's "intent," "motivation," "demoralization," and their "attitude towards the victim" generally, places the blame of genocide on the colonizers. He adds, "With few exceptions, the colonists of New Spain were guilty of genocide… They profited by the ownership of slaves and since even the governors were slaveholders, they could not be induced to enforce the royal orders against slavery and other abuses ... the colonists were guilty on all counts" (Ibid 509). Further, he underlines that the administrators of the Spanish colonies were the most responsible for these crimes because they had the power and duty to intervene and stop these abuses, based on royal orders, but they were slaveowners themselves and condoned genocide (Ibid 510). In the paragraph below, Michele de Cuneo, an officer of Columbus, narrates his own account of raping an Indigenous woman in gruesome detail:

> While I was in the boat, I captured a very beautiful Carib woman, whom the said Lord Admiral gave to me. ...I was filled with desire to take my pleasure with her and attempted to satisfy my desire. She was unwilling, and so treated me with her nails that I wished I had never begun. But ...I then took a piece of rope and whipped her soundly, and she let forth such incredible screams that you would not have believed your ears. Eventually, we came to such terms, I assure you, that you would have thought she had been brought up in a school for whores, (Columbus, 1969: 139 qted. in Hardin 2002: 16)

[496] A grant of land and resources, including Indigenous labor, to Spanish settlers for military service. In El Salvador, encomiendas were granted in exchange for export crops such as balsam and cacao (Tilly 2005: 110).

The sadistic and vicious nature of this rape and of the rapist's mindset and motivation, is permanently captured by his own hand and reveals his attitude[497] towards the victim. As Lemkin notes above, this colonizer's bragging about his cruelty toward Indigenous women without any remorse, shows that the violent disarticulation of a racialized woman's sexuality by a white man is his best attempt to control her greatest power, using violence and terror to destroy the female body.

Hardin goes on to show the testimony of a doctor who accompanied Columbus in his journeys, stating that in one settlement, "the Christians had taken three or four women apiece" referring to rape (Columbus, 1969: 148 qted. in Hardin 2002: 16). Further, Columbus himself reported that "The cost of a woman is 100 castellanos" (Columbus, 1969: 271), showing that he was complicit with the trade of Indigenous women. Years later, Las Casas (1992a) wrote that "the most powerful ruler on the islands had to see his own wife raped by a Christian officer" (Ibid 33). He added that "The Spaniards broke up marriages, separating husbands and wives... took for themselves the wives and daughters of the people or gave them to the sailors and soldiers as consolation" (1992a 73 qted. in Hardin 2022: 16).

Academic feminist and activist, Andrea Smith (2015), explains that it is precisely through sexual violence that Indigenous genocide was successful on this hemisphere. She cites the work of Ann Stoler[498], to speak of sexualized violence as a logic of genocide, adding that racism is a process by which colonized peoples become marked as inherently dirty and impure, from which the larger colonial body is always trying to clean itself. In the history of Indigenous genocide, she adds, Indigenous bodies have always been equated with pollution or dirt because they cannot be white, they can never be clean, they can never be pure. From this perspective, patriarchal worldviews hold that only a body that is pure can be violated. Thus, the rape of Indigenous bodies does not count as rape, as they are inherently 'rapeable'. The logics of the colonial project are not just about killing Indigenous people and occupying their land, but also about attempting to kill their sense of humanity, as Lemkin has shown that the dehumanization[499] of the other is a prerequisite for genocide[500]. In this way, sexualized colonial violence is a process by

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[497] Rudman and Mescher's research on men's implicit dehumanization of women and sexual aggression (2012) directly link female dehumanization to male sexual aggression when men perceive women as "subhuman" either because they have not fully evolved (i.e., they are animals), or because they have the properties of an object (e.g., they are impervious to pain). Women are at risk for both types of dehumanization by men (Haslam 2006 qted. in Rudman and Mescher 2012). Objectification is present when a person is treated (a) as a tool for one's own purposes (instrumentality and ownership), (b) as lacking agency and self-determination (inertness and denial of autonomy), (c) as if permissible to damage or destroy (violability), (d) as if there is no need to show concern for the "object's" feelings and experiences (denial of subjectivity), or (e) as interchangeable with similar others (fungibility). When men's objectification of women reflects any or all these factors, it is plausible to expect male sexual aggression toward women (Nussbaum 1999 qted. in Rudman and Mescher 2012). Both, feminist and social psychologists are correct in connecting men's objectification of women -- by viewing them as animals (Goldenberg et al., 2009; Ortner, 1974), or as objects (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) -- to women's increased risk for sexual victimization.

[498] See Ann Laura Stoler. "Carnal knowledge and imperial power" (1991): 51-101.

[499] See Irvin-Erickson's *Raphael Lemkin and the Concept of Genocide* (2016: 116, 242).

[500] Holocaust literature shows that Jewish women and men were separated in Nazi deportation camps and on death lists, as well as segregated in prisons. Both sexes were subjected to similar kinds of torture, abuse,

which patriarchy literally inscribes its hierarchical structures of power on the bodies of women to dehumanize[501] and treat them as objects, as property (Ibid).

Repeated instances of heinous, white, male violence against racialized and sexualized women and men redefined for Indigenous men and women that Spanish machismo gave colonizers permission to rape Indigenous women, although these brutal behaviors were not permitted in Spain or with Spanish women or Spanish men (Ibid). Diego de Landa (1978), a Spanish priest living among Indigenous people's documented that in Maya communities: "they are very jealous, and do not lightly suffer infidelity on their wives' part; and now that they see the Spaniards kill their wives for this reason, they are beginning to maltreat and even to kill them" (Ibid 41).

Sociologist Violeta Sara-Lafosse (2014) also concludes that the origins of machismo in Latin America can be located in the gender dynamics of the Spanish conquest, focusing on the tendency of males to abandon their children in machista societies (qted. in Musalo 2018: 34-35). She adds that in patriarchal societies, boys who grow up without a father figure tend to develop hyper-masculinized identities and display aggressive behaviors (Ibid). Bautista Bayona confirms paternal abandonment as a trait of Salvadoran machismo, citing that "it is socially acceptable for men to be absent from the home and have multiple sexual relationships, leaving the women with total responsibility for maintaining the home and raising their children" (Ibid). Musalo links contemporary paternal abandonment in Latin America to the Spanish conquerors' unwillingness to recognize the children they fathered through rape or cohabitation with Indigenous women, which she points out, fostered high rates of illegitimacy[502] during the colonial period (Ibid). Musalo states that when fathers refuse to recognize their children, it perpetuates machismo in society, affecting everyone, especially women and children (Ibid).

1.e Coloniality of Gender as Framework to Analyze Carla Ayala's Murder

Although patriarchy and machismo account for the hyper-masculinized violences of the conquest, these dynamics alone cannot account for the systematic institutionalization of male violence against women and girls in El Salvador. Decolonial feminist and philosopher María Lugones theorizes about the *colonial/modern gender system* or *coloniality of gender* (2007) to amplify what we know about the intersections

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starvation, forced labor, deportation, humiliation, and death, but only women had to cope with pregnancy, amenorrhea (the absence of menstruation), abortion, rape, and invasive gynecological examinations (Ephgrave 2016: 14). Jewish women experienced dehumanization in distinct ways from men that specifically targeted their bodily integrity (Ibid 16). Rape, according to genocide experts, is the archetypical act by which a male demonstrates to a female that she is conquered by his superior strength and power. It is not an unusual act of sexual desire committed by a lone soldier against a female victim in a defeated country. In war, rape has much wider social and cultural implications for the woman and her community (Ibid 18). Sara R. Horowitz explores the ethics of representing sexual trauma or what she refers to "gender wounding", a particularly female suffering communicated to her by survivors of rape who experience a "shattering of something innate and important to her sense of her own womanhood" (Ibid 27).

[501]In order to murder, rape, and torture their victims, perpetrators must perceive those victims as sub or inhuman, as outside the scope of moral responsibility (Oliver 2011: 93). Violent practices such as rape, torture, or slavery share an asymmetry of power, as their dominant feature (Ibid 113).

[502] I do not support the concept of illegitimacy to speak of children whose fathers do not legally recognize them because I believe that all children are legitimate.

of race and gender in Aníbal Quijano's theory of the *coloniality of power* (2000: 215-232).

Discussing the coloniality of power, Quijano proposes that the imposed re-organization of social relations by Europeans during colonial times resulted in deeply racialized hierarchies that produced lasting inequity, discrimination, and oppression, through the control of [racialized] labor, its resources, and products, and the exploitation of bodies deemed inferior (Ibid). This racialized extractivism was essential to the formation of Euro-centered global capitalism and the project of modernity, which established Europe as the axis of power and relegated colonized peoples and spaces as peripheral, dismantling in this way, '*Other*' ways of being and knowing in the world (Ibid).

In *The coloniality of gender*, María Lugones builds upon Quijano's theory of the coloniality of power through an in-depth analysis of gender and its entanglements with race, which she posits are co-constitutive of each other and cannot be separated in the project of modernity, as Europeans in colonial times saw race as gendered, gender as raced, and labor as both, raced and gendered (2007: 1-17). She interrogates Quijano's Eurocentric and hegemonic framing of sex/gender, which, she states, he bases on patriarchal and heterosexual dimorphism or the biological ordering of the sexes; she proposes that his theorizing is a means for continuing to subject and disempower colonized women and *Other* gendered minoritized peoples such as 2SLGBTQ+ communities. From her perspective, the coloniality of gender trespasses all aspects of a person's life, creating new social and geo-cultural subjectivities that are aimed to destroying Indigenous notions of body and territory, as well as sacred knowledges – including Indigenous conceptualizations of sex and gender[503] -- that existed prior to the imposition of the European modern/colonial gender system. Through the European colonial logics, Lugones interjects that the coloniality of gender orders and authorizes two opposed and hierarchical groups, where men are dominant/superior, and women subordinate/inferior (Ibid). Thus, male violence against women and girls is most forcefully felt by those whose race/ethnic, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, disability, and other social intersections render them "inferior" and therefore, locate them within a female body (Dawson and Vega 2023: 4).

Lugones is particularly interested in understanding the *indifference* of men (who have been violently and systematically racialized as inferior themselves) to the violences inflicted upon the bodies of racialized women and their struggles to resist them. She argues that a man's indifference to a woman's pain and subjection makes visible the instrumentality of the colonial/modern gender system to subject both -- women and men of color -- in all aspects of their lives, while supporting the hyper-masculinized

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[503] Burr Cartwright Brundage (1979) posits that, for Mexicas, "it was relatively easy for deities to shift their sex" (54), an idea supported by Inga Clendinnen (1991), who argues that gender roles and sexual identity was not stable among deities. For instance, *Xochiquetzal* was the deity of sexual love, artistry and delight, and threads "her" way through multiple sexual relationships with deities. But she was also *Macuilxochitl,* who is commonly taken to be male. Earth and water deities were androgynous and could be invoked in either gender identity (Ibid 167, 168).

constructions of authority, the relation between capital and labor, and the production of knowledge in Latin America (2007, 1-16).

1.f Intersectional Approaches to Femicide/Femi(ni)cide

To respond to the epistemic gaps that Lugones highlights above, in our understandings of power at the intersections of social identities, socio-cultural practices and ideologies, and state institutions, human rights legal scholar, Lorena Sosa (2023), proposes incorporating an intersectional approach (Crenshaw 1989) to nuance the complexities of male violence against women and girls that results in femicide. She states that intersectionality captures the diversity of power relations in connection to the unique positionalities that women and girls occupy in the world to strengthen our understandings of femicide, so we can develop more adequate responses (Ibid: 50). Sosa's work stresses how intersectionality illuminates multiple intersecting categories of difference -- such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, nationality, and other social categories that shape the inequalities that women and girls face, and in term, the complexity of the violences they experience (Crenshaw 1993 qted, in Sosa: 2023: Ibid).

Specifically, Sosa argues that an intersectional approach to femicide can offer a comprehensive analysis of the multiple and simultaneous systems of oppression and inequalities involved in a femicide case and how these are at play in specific contexts. Thus, intersectionality moves the analysis beyond patriarchy and machismo, and incorporates other systems of oppression that harm women and girls, such as racism, agism, ableism, nationalism, heteronormativity, class inequality and other forms of discrimination based on language and religious practices, etc. (Ibid 53). By introducing different dimensions of analysis of femicide cases, Sosa's research underscores the sedimented nature of oppression and the complexity of inequality, thus contributing to our understandings of femicide as the result of multiple forms of oppression, discriminations, and inequalities. Lastly, Sosa's research can help substantiate the complicity of social institutions through their inadequate and or lacking responses to femicide, which can take place in a variety of settings, such as within the home, the workplace, in educational settings, and other realms (Ibid).

We know little about Ayala's life, as a woman, as a human being. What we do know about her is through her death. Yet, to remain silent, completely silent, about her tragic circumstances invites complicity with the racialized, gendered, and sexualized violences that kill women and girls everywhere and cover up their deaths under silence. Using a *Kab'awilian* strategy[504] of double gaze or deployment of two visions at the same time without an intention to dominate what you see (Chacón 2018: 15), I frame my intersectional analysis of Carla Ayala's oppressions surrounding her death, on the teachings of Black feminist, poet, and philosopher Audré Lorde, who has taught us that our silence will not protect us (2003), and that we should not look death the other way. It is my intention is to challenge the systems of oppression – race, gender, class, police brutality, sexual violence, discrimination, inequality, etc. -- that have prematurely killed close to 4,000 Salvadoran women and girls of color, in recent, "peaceful" years to help dismantle the master's house (1977). I believe that in the spirit of the Black feminist

[504] This concept will be elaborated in section 3 of this chapter.

tradition and in the name of transnational solidarities, radical social change from below must take place in the everyday experiences of women of color everywhere, starting with our right and our fight to be alive and free from violence and abuse. It is within these feminist decolonial ideas that I attempt to shed light on a fallen woman's social identities, with what I know of her life, from where I stand.

In El Salvador, 53 percent of Salvadoran women are considered unemployed in the formal sector, and 47 percent who work in the informal sector (street vendors, part time domestic workers, part time service industry workers, etc.) care for someone or do domestic work at home without compensation. Their unremunerated status invisibilizes their productivity and labor (Burgos 2017). Therefore, national employment data show that 80 percent of unemployed people in El Salvador are women (Ibid). Most young women and men who join the police force come from low-income communities and only have a high school education. Given the lack of employment opportunities in the country, they see public service through the security forces as a viable career that offers them a steady paycheck, health benefits, and retirement, as opposed to working at home or in the streets without any compensation, or doing agricultural work or working in service occupations, or in the *maquiladoras* (sweat shops), where minimum wage averages $7.00 per day or about $217 per month, without benefits or a retirement system (Ibid). Despite the lure of a public service career, the salary of an entry-level police officer averages $450.00 minus taxes per month and it increases to $526.71 minus taxes, after 20 years of service. Yet, *la canasta básica* (basic food basket price) in El Salvador in 2017 averaged $194 per month, and *la canasta de mercado* (basic food and services to live) averaged $594 per month in the same year. The poverty line in El Salvador in 2017 was defined as a monthly income of $389 per month or less, according to El Faro (Ibid). Under these circumstances, many low income, uneducated women choose a career in the security forces that offers them some stability and the perception of safety, although it pays them wages that are barely over the national poverty line (Ibid). In this context, it can be inferred that Ayala, a 19-year veteran in the PNC, depended on her monthly paycheck to support her family and she did not have too many other employment choices.

In terms of her race/ethnic background, Ayala may not have openly identified herself as an Indigenous woman or as a descendant, but her intersectional identities as a working-class woman of color, uniquely positioned her to occupy "a certain" place in Salvadoran society. Even though El Salvador officially claimed to be "overwhelmingly, a mestizo nation,"[505] it prided itself on being "a country without Indians" since the early twentieth century[506] to attain a reputable standing in "the family of nations" (Tilly 2005: 12, 218). It was only in 2014, when the Salvadoran state officially recognized the existence of Indigenous peoples by amending its constitution[507] to gain status as a "multicultural nation"[508] under significant pressure by the international community

[505] In El Salvador, mestizos are by far the largest ethnic group of the nation, accounting for 86.3 percent of the population (World Atlas Online).
[506] Following the 1932 Matanza in Western El Salvador. See Cuéllar (2018); Gould & Lauría-Santiago (2008); Almeida (2008); Tilley (2005); Wood (2000); Ching and Tilley (1998).
[507] Article 63 of the Constitution of the Republic of El Salvador recognizes the rights of Indigenous peoples (United Nations 2019).
[508] See DeLugan (2020: 38).

(Bermúdez 2017: 1). However, the repressive tactics and technologies of terror used by the Salvadoran government for decades to silence and invisibilize Indigenous communities following the 1932 Matanza, have had durable impacts[509] and prevented the formation of a national climate of [multicultural] equity and inclusion, as Nantzin Antonia Ramírez testified through her songs, in Chapter 1 of this study.

In this light, I propose that state-sponsored violences in El Salvador constrained Salvadoran identity to the fiction of *mestizaje* under the imposed logics of the Spanish *casta* system, the cultural politics of "*armas y letras"* (weapons and letters), and the strategic deployment of racialized nationalist discourses during *El Martinato* (Lara-Martínez 2011: 1, 16, 91; Tilley 2005: 200-207). Together, these racist ideologies and policies disavowed Indigenous virtues in European ideas of [Salvadoran] race formation that evolved through notions of mestizaje/Latinidad.[510] Additionally, the use of legal violence by the Salvadoran government to erase 'Indianness' and 'Blackness' from the national census and the nation's imaginary through the passage of race laws in 1933 (Cuéllar 2018: 40), coupled with the worst excesses of political violence seen in the 1980s war -- such as torture, rape, arbitrary arrest, imprisonment, forced disappearance, and assassination -- attempted to suppress any sign of popular dissent through sheer violence and terror (Menjívar 2005: 85-114). Thus, few people in El Salvador identify as Indigenous or Indigenous descendants today, given its long history of despotic racialized, gendered, and sexualized killings, its ethics and culture of violence, its silencing and invisibilization of Indigenous peoples through terror, and the deeply ingrained internalization of colonialism and other European systems of oppression.[511]

Arguably, as a member of the national civilian police[512] -- the country's primary law enforcement agency created in 1993 to set expectations for the respect of human rights by security forces -- Officer Ayala had, at least aspirationally, some proximity to state power, tactical training, and access to weapons, etc., which were not enough to save her from being brutally executed by her fellow male police officers. This obvious imbalance of power among individuals who were 'seemingly' entrusted -- on an 'equal' basis -- to represent the civil authority of a government to maintain public safety and order, highlights the lack of consideration given to gender in the negotiations of peace

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[509] Sylvia Rivera Cusicanqui states that mestizaje is a project of forgetting and that to remember our Indigenous roots, it is necessary to decolonize ourselves and recover our collective ancestral memory (2015: 119).

[510] José Vasconcelos's *La raza cósmica* (1925) saw the true value of *La Raza* in its European roots, while disparaging, rejecting, and eliminating Indianness through cultural change. Thus, ideas of "*Latino mestizaje*" were embraced and celebrated in El Salvador. See Alberto Masferrer's "Now and in You" (1927) (Tilley 2005: 200-207).

[511] See Bourgeois (2018) for a definition of settler colonialism, gender, territory; see Veracini (2010) for a definition of settler colonialism and territory.

[512] The 1992 Peace Accords mandated security reforms that included the creation of a new National Civil Police (PNC), which were to receive mandatory training at a new National Academy of Public Security under a civilian security doctrine focused on human rights and democratic, gender-neutral values, instead of military instruction. Training and professionalization of the PNC focused on community service and national reconciliation between former enemies. A ratio of 60/40 was agreed upon, favoring a civilian majority and equal distribution of the remaining ratio between ex-combatants from both sides. However, there were no specific gender quotas for the recruitment of women and other genders into the PNC (Rojas-Ospina 2019: 73).

and security in El Salvador, in the 1992 Chapultepec Peace Accords, and thereafter (Rojas-Ospina 2019: 70).

As a missing and murdered police officer, a working-class woman of color, a daughter, a wife, a mother, etc. living in a colonized space, her lifeless body bears witness to the inability and indifference of the Salvadoran national civil police to protect its own [women] members from gender-based violence within the institution. This attests to the racialized, gendered, and sexualized nature of state power and its complicity with *femi(ni)cide*. Her murder and disappearance speak of the indifference of the state to investigate any femi(ni)cide thoroughly and in an urgent fashion, and to carefully examine the unique safety and security needs of women and girls, who have different positionalities in society and little to no access to state power. The cold-hearted execution of a policewoman by several policemen in El Salvador shows that state power remains deeply embedded in a hyper-masculinized patriarchal system that legitimizes the use of force upon the bodies of those it wishes to control, authorizing in this manner, the killing of defenseless women and girls (Ibid 71). Further, the merciless close-range killing of a woman by police[men] also raises questions about the continuity of the past in El Salvador (1932 Matanza, 1980s (un)civil war), regarding the primacy of the state as a failed referent of safety and security for the Salvadoran people, especially for historically marginalized groups such as Indigenous communities and women and girls (Ibid).

Noted in the initial news articles of Ayala's murder and disappearance was a reference about her leaving her home on the night she disappeared, wearing a "blue lycra dress and brown high heels" (Barrera 2018). These articulations of *racialized sexuality*[513] about women who are killed often appear in the first or second paragraphs of their news story and describe how she was dressed, which is associated with the victim's sexuality and suggest her responsibility for her own killing. This is done to (re)affirm the 'public' and thus inferior nature of women and girls who have disobeyed gender norms, and to re-establish the victims' place within society (Fuentes 2018: 1678). In other words, the interpretation of the victim's clothing may be a code that passes judgment about the worthiness and decency of women and girls who are killed: "If she goes out at night looking that this, why should I care about this case or what happened to her? She was asking for it" is the implicit logic. The modes of representation in the media, of public victims, are themselves, acts of gendered extermination (Ibid). In the absence of patriarchal ideologies and hyper-masculinized social and state institutions that fail to protect the life and dignity of Salvadoran women and girls every day, Ayala and thousands of missing and murdered Salvadoran women and girls would be alive, today.

1.g Spatial Approaches to Femicide/Femi(ni)cide

To shed light on the dynamics of femi(ni)cide and space, feminist researcher, and activist Lorena Fuentes (2023) posits that gendered and racialized violence is "read" through the bodies that bear it (70). She maintains that how gendered and racialized violence is "read,'" is directly connected to the power dynamics that are reproduced in specific geographical and historical contexts, urging us to carefully "re-read" violence for "the schema that orchestrates and interprets it" (Butler 1993: 20 qted. in Fuentes 2023: 70). From this premise, Fuentes proposes that *the politics of space* are a key component

[513] See Jelke Boesten (2014: 59)

of the structures that propitiate racialized, gendered, and sexualized violence in colonized contexts. Space, Fuentes adds, is central to the meaning-making of femi(ni)cide, for it lays the ideological scaffolding for how victims emerge or fail to emerge from their deaths, which renders male violence against women and other forms of gender-based violence *spatial and not aspatial* (Ibid).

According to Fuentes, the meaning of femi(ni)cide is reflected in the socio-spatial scripts or spatial colonial logics that inform the political, legal, and societal responses for differently situated subjects of violence, who often find themselves dispossessed of their land and spatially segregated or contained as pre-requisites for the normalization of impunity of femi(ni)cide (ibid). Therefore, she argues that racialized, gendered, and sexualized bodies and spaces are woven together through the production and re-production of socio-spatial scripts, which over time normalize and invisibilize male violence against women and girls, ensuring impunity and complicity by state institutions (71). To this extent, space functions as a unit of analysis to expose how official discourses ascribe hierarchical meanings and values to particular bodies, in particular geographies (Ibid).

From this perspective, Fuentes states that when we read the spatial coordinates of a site of femi(ni)cide (i.e., private sphere: a home vs. public sphere: a highway), careful attention must be paid to other coordinates that are mobilized simultaneously in the story, such as the relationship between the actors (the perpetrator as significant other vs. a stranger), the modality or mechanism of injury (sexual violence vs. gun violence), and societal expectations of the naturalness for the violence to occur in that space (normal vs. exceptional). These coordinates are imbued with hierarchical meanings, such as race, gender, sex, class, nationality, etc. They are co-produced to dislocate the violence from the victim's body and invisibilize the colonial logics and power that shape racialized and sexualized women's relationship with colonized spaces (72).

Although Fuentes states that feminist spatial approaches to understanding femi(ni)cide are necessary, she warns that it can be dangerous to link femi(ni)cidal violence to a particular space, because it naturalizes the gendered, sexualized, and racialized violence in that space (as in the case of the U.S.-Mexco border in Ciudad Juarez), which may flatten a state's response to it, or elicit extreme social cleansing responses that result in government excuses for increased policing, militarization, and mass incarceration (as in the case of El Salvador's state of exception under the Bukele administration related to territorial control against organized crime). These extreme state responses to femi(ni)cide, according to Fuentes, ignore the historical processes that have shaped colonized geographies and therefore, misunderstand the root causes of racialized, gendered, and sexualized violence, failing to craft an appropriate state response (73). For these reasons, she argues, it is critical to visibilize the Eurocentric connections to the socio-spatial scripts in colonized geographies and pay attention to how racialized, gendered, and sexualized victims of femi(ni)cide emerge or not from their deaths. Fuentes notes that colonial logics have relied on violence and used space as a central "framing" device to signify spatialized bodies and embodied spaces, leading us to assume that violence in those spaces is normal[514] (Ibid).

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[514] See Sylvia Wynter's notion of uninhabitable geographies in *Demonic Grounds* (2006), qted. in McKittrick (2020).

For instance, colonial conceptualizations of Indigenous women deem them degenerate and disposable because they trespass the safety extended through their private spheres. Yet, without a home or a territory, they are out of place. Thus, they meet death in public spheres because their bodies are where they are not supposed to be. Already seen as violated, violable, and disposable because of their race, gender, class, religion, etc., their bodies are always in a state of perpetual violability (75). In this context, femi(ni)cide becomes a form of violence that is guaranteed to happen to women who are in geographies authorized as naturally violent (Ibid).

In the case of El Salvador, male violence against women and girls is always imagined to be normal since colonial times, during the 1932 Matanza and thereafter, and in the 1980s war and postwar period. The historical continuities of colonialism and the project of modernity that manifested through racialized, gendered, and sexualized violence against Indigenous women and descendants, always imagine them to be the victims of heinous crimes, whose spatialized bodies sometimes emerge, and other times disappear, embodying the colonized space.

In the murder of Carla Ayala, what emerged of her death in numerous media stories, is that she was out at a party, late at night, wearing a form-fitting dress and high heels, accompanied by many male police officers who had been drinking, had been trained to kill, and had access to weapons, in the confines of a vehicle. The socio-spatial scripts that surface in these media articles may lamentably suggest that she may have deserved what happened to her, even though it is not openly stated. Her "victim" profile is mobilized by the authorities and deployed by the media to violate her humanity, by deeming her not altogether an "innocent" victim. An implied signifier that can be read between the lines in the media stories is that she may have been at fault -- at least partially -- for being in a truck with several drunken men, late at night, instead of at home with her family.

The men she was with, were mainly police officers, members of an elite police unit, known for its controversial record of committing massacres and extrajudicial killings, and for their past associations with death squads.[515] Given that she was in a male-dominated occupation as a police officer herself, an implication of the circumstances that led to her death could be that she placed herself in proximity to danger by associating herself with hyper-masculinized state agents who have been historically trained to kill without remorse. As an internal affairs investigator, she may have been working on a case that angered the men and, consequently, they killed her. Another inference that may have been mobilized by her media story is that she herself was a police officer, one of them, and therefore, she was deserving of the same violences that police inflict on others. Yet, in reckoning with her brutal murder at the hands of a male police officer in the presence of several other police officers, in a confined space, her racialized, gendered, and sexualized identities surface to highlight her power differential and locate her in a unique space of vulnerability, where her non-white female body is deemed already violated and always 'violable'. As a woman of color in El Salvador, local norms still demand that she cannot openly challenge the authority of men, much less the double authority of policeMEN[516].

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[515] Cristosal's Report on *Litigio Estratégico* (2018); Griffin (2018); InSight Crime (2017).
[516] Capitalized for emphasis.

There is not much more that has been made public by the news media about her killing on the night of December 29, 2017, other than she was shot in the head at close range. Forensic data show that wounding with firearms is an extremely complex situation that involves several variables such as bullet size, velocity, shape, spin, distance from muzzle to target, and nature of tissue, which are interrelated (Gitto and Robert Stoppacher 2021). Without specific information about the gun and the type of ammunition used to commit her murder, at the very least, it can be generally inferred by the mechanism of death employed by her killers, that a bullet that enters the cranial cavity expends energy, but the closed cranium cannot expand, so the energy may be dissipated by damaging brain tissue and fracturing of bone. There is also significant damage done to tissue by the gases released by the firearm at close range (Berryman, 2019). In more than one way, it can be said that her killers s h a t t e r e d Ayala's body and her life in an instant, and they also s h a t t e r e d her loved ones, and her community forever.

The spatiality of the police vehicle where she was killed raises questions as to why she may have [voluntarily] boarded it. A safe speculation is that she was used to riding on police vehicles, since it was her occupation for almost twenty years. It can also be suggested that both victim and perpetrators were at an end-of-year celebration and not on a dangerous mission; therefore, she did not expect to be in harm's way. Yet, local norms still make it unacceptable for "decent" women to get in a car with several men, especially late at night. Salvadoran patriarchal and machista ideologies make the spatiality of the vehicle where she was killed a contested site that unjustifiably calls for policing the victim's sexuality, instead of policing the police, who are her killers, here.

The enclosed nature of the vehicle delimited the victims' ability to flee, if she had an opportunity to do so, as it constrained her movement while simultaneously increasing her killers' chances of succeeding at their macabre task. Marked as a public safety space, the police vehicle where she rode for the last time, ironically became a space of death for her and it severed her right to life, instantly. The spatial colonial logics of a state-owned [police] vehicle driven by policemen, while transporting the lifeless body of a woman for several hours, expose the hierarchical signification ascribed to the lack of humanity of a [female] body, reinforcing patriarchal authority to contain women by force to the private sphere. By being contained in a police vehicle, her body becomes a site of disposability, like the bodies of thousands of Salvadorans who have been apprehended by police and are immediately marked 'already dead,' 'already violated,' devoid of any humanity', 'rightless'.

The horrific imagery of a woman's bleeding body being paraded for hours throughout San Salvador's streets by her killers, in a police vehicle, as described in newspaper reports[517] is reminiscent of the 1980s war or the 1932 Matanza, when white trucks and wooden oxcarts, respectively, were used by government forces to 'publicly' display the dead bodies they wanted seen (Fieldnotes and Interviews 2019). Yet, her killers hid her remains for months. Had she not been a police officer, her corpse may have been found strewn on a side road, and her killers may have never being caught, charged, and or convicted of any crimes.

[517] I am not aware of such image being shown in local newspapers, but there is at least one article that describes this occurrence.

Under these circumstances, the life and death of Ayala was delegitimized and dehumanized by her killers, by the state, and by society, who continued to show apathy and indifference toward her. But for her occupation, Ayala would not have emerged as a victim of a vile femi(ni)cide, until the notoriety of her disappearance and murder became an embarrassment for the PNC and created international pressure for the government to resolve her killing. "¡No, hombre, seño!... si aquí vamos peor cada día. Ni siquiera los policías están a salvo, pues entre ellos mismos se están matando. Imagínese cómo nos sentimos de vulnerables nosotros, que no somos la policía y que no tenemos cómo defendernos... ¡aquí estamos bien jodidos!" ("No, sir!... here we are doing worse every day. Not even the police are safe, they are killing one another. Imagine how vulnerable we must feel, we are not the police and we do not have the means to defend ourselves… we are pretty screwed, here!"), told me a street vendor in San Salvador, who was selling a newspaper with headlines about this case.

The Salvadoran socio-spatial scripts in Ayala's murder dislocated and mislocated the violences perpetrated on her body by her killers, by the state denial of her the right to a life free from violence and abuse, by normalizing the belief that racialized, gendered, and sexualized killings happen to certain people, in certain places, and by erasing her humanity through the media stories that emerged. During the time I was there, no one wrote a single news article that defended Ayala's 's right to go out at night and be free from male violence. In addition, the neoliberal performativity of the state also helped dislocate and mislocate the mortal violence inflicted by policemen on her body, given that it coopted the grammar of women rights/human rights to center men who, in her funeral, boasted about having solved her femi(ni)cide, instead of having prevented it.

In terms of the emergence of Ayala's body in a rural shallow grave nine months after her disappearance, Fuentes cites the words of a K'echi'-Xinka feminist activist in Mixco, Guatemala, to explain that:

> These women are disposable women. They are the female pariahs of society; they are women who aren't worth anything. And any woman that is assassinated in this country and ends up this way, it is because she is the garbage of society. And look at where garbage ends up. It's a very moral message ... it also enters through the eyes. (Fuentes 2020: 1668).

Finding dead bodies in public places is a common occurrence in El Salvador. It is a continuity of the 1932 Matanza and the 1980s war. Almost every day, several bodies of women and girls are found in public spaces (non-domestic spaces), according to data referenced in this study. There are frequent news reports of 'fresh' mass graves that have been found during peace time, four decades after the war ended. This ongoing emergence of "public victims' attests to a deeply gendered and sexualized ethics and culture of violence that delegitimizes the humanity of murdered and missing women and girls by mobilizing racialized, sexualized, gendered, classed, and other assumptions about their social status and circles (Ibid 1670). Ultimately, the key socio-spatial script deployed by the public location where bodies emerge is that public victims lack worth. The performativity of their femi(ni)cides in these instances highlights the centrality of settler colonialism in treating racialized, sexualized, gendered, classed women and girls, as disposable (ibid). This productive performativity visibilizes the spatiality of bodies as sites of

violence that official discourses of femi(ni)cide re-articulate in the victims' intersectional differences (1672).

The settler colonial dynamics in El Salvador center land and territory as racialized spaces that locate in them, poor Indigenous and mestiza women, as racialized bodies who are "at the bottom ring of the colonial-patriarchal chain" (Cumes 2012: 10 qted. in Fuentes 2018: 1673). This is the meaning and location of gendered disposability and the reason why victims of femi(ni)cide who are marginalized are "disposable". Kaqchikel scholar Aura Cumes states that "the colonial," is the "stage which defines the material and intellectual space of Mayan women". This "stage" she adds, establishes a hierarchy that "not only benefits Indigenous men, but ... [especially] non-indigenous men and women due to [its] chain of subordinations" (Cumes 2012: 10). Anthropologist Audra Simpson (2016) emphasizes that Indigenous women in the global North "have been deemed killable, rapeable, expendable ... less valuable because of what they are taken to represent: land, reproduction, Indigenous kinship" (Fuentes 2018: 1674). Thus, the framing of El Salvador as a "wasteland" and as a 'large cemetery' is a function of its colonial history that is not over. Ayala's body was only buried and re-buried in two different locations by her killers, so that they would not get caught and not because they deemed her worthy of a burial.

1.h Salvadoran Government's Responses to Femicide/Feminicide

Although in the past decade or so, the Salvadoran government has engaged in legislative and administrative efforts to curtail the alarming number of femi(ni)cide cases during peace time -- given international and local women's groups pressure -- more needs to be done to ensure that the state responses are timely and adequately address this problem. Cecilia Menjívar and Diossa Jiménez (2023) document that in 2011, the government of El Salvador approved Decree 520, a Special Comprehensive Law for a Life Free of Violence for Women (El Salvador, 2012). This was the first time that a law proclaimed that women had the right to physical, psychological, moral integrity, and equal protection before the law, presuming that violence against women originates from her unequal relationship of power with men (457). In this context, Decree 520-2011 classifies femi(ni)cidal violence as an extreme form of gender violence against women and a violation of her human rights, both in public and private settings. However, according to Menjívar, the law lacks the administrative policies and procedures necessary to investigate domestic violence or feminicide cases, but it incorporated articles to include financial resources for victims (Ibid 457).

Decree 520-2011 also included provisions for the development of a specialized commission to guarantee the application of the law (Ley Especial Integral para una Vida Libre de Violencia Contra las Mujeres). Yet, the responsibility for overseeing prosecution and sentencing procedures was vague, highlighting the symbolic character of the law. Despite the approval of the first femi(ni)cide law in El Salvador, the lack of regulations and specialized courts with trained judges and multidisciplinary professionals undermined its implementation, rendering Decree 520-2011 ineffective in protecting women and girls. In 2016, Decree 286 approved the creation of specialized courts, but case-intaking was delayed a year. In 2017, El Salvador created a specialized jurisdiction for *A Life Free of Violence and Free of Discrimination Against Women* (458). Three years after the specialized courts were established, they collapsed during the COVID-19

pandemic, but the number of women being killed continued to rise. Between 2011 and 2019, El Salvador reported 3,659 femi(ni)cide cases (ORMUSA, 2020) (Ibid 459).

Meanwhile, none of these steps could have taken place without the strong political advocacy and prevention education efforts[518] of women's groups such as *La Red de Acción Contra la Violencia de Género en El Salvador*, *Las Dignas*, and *La Colectiva Feminista,* whose unrelentless efforts aligned with the Beijing platform to demand gender equality and government accountability. This transnational partnership led to the approval of Decree 520-2011, forcing the government of El Salvador to comply with international agreements (Ibid 460). Menjívar and Diossa-Jiménez argue that the legal and administrative actions taken so far by the Salvadoran government will continue to be ineffective in combating male violence against women and girls because the socio-political conditions[519] in which women live reflect significant structural inequalities that harm them and their families (Menjívar, 2011: 40; Menjívar, 2023: 460).

[518] "Nada Justifica la violencia sexual. ¡Mi cuerpo se respeta!" (460).

[519] Women face significant challenges accessing land, education, dignified housing, employment, and healthcare, among other basic needs (Menjívar, 2011: 40).

Section 2: Nanahuatzin: The Nawa-Pipil Myth of Creation

Nemik se takat munamiktixtuk, kipia ne isiwaw, wan inte kimatikatka, ka kisa ka tayuwa. Semaya kidakatka, ka tatuwi kipia ti kikwa tey seya. (1)

Nemik se, ka kipachiwia wan kilik: “xikpachiwi ne musiwaw: kisa ka tayuwa, pal yukuchi wan se seyuk.” (2)

“Tikidas, ka ijkia, ka kisa, ka kitalia se kwawit tan-kupa ne mutaken,paltikmati, ka nemi mu-nawak.” (3)

Wan kipachiwia wan kidak, ja ijkia, ka kiski; wan intiakta kilik. (4)

Kan tatuwik, yajki ichan ne,ka kilijtuk, wan kil-ik: ijkia tey ne tinichilik. “Yajki ne itsuntekun,yaj-ket ni imejmey, kwakuni yajket ni mejmetskuyi, ---“Semaya maka ni iweyka.” (5)

Wan nema ne seyuk ka tayuwa muketsi tachia, kan ne kujkupeutuk, wan kidak naktuk isel inajnakayu. Wan yajki muteka kichia, keman yuwits. (6)

Axkan, kan tatuwik, yajki kilia, ka kistuk: kan-ne kujkupeutuk, --- isel najnakuyu. (7)

Wan kilik: “axan pal makida, ka tikitstuk, xuxi-kwi se wajkal wan nesti; wan tikma istat, tikma kan ne kujkupeuttuk. Kwakuni tiaw timuteka, tikchia, despues yuwits.” (8)

Kwakuni kan walaknw itsuntekun, musaluk, ---¡inte welik! Musaluk sempa, ---¡inte welik!. Uetski, mukwepi musuluwa, ---¡inte welik!. (9)

Kwakuni wits ne imejmey, ---- inte welik.

Kwakuni witsne imejmetskuyu, --- kenaya, inte welik. Kwakuni taketski ne tsuntekumat: ¡ximuketsa!. (10)

¿Tey tikneki?. (11)

"¡Ximuketsa!. Nikneki maxinechilli, teika tikchiwtuk ne inteyek. Wan palte timukwepa tikchiwa, niumusaluwa mutech." (12)

Ume Tsuntekun

Kwakuni musaluk techne ixulejyu. Nakat ume tsuntekun: kan yawikatka tekiti, kiwikakatka; takwa kanne takwa ne xulejyu. (13)

Wan pal mijkwita, ---tik ne itili ne xulejyu, wan pal muxixa, ---tik ne kulutsin ne xulejyu. (14)

Wan pal kuchi mukupewakatka tech ne xulejyu; Wan kuchit sanse wan tajtaketsa yek. (15)

San muulina ne ixulejyu, nema nimi yaja pachiwia palte ykiajkawa. (16)

Kwakuni yajket ka kujtan, asiket tan se kwawit chiltik tsaput wan kasiket se tsaput uetstuk. (17)

Wan kipejpenki wan kitajkuk, kixtik; ne se tajku imak ne itsuntekun ne seyuk tajku kikwak yaja, kiliak ka ajwiat. (18)

"Titejkuskia, titachia, su tikasi aseyuk". (19)

"Su timutalia ni tejku". (20).

"Nimutalia." (21).

Kwakuni kixtikne ikwechpala ne ixulejyu wan kitalik, pal mamutali ne itsuntekun. Kwakuni tejkuk ne xulexiu wan asik se wan kaltajkalik se. (22)

Kwakuni kiasik seyuk, kitek wan kiski selek;

kwakuni kilik: “niktek se selek”. (23)

“Xiktamuta”. (24)

Kwakuni kitamutak wejka; wan yajki wetsi pak
Se masat; Kwakuni kiski mutaluwa ne masat. (25).

Wan kankikat, ka mutaluk, inak yaja , ka mu-
Taluk ne xulejyu. Kwakuni kajkewki yajki
Kasi, wan nema kasik ne masat. (26)

Wan kan kiasik, musaluk pak ne itsinkujku.
Kan kimatki ne masat, ka musaluk pakne
Itsinkujku, kwakuni mutaluk. (27)

Wan muchi ne wejwitisti, kanne panuyawi…
axta walak miki, wetski. (28)

Kwakuni temuk ne ixuljyu wan inak: “ne nu-
siwaw yajki! Kixketski yaja, ka naja nimutaluk;
axan niunitemua! ---Inte nikasi axan tey nik-
chiwa? Niuniaw nimuyulkwitia wan ne pale!” (29)

Ne Tepehua

Wan nechilik ne pale, ka maniaw niktemu, axta
kan nikasi, wan ni ajki niktemua, axta nikasik. (30)

Kan nikasik, niajki niknawatia ne pale. Wan
nechilk, ka maniktuka; wan kan niktukat, ma
nikpupu, manikwichpana (31)

Wan maniaw. Muchi ne tujtunal maniaw ni ta-
chias. Wan kan nikida tajtatkaya, ma niknawa-
ti ne pale. (32)

Wan kan nikidak, takatki se waxkalchin. Ni aj-
ki Ninawatia ne pale; wan nechilik, manik-
pachiwa tey yukisa. (33)

Wan weytiak, yajki chiupi, weytiak, yajki, ki-
chiwki se xuchitin. Kwakuni niajki niknawa-
tia ne pale; wan nech illik, ka ma ne ninemi niu-

pachiwia. (34)
Wan weytiak ne wajkal; wan kan chikawayak,
kwakuni tsssayanik. Kan tsayanik, nikida kumuni
ijtik. Wan niajki niknawatia ne pale; wan nech-
ilik manikpachiwi tey yukisa. (35).

Wan pejki nikida jkanne tsayantuk, nakak nik-
ida wan pejki nikida, ka kumunit. Wan nakak ni-
kida, ka muchi pipilchichin. (36)

Kwakuni niajki niknawatia ne pale. Kwakuni
nechilik, manikisa tik tekchan, niktajtani
kwejkwechpalachichin. (37)

Wan muchi, tey ne wetsityawit, nikinpexpena
wan nikinkimilua. Kan tamik xinit, nikinkwikak
ka nuchan. (38)
(Recopilation by Leonhard Schultze-Jena, 1930, qted. in Lara-Martínez 2016: 24-27).

La mujer en fragmentos

Había un hombre casado cuya esposa salía de
noche sin que él lo notara. Desde el amanecer, ella
le había preparado los más diversos manjares para
que comiera. Un solo hombre observaba que ella
salía sin ser vista. (1)

Quien advertía sus continuos viajes nocturnos, le
recomendó (al esposo): "vigila a tu mujer, ya que
de noche va a dormir en compañía de otro." (2)

"Notarás que es cierto que sale si pones un palo
bajo la manta. Así creerá que estás cerca de ella." (4)

Al amanecer, fue a casa de aquel que se lo había
revelado, y le dijo: "Es verdad lo que tú me contaste!"
La cabeza le fue cortada; se fueron los brazos, luego
se fueron las piernas (muslo y pantorrilla). "Solo
quedó el cuerpo inerte." (5)

Y de inmediato otra noche, se levantó a observar
lo que sucedía. Donde se encontraba el cuerpo
resquebrajado, advirtió que habían quedado solo

las carnes inertes. Y fue a acostarse sin mayor preocupación, no sin observar que después regresaría. (6)

Al amanecer, salió a decir lo que había mirado. “Del cuerpo resquebrajado, solo quedan carnes (sin espíritu).” (7)

Y le recomendó: “Ahora intenta que ella advierta que la has visto tú. Pon un huacal con ceniza y le echas sal. Se la echas precisamente ahí donde está resquebrajado, en el cuerpo cercenado. Luego te acuestas y la observas cuando regrese.” (8)

En seguida vino la cabeza a adherirse. Pero no fue posible. Intentó adherirse otra vez. Tampoco fue posible. En cambio, se derrumbó y volvió a adherirse. ¡No fue posible! (9)

Luego vinieron los brazos. No fue posible. Luego vinieron las piernas enteras. Igualmente, no fue posible. Luego profirió la cabeza/calavera. ¡Levántate! (10)

“¿Qué quieres?” (11)

¡Levántate! Quiero que me digas, ¿por qué has obrado de manera nefasta? Te recomiendo que no lo vuelvas a hacerlo. Voy a adherirme a ti! (12)

La doble cabeza

De inmediato se le adhirió al esposo, de manera que quedaron dos cabezas (en un solo cuerpo masculino). Al ir a trabajar, la llevaba consigo. comía, al alimentarse el esposo. (13)

Y así defecaba, por el ano del esposo. Y así orinaba también, por el pene del esposo. (14)

Y dormía por sí sola, ya que se separaba del esposo. Y dormían cada quien por su lado. Y platicaban largo y sin disputarse. (15)

Tan solo se movía el esposo, de inmediato estaba ella vigilándolo para que no la abandonara. (16)

Un día se internaron en el bosque. Llegaron bajo un árbol de zapote rojo y vieron que había un zapote caído. (17)

Y lo recogió y lo partió. Lo despulpó. Una mitad la dio a la cabeza; la otra se la comió él. Dijo que estaba deliciosa. (18)

"Deberías subir. Así buscas y miras si hay otro". (19)

"Sí te sientas, subo." (20)

"Me siento." (21)

Luego se quitó la ropa el esposo y la colocó para que la cabeza se sentara. Luego subió el esposo y encontró uno y lo tiró hacia aquí abajo. (22)

Luego encontró otro, lo cortó y salió verde; luego dijo: "corté uno verde." (23)

"¡Tíralo!" (24)

Luego lo tiró lejos, pero fue a caer duro sobre un venado. Luego se alejó corriendo el venado. (25)

Y al oír que se corría, pensó que era el esposo quien huía. Luego se encaminó; fue a encontrarlo; y de inmediato encontró al venado. (26)

Y al encontrarse con él, se le sujetó a la rabadilla. Al advertir el venado que se le había pegado en las ancas, huyó de inmediato. (27)

Y corrió por todas las espinas (que se hallaban en el bosque) -- esto sucedió tal cual testimonio -- hasta (que la cabeza) vino a morir y caer por tierra. (28)

Luego la buscó el esposo y dijo: "¡Mi mujer se fue! Imaginó ella que yo había huido. ¡Ahora voy a buscarla!" --- "No sé qué haré si no la encuentro. Iré a confesarme con el padre!" (29)

Nacimiento de los muchachos de la lluvia (Tepehuas)

Y me dijo el padre que fuera a buscarla hasta
encontrarla. Y fui a buscarla hasta que la encontré. (30)

Al encontrarla, fui a avisárselo el padre. Y me dijo
que la siembre/entierre y el sitio donde la siembre
entierre que lo limpie, que lo barra. (31)

Y agregó que vaya todos los días; que vaya a mirar.
Y en el instante en que vea algo extraño, se lo avise
a él. (32)

Y con el tiempo observé que creció un árbol de
morro. Fui a avisárselo al padre. Y me dijo que
vigilara lo que aparecería. (33)

Y creció. Poco a poco fue creciendo. Fue haciendo
unas florecitas. Luego fui a avisárselo al padre. Y me
dijo que ahí permaneciera vigilando. (34)

Y creció el morro, el cual, al madurar, reventó. Al
reventar, observé que se alborotaba dentro de
la fruta. Y fui a avisárselo al padre. Y me dijo que
vigilara qué aparecía. (35)

Y se inició (que) observé detenidamente lo que había
reventado. Permanecí largo tiempo observándolo
y re(comienza) (que) continué observándolo.
Pacientemente, permanecí observándolo hasta
que brotaron muchos niñitos de la fruta. (36)

Luego fui a avisárselo al padre. Luego me dijo que
Fuera al pueblo a solicitar pedacitos de tela. (37)

Y al ir cayendo todos los niños, los recogía y vestía
de inmediato. Al terminar de disgregarse, los llevé
a casa. (38)
(Translation by Rafael Lara-Martínez 2016: 24-27).

The Woman in Fragments

There was a married man whose wife used to go out
at night without him noticing it. Since early hours she
would prepare a large variety of delicacies for him
to eat. One man was observing that she would
go out without being seen. (1)

The one who warned of her continuous nocturnal voyages
recommended to the husband. “Watch your wife, given
that at night she goes to sleep in the company of another”. (2)

“You will notice that it is true that she goes out if you put a stick
under a blanket. This way, she will believe that you are near her.” (3)

The husband watcher her until he realized that it was true that
she would go out, but he said nothing. (4)

In the morning, he [the husband] went to the house of the one who had
revealed it to him and told him: “It is true what you told me!”
The head was cut off; the arms fell off; then
the legs fell off (thighs and calves). --- Only
the inert trunk was left.” (5)

And immediately another night, he [the husband] got up to observe
what was happening. Where the fragments of the body were lying
he noticed that there was only the inert body. He went back to bed without
worrying too much, not without noticing that she would return later. (6)

In the morning, the man went out to tell about what he had seen. “Of the
fragmented body, only the inert meat is left behind (without the spirit).”
(7)

And the man recommended: “Now, let her know that
you have seen her. Place a container with ashes and put
salt in it. Throw salt, precisely where the
fragmented, severed body is. Then, go to
bed and watch her when she returns.” (8)

Right away, the head came back to adhere to the body. But it was
not possible. It tried again, to adhere. It was neither
possible. Instead, it collapsed and it tried to
adhere itself one more time. It was not possible!. (9)

Then, the arms came. It was not possible. Then, the
whole legs came. It was equally
not possible. Then, the head/skulls screamed.
“Get up!” (10)

“What do you want?” (11)

“Get up! I want you to tell me, why have you

Acted in this disgraceful way? I recommend that you
do not do it again. I am going to adhere myself to you." (12)

The Double Head

Immediately, the head adhered to the husband, in this way.
There were two heads (in one masculine body).
When he went to work, he carried her with him.
She ate when he ate. (13)

And she would defecate through the husband's anus. And
She would urinate through the husband's penis. (14)

And she would sleep alone given that she separated from the husband.
And each of them would sleep alone. And they would talk for
a long tm and without arguing. (15)

When the husband would move, immediately she would be
watching him, so that he would not abandon her. (16)

One day, they went to the jungle. They arrive under a red
sapodilla tree and they saw that there was a fallen
sapodilla. (17)

He picked it up and cut it. He cleaned it. One half of it
he gave to the head and the other one, he ate. He said
that it was delicious. (18)

"You should climb up. That way, you can see if there is another one." (19)

"If you seat, I will climb up." (20)

"I will seat." (21)

Then, the husband took off his clothes and he placed them so
that the head could seat. Then, the husband climbed up [the tree] and
found one [sapodilla] and threw it down here. (22)

Then, he found another, he cut it, and it was not ripe; then,
he said: "I cut one that is not yet, ripe." (23)

"Throw it." (24)

Then, he threw it far away but it landed hard on a
deer. Then, the deer took off running far away. (25)

And, when [the head] heard the deer ran, it thought it was her husband who was fleeing. She then headed out to find him; and immediately, she found the deer. (26)

And when [the head] found the deer, it adhered to its rump. When the deer noticed that [the head] was on his haunches, it fled right away. (27)

And the deer ran through the thorns (that were in the jungle) --- this happened according to testimony -- until [the head] died and fell off to the ground. (28)

Then, the husband looked for it and said: “My wife left! She imagined that I had left her. Now I am going to find her! -- “I do not know what I will do if I cannot find her. I will confess with the priest!” (29)

The birth of the lords of the rain

And the priest told me to go looking for her until I found her. And I went looking for her, until I found her. (30)

When I found her, I went to tell the priest. He told me to sow/bury it and to clean and sweep the site where I sow/bury her. (31)

And he added, for me to go every day; to go look. And the minute I see something strange, to tell him. (32)

And with time, I observed that a calabash tree grew. I went to tell the priest. And he told me to watch closely what would appear. (33)

And it grew. Little by little it grew. It was making some little flowers. Then, I went to tell the priest. And he told me to stay there watching it. (34)

And the calabash grew, which when ripe, it burst. When it burst, I noticed something disturbing inside the fruit. And I went and told the priest. And he told me to watch what would appear. (35)

And I began to carefully observe what had burst. I stayed there for a long time observing it

> and it restarts that I continued watching it.
> Patiently, I stayed there observing it until
> Some little children came out from inside the fruit. (36)
>
> Then, I went to tell the priest. Then, he told me to
> Go to the town and ask for little pieces of fabric. (37)
>
> And, as all the children fell [of the fruit], I picked them up and dressed them immediately. When they finished breaking up, I took them home. (38)[520]

2.a Salvadoran Intertextualities of the Gourd

The story of *Nanahuatzin*, also known as *La mujer en fragmentos* (The Woman in Fragments), is the Nawa-Pipil myth of creation, which was first compiled by German Anthropologist Leonhart Schultze-Jena (1872-1955) during a summer trip to western El Salvador in 1930 was financed by American Anthropologist Frantz Boas (1858-1942). Some believe that this and other Nawa-Pipil stories were told to Schultze-Jena by a Nahua man, Ynés Másin, and his wife (she remains unnamed on the record), both native from Itzalku, Department of Centzunat in Western El Salvador. Although their names were omitted by the German scholar on his manuscript, their photograph appears in the back of his publication. Schultze-Jena published *La mujer en fragmentos* in *Mythen in der Mutterspache der Pipil von Izalco in El Salvador* (1935), along with over fifty other stories, a literary collection considered the largest Nawa-Pipil mythopoetics in existence today (Lara-Martínez 2016: 4; Lara-Martínez 2010: 6). *Mythen* was first translated to Spanish in 1977[521] and again in 1982[522], by Gloria Menjívar Rieken and Armida Parada Fortín (King 2012: 5).

The 1930s and 1940s in El Salvador[523] were the aftermath of ethnocide and characterized by military dictatorships, *Indigenismo* policies[524], and the politics of silencing *"lo indio"* and simultaneously 'rescuing' *"lo nuestro"* by the Salvadoran intellectual community. During this time, there was one significant academic investigation about Indigenous communities conducted by María de Baratta (1890-1978),

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[520] My translation to English, 2023.
[521] *Mitos y leyendas de los pipiles de Izalco*, Ediciones Cuzcatlán, San Salvador, 1977.
[522] *Gramática pipil y diccionario analítico*, Ediciones Cuzcatlán, San Salvador, 1982.
[523] As discussed in prior chapters, it is estimated that during the 1932 Matanza, between ten to thirty thousand Indigenous peoples, mostly men and boys, were massacred in a matter of weeks by Salvadoran government troops, amounting to a form of ethnocide before the notion of human rights existed and the concept of ethnocide could be incorporated into the treaties and conventions of the United Nations (Gould and Lauría-Santiago 2008: 219).
[524] Indigenismo policies refer to an early twentieth century project of the Salvadoran state and the intellectual community, focused on situating "el indio" as a thing of the past or a museum piece, while simultaneously silencing the 1932 massacre; it is a violent nostalgia movement that Lara-Martínez describes as part of the cultural project of "El *Martinato*," which he instituted to support his position that "en El Salvador ya no hay indios" (2011: 15-16). *El Martinato* is a term used by historians to refer to the regime of terror of Col. Maximiliano Hernández-Martínez, President of El Salvador believed to be responsible for the 1932 ethnocide. Among the intellectuals whose contributions helped silenced the 1932 massacre named by Lara-Martínez are Francisco Gavidia, María de Baratta, Miguel Ángel Espino, Pedro Geoffroy Rivas, Gilberto González y Contreras, José Vides, and others (Ibid).

which was published by the government in 1951, titled *Cuzcatlán Típico* (Lara-Martínez 2011: 14-15). This important corpus of research focused on Indigenous music and musical instruments in El Salvador, using "folklore, folkisa, and folkway"[525] as Western frameworks for understanding what Nawa-Pipil communities consider sacred ancestral practices that are deeply connected to their cosmogonies and ways of living. While de Baratta's research on what is now known as ethnomusicology did not focus specifically on Nawa-Pipil mythopoetics, it remains very relevant today because it opens a liminal space for theorizing *Other* ways of being and understanding the world, where alterity is possible to reconstruct history, from the perspective of a woman at a time, when in El Salvador "there were no indios," according to the policies of *El Martinato*.

In the 1980s, North American linguist Lyle Campbell published the most rigorous and exhaustive Nawat-Pipil dictionary and grammar handbook that exists in English (957 pages), titled *The Pipil Language of El Salvador* (1985). His research is based on fieldwork he conducted in Cuisnahuat, Witzapan, and other Nahuat-speaking localities in western El Salvador during the 1970s. Yet, the onset of the 1980s war obscured Campbell's major academic contribution. Despite the political challenges of the time, Campbell's research is now an important source for Indigenous/Salvadoran/Central American studies.

In the post-war period, linguistic anthropologist Rafael Lara-Martínez published *Indiana II: Mitos en la lengua materna de los Pipiles de Izalco* (2010), based on Schultze-Jena's 1935 German manuscript. Lara-Martínez's research includes a general introduction to Nawat-Pipil philosophy and thought, using 54 Nawa-Pipil stories as data, which he divided into several sections according to themes. His book contains a Spanish poetic translation, a linguistic-literal translation, and a section of technical notes related to the Nawat-Pipil language. Lara-Martínez is the first author to engage with the only Nawa-Pipil literary collection that exists today. He proposes that the mythopoetic works compiled by Schultze-Jena are a legacy that has been ignored for decades by the intellectual community -- at home and abroad --, which, he argues, denies Indigenous peoples in El Salvador the right to words, to a language, to historical memory, to a philosophy and to philosophizing, based on Eurocentric conceptions of what is acceptable in the canon. Preempting Western ideologies of exclusion and the denial of personhood of Indigenous peoples, Lara-Martínez opens his book with the following quote: "Desde Comala, siempre, entre despojos de memoria en testimonio de lo que no decimos" ("From Comala, always, among dispossessions of memory in testimony of what we do not say"), in response to the academic tradition of silencing and erasing the [Indigenous] Other, as a weapon of dominion (Ibid 2010 page not numbered).

Another important corpus of research about Nawa-Pipil communities and the Nahuat language spoken today in El Salvador includes the applied linguistic work of Salvadoran scholar Jorge Lemus, which has been central to the official recovery of the Nawat-Pipil language. He has worked closely with Indigenous leaders, the Ministry of

[525] According to Lara-Martínez, folklore, in the historical context of the 1932 Matanza in El Salvador, equates Indigeneity and being Indigenous to national tourism and it relegates Nawa-Pipil people as objects of study of anthropological interest (museum pieces), reflecting what he calls a "mestizaje apology" for the intellectual community's silence about the 1932 ethnocide (2012: 10).

Education (until 2014), and the *Universidad Don Bosco* to establish the *Xutxukisa Nawat* program (*La Cuna del Náhuat* or the birthplace of Nahuat) since 2010[526]. This initiative is known by its unique pedagogical approach in which active maternal Nawat-Pipil speakers[527] -- mostly elderly women known as *las nantzin tamatxtiani (señoras [mayores]maestras* or elderly women teachers*)* -- teach young children (ages 3-5) the language through linguistic immersion methods at pre-schools located in well-known Indigenous regions. All interactions during the half-day of instruction between the children and *las nantzin* take place in Nawat-Pipil (Lemus 2015: 131-135). *Xutxukisa Nawat* is the only language revitalization program developed in El Salvador to have shown positive results recognized by locals and foreigners alike (El Faro Newspaper 2023).

In 2007, Salvadoran scholar, poet, and writer Luis Melgar Brizuela published *Oralitura de El Salvador: Antología de narrativa oral popular* (Oraliture of El Salvador: Anthology of Popular Oral Narrative), in which he presents the first post-modern[528] collection of popular literary production compiled through fieldwork and other scientific methods by the Universidad Nacional de El Salvador (UES). His book aims to better understand and interpret the diverse socio-cultural Salvadoran identities that have emerged through time and space in the quotidian dialectical processes that intertwine Indigenous traditions with the project of modernity, and that produce a unique cultural dimension of what it means to be Salvadoran (Ibid 2007: 10). Among the 52 stories featured in Melgar Brizuela's book that were collected in 16 municipalities by himself and his students, there are three versions of *La mujer en fragmentos*: *Suntecomate* (Ibid 95-101), *La calaverita* (Ibid 23, 101-104), and *La bruja* (Ibid 104-107), which like the other oral stories collected, dwell in the interstices of memory and forgetting of everyday Salvadorans who quietly continue to weave the Salvadoran cultural fabric each time they remember and tell these stories. In this process, Melgar Brizuela's work has helped turn the spoken word of the humblest Salvadorans into the written text, to reveal a rich oral/aural tradition and a corpus of Mesoamerican oraliture and histories that refuse to disappear (Ibid 2007: 14).

British linguist Alan R. King published a new translation of Schultze-Jena's *Mythen,* in Nahuat, titled *Tajtaketza Ipal Itzalku (Pláticas de Izalco /* Talks from Izalco*)* (2012). In it, King recovers the Nawat-Pipil version of *la mujer en fragmentos* known in

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[526] In February of 2023, the government of President Bukele, through the Ministry of Education, announced the disbandment of the *Xutxukisa Nawat* Revitalization Program, which will be replaced by the First Lady's program "Nests of Linguistic Immersion," under a new law called *Growing Together*. Indigenous communities and advocates expressed great frustration for suffering a major blow to their right to be educated in their language (Lemus 2023). With the support of El Salvador *ElKartasuna* Collective, the University of Alberta in Canada, UNESCO, UNICEF, and the Salvadoran diaspora in the United States, *Xutxukisa Nawat* continues its mission to revitalize the Nawat-Pipil language (Ramírez 2023).

[527] "Las *Nantzin*" are the last Nawa-Pipil generation who learned to speak Nawat-Pipil in the womb, which is estimated to have taken place around the time of the 1932 Matanza, according to Lemus's research. He connects the loss of their native tongue to the ethnocide and its aftermath (Lemus 2015: 141).

[528] Postmodern in the sense that this oraliture collection relies on the multiplicity of storytellers' perspectives and sense of lived experiences, which reject concepts of rationality, objectivity, and universal truth.

his book as *El Nanahuatzin* (King 2013: 4-9), which has comparable elements to the Mexica story of *Nanahuatzin*, compiled by Friar Bernardino de Sahagún (circ. 1558) in *The Legend of the Fifth Sun* (Ibid 2008). According to León-Portilla, Sahagún's scribes narrate how the gods began the history of the universe in this story (1963: 6, 35-39, 43-45). King states that *Tajtaketza Ipal Itzalku* is his attempt to return something that belongs to the Nawa-Pipil (*Mythen*), in their mother tongue. He states that recognizing Indigenous rights to intellectual property and sovereignty is tied to his obligation as a researcher to actively facilitate, support, and help recuperate a language that was lost to the violences of colonialism (2012: 6). King's adaptation of Schultze-Jena's work recuperates the original Nawat-Pipil text of *Nanahuatzin*, from *Mythen* leaving out Schultze-Jena's personal notes and commentaries, so that Indigenous communities can have an opportunity to confront the text and exercise their agency and capacity to understand, interpret, and enjoy their ancestral legacy with minimal interference from the academic community (Ibid 6, 7). In addition to *Tajtaketza*, King and Jan Morrow published *Tushik* in 2016, an online Nahuat Resources site that offers *Timumachtikan! (¡Aprendamos!*/ Learn!), a complete beginner's Nahuat course for adults, and *Yankwik Sentaketzat*, the first translation of the New Testament to Nawat-Pipil, which is a more advanced Nahuat course.

In 2019, psychiatrist Werner Hernández González, an informal disciple of Alan R. King whom he met in the field when doing his medical field visits, published *Nawat Mujmusta*, a Nahuat/Spanish dictionary that he compiled after 15 years of traveling throughout remote areas in Western El Salvador and interacting closely with Nawa-Pipil communities, in his capacity as mental health provider. Hernández González's work has been central to popularizing the revitalization of the Nawat-Pipil language in El Salvador, as it has helped to focus national interest on this topic through his dynamic participation and leadership role in the *Colectivo Tzunhejekat (Cabeza de Viento* or Head of Wind / 'Dazed' Collective). This is an active group of young professional men who teach Nawat-Pipil in two well-respected universities, la Universidad de El Salvador (UES) and la Universidad Centroamericanana José Simeón Cañas (UCA), and who advocate for the rights and well-being of Native speakers on a consistent basis.

One other group, *La Iniciativa Portadores del Nahua* (IPN or Nahuat Carriers' Initiative), a non-profit organization led by active maternal Nawa-Pipil speaker, Alejandro Tepas Lapa and and Nawat-Pipil hip-hop artist and performer Elías Córdova, has contributed significantly to the transnational revitalization of the language, and most importantly, to the dissemination of its cultural traditions from within. Both Tepas Lapa and Córdova have been teaching the Nawat-Pipil language and imparting a certification program (*Diplomado*) in Nahuat Interculturality at the Universidad Tecnológica de El Salvador (UTEC), along with *Nantzin Tamatxtiani* Fidelina Cortéz and *Tajtzin Tamatxiatiani* Nicolás Sánchez-García, who is from Witzapan. The Nahuat Interculturality program at UTEC is overseen by Dr. Morena Guadalupe Magaña. IPN has a large Facebook[529] presence, which it uses to teach the language remotely to a large transnational Salvadoran audience and beyond. IPN leads many community events and public commemorations, actively engaging the Salvadoran community at home and

[529] Facebook Inc. is known as Meta since October 28, 2021.

abroad in dismantling the lingering legacies of colonialism that silence and invisibilize Indigenous peoples, its languages, cultural traditions, and cosmovisions. A strong characteristic of this program is the rich cultural knowledges and lived experiences that Tepas Lapa shares with his students when teaching the language, offering a valuable cultural context for the making-meaning of words and phrases. He states that he learned the language from his grandmother who is from Itzalku.

It is in a context of extreme political violence, torture, disappearance, killing, and war within a larger context of unaddressed ethnocide that the few but invaluable produced intertextualities -- implicit or explicit -- of the above-mentioned authors and most importantly, the generosity, visionary spirit, and audacity of the Nawa-Pipil speakers and storytellers make possible for these treasurable literary archives to be accessible to the world[530]. Leaning on what seems to be the forgotten cultural traditions and cosmogonies of *mis abuelos y abuelas,* I center the story of *Nanahuatzin* in this study, to make meaning of ancient Nawat-Pipil ways of being and understanding lifeworlds, at a time when El Salvador is experiencing one of the highest feminicide rates[531] in the world. I emphasize the diverse connections to and understandings of *Nanahuatzin* in Mesoamerica through Ruud Van Akkeren's research on the intertextualities of the gourd (2006), to elucidate the spatio-temporal relationality that exists about this powerful story among various Indigenous communities in the region. I offer that these entanglements of the past continue to transit through the present and redefine multiple and simultaneous realities for Nawa-Pipil communities, illuminating sites of alterity for Indigenous futures. I propose that *Nanahuatzin*, the Nawa-Pipil myth of creation offers us a decolonial understanding of lifeworlds through the metaphorical fragmentation of a woman's body that creates life and sustains humanity. These sacred Nawa-Pipil knowledges unsettle the harsh realities of femicide/femi(ni)cide In El Salvador, which are rooted in colonial legacies of deathworlds, which are literarily dismembering Indigenous women's bodies every day.

2. b Mesoamerican Intertextualities of the Gourd

In *Tzuywa*, or place of the gourd[532], anthropologist Ruud van Akkeren (2006) traces the Mesoamerican connections and significance of the gourd through various mythopoetic stories of creation in this region. He proposes that the gourd was an important symbol in Mexica, Maya, and Nawa-Pipil oral traditions about the first appearance of Maize and agriculture since preclassic times. It found its expression, not in rites carried out in the milpa, but in the ancient Mesoamerican tradition of the ball game.

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[530] In German, Spanish, English, and Nawat-Pipil languages.

[531] According to the Encuesta Nacional de Violencia Contra la Mujer (Violence Against Women National Survey), done by La Dirección General de Estadística y Censos of El Salvador in 2017 (the General Directorate of Statistics and Censuses was closed in 2022, by President Bukele's administration), in El Salvador, 67.4% of women report having experienced at least one instance of gender-based violence in their lifetimes, and 45.8% of women under thirty, report having been abused within the last twelve months. These staggering statistics only account for those who survive the abuse and dare to speak about it. According to the same sources, one woman is murdered by a man every three hours in El Salvador, making this, the highest rate of femicide in the world.

[532] The Nawat-Pipil word for gourd is *tzakawajkal* (Hernández 2019: 263), c*resencia cujete* and *lagenaria siceraria* in English (Van Akkeren 2006: 53).

The gourd represented the ball, and the first gourd tree grew beside the ball court, according to Indigenous texts (Ibid 36).

Tzuywa is mentioned in important Mesoamerican books, such as the *Chilam Balam* of northern Yucatan, the *Popol Wuj* from the K'iche,' the *Memorial de Sololá* (Annals of the Kaqchikels), and the *Testamento de los Xpantzay* from the Kaqchikel. *Tzuywa* is believed to be a term of Maya origins linked to the Nonoalca people in the Tabasco region of Mexco, associated with *Tullan,* which is related to the cultural centers on trade routes (Ibid: 37). In the *Chilam Balam, Tzuywa* is the name of one of the four directional places where the *Itzá* migration started, and it represents a place of origin of the secret language of the rulers (Ibid). In the *Popol Wuj,* it is portrayed as a place of origin paired with *Tullan* and located in the east, where the sun comes out and the seven-caves or seven-canyons known as *chicomoztoc* in Central *Mexco* are located; here, it relates to how people multiplied and got different names (Ibid 38). In the *Memorial de Sololá, Tzuywa* is one of the four *Tullans* and it is associated with the creation and the ball court, where the mother of the Hero Twins came from (Ibid). It is considered the text with the richest historical references of/to *Tzuywa* (Ibid 39). In the *Testamento de los Xpantzay, Tzuywa* is coupled with Tullan and serves as a place of origin (ibid 40). These places of origin correspond to the mountain where Maize was found and they are associated with the biblical term "terrestrial paradise," which implies a sort of *tlallocan* (the paradise of *Tlaloc,* the God of the rain) or *siwan* (canyon or place of the daughter) meaning (Ibid 41).

Van Akkeren proposes that the image of the canyon or *sewan* can be substituted by the image of the Mesoamerican ball court, which is conceived as a chasm or rift in the Earth. In other words, *siwan* is another place of origin, such as for the *Chichimecas,* who list the ball court as a place of origin (Ibid 41). In the *Rabinal Achi,* the Sons of Sunrise, in the myth of creation, are lured out of the Maize Mountain and they are abducted when they come out to play around the Maize tree (Ibid 43). Other parallels of the gourd and the ball court as places of origin relate to the Mexica story of Lord *Quetzalcoatl,* descending into the underworld (sewan) to recover the bones of his father, from which the people of the current age are made. The bones are brought to life by placing a kernel of Maize in their mouths. In the *Popol Wuj*, the spot where the bones of Jun Junajpu (father) are buried is the ball court, which is called *pukb'al chaj* or dispersed ashes, a phrase that is related to the bursting of the squash. The burned bones of the Hero Twins' father are a metaphor for Maize and dispersing ashes conveys the idea of sowing Maize (Ibid).

The scene of the bursting squash, according to Van Akkeren, refers to the time when Junajpu's head has been chopped off and it will be presented as a new ball in the court. A coati brings squash to be used as a counterfeit ball that his brother Xb'alan'q'e kicks into a field of tomatoes, where a waiting rabbit hops on the fake ball and distracts the lords of Xib'alb'a from the court. Xb'alan'q'e restores Junajpu's head into his brother's rump, and kicks the squash into the field, where it bursts open, and seeds come out of it. The *K'ich'e* word for seeds of squash is *saqilal,* which is a close homonym for the "sons of the sunrise," and the verb *saqiram,* which is used, evokes the idea of dawning and light. The time when Xb'alan'q'e is making the fake head out of the squash, is nearly dawn; in other words, the moment of creation or beginning of time, is when the

sun rises. Junajpu later becomes the sun of a new era and his head is replenished with Maize seeds or creatures that also represent the sun (Ibid 43).

In addition to the relationality among these Mesoamerican stories of creation, there are murals such as the Chichén Itzá's Ball Court Mural and the San Bartolo Mural that depict similar elements as discussed here. In the first one, there is a ball with a skull, a standing soldier with a head in his hand, a kneeling soldier that is decapitated and spurts blood in the shape of six snakes, and a seventh spurt that is a vine sprouting fruits and flowers that seems to correspond to a calabash plant (Ibid 46). In the second mural, the Olmec[533] Maize god is standing by the entrance of Flower Mountain, another Mesoamerican place of origin, a realm of flowers, fruits, and water. The Maize god is surrounded by four young women and a man kneeling holding a gourd (*tecomate*) that is sprouting a squash plant. The gourd is bursting apart, and five characters come out of it. Four of them fly in the four directions with their umbilical cords still attached and the fifth one emerges from the *tecomate.* It is speculated, according to Van Akkeren, that this is the youngest brother *Nanahuatzin,* which most closely resembles the modern Nawa-Pipil myth about the birth of maize (also known as *la mujer en fragmentos*), and the maize people (Ibid 48).

Nanahuatzin, as narrated by Van Akkeren, tells the story of man who finds out that his wife is cheating on him at night. Only her head wanders off at night to meet her lover; the rest of her body remains at home. When she returns home before dawn, her head attaches to her body and she wakes up next to her husband, each day. One day, a neighbor tells the man to watch her. When he confirms her nocturnal escapades, he adds salt and ashes to her neck, so that she can no longer re-attach her head when she returns. The next night, upon returning home, she cannot re-attach her head to her body. Not knowing what to do, she then attaches her head to her husband's body and he remains stuck with two heads. Her head keeps him company in everything he does. One day, they go to find a *zapote* tree in the forest, and he puts her head on the ground to climb the tree. The head waits for the fruit on the ground. The husband throws a few *zapotes* down and one of them startles a deer that is nearby. The deer takes off running and accidentally tramples on her head, which attaches to the deer; as the deer runs away into the forest, they fall into a canyon (*sewan*), and both die. The skull is buried in the forest. After some time, a gourd tree grows from the head. It flowers and produces fruit. When the fruit is ripe, it bursts, and little boys come out. The man leaves the boys in the care of his mother, *tantepus lamat* (iron-toothed old woman). The boys grow up and hunt food for the grandmother, but the smallest and smartest of all, *Nanahuatzin*, finds out that she is cheating on them by giving their food to her lover and they leave her. Other versions state that they kill her.

After they leave her, the boys come up to a bird that is eating Maize and they follow him to find the source of the grain, which they find is hidden on a mountain. *Nanahuatzin* tells his brothers to open the mountain with a thunderbolt, but they are unable to do so. When *Nanahuatzin* tries to open the mountain with his body, Maize cobs spring out of it and his brothers take it. *Nanahuatzin* is stuck in the mountain but when he

[533] Olmec territories are the place where the ball game originated, based on archeological findings such as balls and yugos dating back to 1200 BC, spreading to all of Mesoamerica (Van Akkeren 2006: 56).

gets out, he is the only one who knows how to sow maize and draw water from the earth to make his *milpa*. This is how agriculture is born (Ibid 50).

According to Van Akkeren's research, various Mesoamerican myths of creation show the close association between *Tzuywa* (gourd) and the ball game. He explains that in *Nanahuatzin,* the separated head of the woman, is *tzuntecumat* (in Nawat-Pipil) or *Tzontecomatl* (in Nahuatl), which may be a possible explanation for the Western translation to Spanish of *Nanahuatzin* as *la mujer fragmentada*. From the [separated] head grows a gourd tree or *huacaltzin.* The canyon where her head dies is *sewan,* a K'iche' word for ball court. The throwing of *zapotes* in the story is related to throwing the ball on the court. The unripen *zapotes* are as hard as the rubber ball used in the ballgame and as hard as stone. Thus, it can be inferred that throwing unripen *zapotes* toward the woman's head is a metaphor for restoring societal order and balance to community after it has been lost.

According to various sources[534], adultery in Mesoamerican societies -- prior to the European encounter -- was punished publicly and severely by stoning the adulterers to death in the ball court, especially the elites who were held to a higher standard of conduct (Toby Evans 1998: 173; see Codex Mendoza, folio 71r for illustrations of noble adulterers with stones by their heads qted. in Toby Evans 1998: 178). Folio 18v of the *Chilam Balam* de Tizimín, connects human sexuality with the fertility of the land ("The land was very lustful. There was excessive adultery") and conveys that a lustful land leads to the destruction of society, while other sexual behaviors that do not violate the sacred precepts of the land, create appropriate fertility, leading to the continuation of life in the community (Edmonson 1982: 62). Similarly, Nahua informants working for fray Bernardino de Sahagún's, although reflecting some degree of acculturation, documented in the Florentine Codex (1540-1585) that adultery was a cause of societal decay, and it constituted a capital offense (Toby Evans 1998: 173). Other sexual indulgences such as incest, homoeroticism, and rape were also severely punished, according to *Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas* (Garibay 1973), as these invited conflict between order and chaos within the person, the home, and the community. Thus, adultery in Mesoamerica, according to these sources, did not carry the same judgment of sin as it did in the European context. Rather, punishment was related to maintaining harmony in the land and its fate did not rest in the hands of religious institutions. Yet, the severity of punishment for adultery and other sexual excesses in Mesoamerican societies prior to the European encounter reveals that sexual relationships bound all individuals to certain responsibilities with the community, for their behavior, and that they understood well the dangers of too much pleasure, therefore, acting collectively to restore harmony (Toby Evans 1982: 174).

One can then infer that the wife and mother of the husband in the *Nanahuatzin* story could be the same person[535] and carry the same name (*tantepus lamat*), which some

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[534] See Edmonson (1982: 62); López Austin (1988: 283-312); Burkhart (1989); Ortiz de Montellano (1989, 1990:150-153); Zorita (1994:130).

[535]Susan Gillespie (1989: 50-52) has noted that the roles of mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters are often merged and are interchangeable in Mexica mytho-poetics, strongly suggesting that their exact relationship to the male protagonist of a story is not necessarily a central issue. Rudolf van Zantwijk (1963: 192) proposes that we cannot take the women's roles (mothers, wives, daughters, sisters) literally in

believe is a version of *Cihuacoatl,* a Mexica deity associated with fertility, motherhood, midwives, and the ruler of the *cihuateteo*, the deified spirits of women who die in childbirth[536]. The deer in the story plays a part in the adultery scene and represents a stage in the hunt. The deer is a vehicle for the gourd and for the appearance of Maize and agriculture in Mesoamerican societies, initiating a new era of farming (Van Akkeren 2006: 51).

The scene of the bursting gourd parallels the scene of the bursting squash in the *Popol Wuj* and the *Memorial of Sololá.* The maize creatures inside the gourd represent the "Sons of Sunrise," who are called *pipiltzin* (little children); for the Nawa-Pipil, the *pipiltzin* represent the *tepewas* or *los muchachos de la lluvia* (Lords of the Rain) and are made of Maize. They are the child-like creatures that come out of the gourd in the San Bartolo Mural (Ibid). For the Mexica, *Nanahuatzin* represents the weak, syphilis-stricken god who self-sacrifices by jumping into the great fire of Teotihuacan to become the sun of a new era. In the *Popol Wuj*, the Hero Twins are related to the birth of maize and become the sun and the moon, who are in perpetual war in the cosmos, similar to the battle between *Coyolxauhqui* (the moon) and *Huitzipochtli* (the sun) (Luna and Galeana 2016). At the end of the *Nanahuatzin* story, the boys become farmers instead of hunters (Ibid).

Lara-Martínez (2012) posits that the significance of *Nanahuatzin* centers on the fragmentation of one primordial body -- a mother gourd (unity) -- into many seeds or fractals of the original unit (multiplicity), which offers humanity the possibility of a new life in which all parts are similar to but disperse from the original part. The dispersion or fragmentation generates difference while reproducing the totality of the universe into each of its [disperse] parts. Thus, the plurality in and of what is alive -- the *utopía cósmica Pipil* (the Pipil cosmic utopia) – he states, acknowledges that what is essential to human survival must be celebrated. This plurality of life must be received with gratitude and reciprocated, for the cosmos is a home and the home is also a cosmos that exhibits the model for all social identity, which derives from its primordial body, and it is infinitively reproduced and disseminated by each of its parts, perpetually (xvi, xvii).

Thus, we can interpret that the ballgame for Mesoamerican societies was an essential, long-lived tradition, necessary for human survival, which opened a space for the perpetual battle between celestial bodies -- day and night -- and the mythical battles between life and death that gave rise to the discovery of agriculture. The close associations with agricultural fertility and the survival of humankind manifested in the ball court through the depiction by players, of the unending movement of the sun and the moon, created the seasons and the rainfall to sustain the vegetal world (maize) and in

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Mesoamerican stories of creation, since kinship terms often function as the titles of Mexica dignitaries (Klein 1994: 226).

[536] See *Remembering Coyolxauhqui as Birthing Text* for a feminist decolonial analysis of the meaning of the fragmentation of women in Mesoamerican mythopoetics (Luna and Galeana 2016). The fragmentation of a woman's body that occurs during the birthing of another, has been conceptualized by ancient Mexicas as 'going to battle': "If she waged her battle successful1y and brought her child into the world, her glory was the glory of motherhood, the prize of her battle the child. If not, if she succumbed in her battle with the child still captive in her womb, hers was the noble death of the warrior and she, like he, went to heaven, to the House of the Sun". Regardless of the [pregnancy] outcome, Nahua women emerged from this experience, with considerable power (Sullivan 63,64).

term, humanity. Sacrificial offerings in the ball court underlined the regenerative power of blood, enacting all creation. In sum, the story of *Nanahuatzin* is a metaphor for the creation of new life that takes place with the fragmentation of the whole into the many, and not necessarily a literal violent shattering of a woman's body to expiate her sins.
Ne gitilana ne i yesiu ne tal (la sangre de la tierra/the blood of the land)

In chapter two of this study, I showed, through the research of Rafael Lara-Martínez (2022), the ways in which the Nawat-Pipil language reads the body and interprets it as part of sacred cosmogonies that associate human fertility with genealogies of corn and the origin of life on Earth, which are connected to the cosmos. Specifically, I show how the rich morphological structure of the language has a significant capacity to concatenate numerous morphemes to create new words and sentences (Lemus 2015: 68, 69). To recapitulate, Lara-Martínez explains that in Nawat-Pipil, *Mêxïhco* is a toponymic locative of the Central Mexican Plateau; its morphemes combine are as follows: "in the place (*-co*) of the umbilicus (*-xïh-)* of the moon (*mê(tz)*-)". Additionally, *Mêxïhco* also refers to the human body being marked at birth, for being born attached to an umbilicus *(-xik*) and a placenta which depart from the maternal womb (*xinach*). The womb is ruled by the moon (*mêtzti; metztli*), given that women's menstrual cycle recognizes the four phases of this celestial body. In the mother tongue, *mêtzhuia* (or "lunear," "to be in one's moons"), refers to "menstruate". Menstruation not only alludes to the "blood that emanates from the sacred womb cyclically," but *-tzinh-es-kisa* simultaneously exports the maternal body toward the celestial. From here, a child (*pil-tzin; pi-pil*) arrives *(-pil-ua)*. Therefore, naming our place of origin is critical to confirming our human identity as being engendered by the moon in the maternal womb (Ibid 2022: 167).

Further, Lara-Martínez (2022), shows that burying (*tuka*), sowing (*tuka*), and the sexual act *(tuka*) in Nawat-Pipil are closely related to the idea of entering a cave or tomb (*xaput),* which mimics the action of a seed entering a groove. If a plant is born from a seed, and a child is born from the reproductive act, then from a [dead] body that is buried, the historical narrative of the present emerges through re-membering. The collective identity of a people surfaces from memorializing, archiving, and remembering their dead (Ibid 169, 170). Between burying a body *(-tuka*) and sowing *(-tuka)*, there is symmetry. Both the seed and the cadaver are thrown dirt on them *(-ki-ma(ka)tal).* Dirt is the living energy *(-yul)* of the land (*-tal)*, which is associated with life itself *(-yul-tuk),* resurrection *(-mu-yul-ku/kwi),* thinking (*yul-ta-ketza)*, and believing *(-yul-mati).* Relatives are given (*-yuj-yulma(ka)*) a vital energy for their dead to depart toward *Miktan* (place of the dead) to find an ideal permanency in the underworld (Ibid 170), where the Nawat-Pipil oral tradition gifts speech to human remains and hard matter such as seed *(-ix*), rocks *(-tet),* bones *(-umit)* to safekeep the collective memory (Ibid 171). In return, *tunantzin* (our mother Earth) returns flowers *(-xuchit)* and thorns *(-witzti)* to the dead, whose destiny is pre-determined by the way they die and the care they receive from the living (*-yulu)*. The destiny of the dead then, perdures in the narrative *(-ina)* of the living. To reiterate, these strong Nawat-Pipil linguistic connections grant seeds *(-ix),* rocks *(-tet),* and bones *(-umit),* the role of archiving the historiography of the past, which is transcribed by the geo-graphy (graph) and geo-logy (logos/*taketzalis)* of the land *(tal)* where our dead reside. (Ibid 172-173).

From these sacred understandings, the flesh and blood of the land -- its fruit -- transforms itself into our own physical and cognitive substance, and into the mythopoetics of our everyday, moving from the terrestrial (land and water), through the body, to the celestial and from the celestial, through the body, to the terrestrial, connected by a universal sacred energy (*yul*) that grants these realms their existence. The spatio-temporal location that the human body occupies in the Nawat-Pipil language -- between the infra-world and the cosmos – offers a connection to/from all other [Earth and celestial] beings who collaborate to co-create our cyclical experience of being-in-the-world (*taltikpak)* (Lara-Martínez 2010: 57).

In this light, the cornerstones of Nawa-Pipil thought are the fruit of the land, which becomes the flesh and blood of all humans; the land, which gives fruit its vigor; water, which gives life to everything and allows it to grow; and the celestial bodies, which reign over everything on Earth. From these observations about human interactions in and with nature, Nahua religious beliefs and mythopoetics emerge to become living traditions (Ibid 63). As such, the myth of *Nanahuatzin* relates the passage from hunting and gathering to agriculture -- a moment in history that is described as rooted in a violent transgression against the entrails of the Earth -- when mythical characters take maize from the heart of the mountain (Ibid 89). In this violent moment of forcible taking, civilization emerges and flourishes, thanks to the generosity of a small grain that gives life to all. We can think about *Nanahuatzin* as a reflection from the past, about how the human body experiences moments of rupture and regeneration, and how each of its autonomous parts is endowed with its own life force or sacred energy and movement, leading us to theorize about an Indigenous philosophy that inhabits between the physical and the metaphysical spaces of the body in connection with its surroundings, which cannot be separated or destroyed, and that is also dual but intelligible on its own (Ibid).

2.c Seeing *Nanahuatzin* through epistemologies of *ne gitilana ne i yesiu ne tal*

According to Lara-Martínez's interpretation of *la mujer en fragmentos* (2010), this Nawa-Pipil myth of creation helps us reflect about the transition between hunting and gathering, to the gradual dismembering and bleeding of the Earth or ne *gilitana ne i yesiu ne tal* (*la sangre de la tierra/*the blood of the Earth), to explain how agriculture suctions the life and energies of the land. Flowers, fruits, and vegetables absorb the blood of the Earth in the same way that carnivores absorb the blood of animals. He offers that from this "ontological cannibalism," surges an imperative for the living (*yultuk*, *yulu*), that demands a necessary sacrificial duty to pay back to Mother Earth (*Tunantzin*) what we take from her, with our bodies upon our death, under the Nahua principle of reciprocity (Ibid 93).

The ontological argument in this story formulates the human body as the material grounds for human perception of the world and the site for conserving and carrying forward the sacred energy of the soul. As such, in this myth, the paradigms for maintaining that which is spiritual within the corporeality of the physical are exemplified by the head (*tzuntekun*/regeneration) and the bones (*umit*[537]/latent life), which have the capacity and energy to regenerate and extend life for the progeny. From these body parts, the boys or "Lords of the Rain" (*ne tepewas/los que riegan*/those who disseminate) are

[537] *Omicetl* in Nahuatl means semen and it comes from the idea of "the osseous that coagulates," attributing semen production to bone marrow (López Austin 1984: 190).

born, given that in Nawa-Pipil philosophy, the sexual dimension is insufficient for the perpetuation of humanity (Ibid). The *tepewas* control vegetable reproduction through their dissemination of water when they open the mountain to find maize and give it to humans. They are the keepers of the vegetable world and the rain, the helpers of *Tlaloc*. In exchange, those who receive rain and maize must keep the circulation of these gifts alive, based on the principles of *convivencia* (coexistence) and *observancia* (observance), which are Nahua obligations to give maize to those who do not have it. If people fail to adhere to these principles, the *tepewas* will ensure that the planting of maize disappears, as violating these principles constitutes a threat to infinite procreation and humanity. This is how Indigenous social agricultural practices based on mutual exchange were born.

In this mutual exchange, there is a clear sacred co-existence between maize and humans. Both have a soul energy (*yultuk)* that recognizes each other (*ixmati*); when grain and dead bodies are sowed/buried (*tuka),* they sprout something that is alive or that is considered "*acorazonado/*with a heart". Heads and bones have a heart (*yulu),* maize has a heart (*yulu*), a symbol that everything is alive. From this perspective, maize and humans must be treated with similar deference. Thus, the human right to physical safety and integrity must be extended to the vegetable world, and especially to maize. This is not just a case of economic exchange taking place within the community, but rather an energizing principle that is shared in the community and that sustains the collective existence, which includes embracing a radical ecological approach to caring for the land and water, so that it can perdure for everyone's benefit. In this way, plants, land, water, animals, and the celestial are understood as being in constant communication to care for humanity and they are considered *tajpiani* (caregivers of the planet), by keeping a close watch on the Earth. Humankind is expected to reciprocate this duty to the land (Ibid 205, 207).

In addition to the head and bones, there are other body parts that work independently to care for the planet, such as the eyes (*ix),* who watch – which constitute a sharp vision of the world that is tied to imagination and possess an investment in the world, a vigilance that ensures harmony through *reciprocidad*, *convivencia*, and *observancia*. The soul energy or *tunal* , which is the life force that humans share with other beings on the planet, and the liver (*eltapach*)is linked to re-membering/forgetting everything that happens in life. Together, these self-sufficient body parts make up one fragmented body (*kujkupeutuk),* in which each component acts and moves independently of the other and even survives when other body parts disintegrate. It is in these separate spaces of the body that the Nawat-Pipil language safeguards the breath of life to sustain future generations (Ibid 93).

To reflect on the sacred ontological openings created by the story of *Nanahuatzin*, I recall my memories of *mi abuelito Toño's mil/milpa* (corn field), in *Tamanique,* an Indigenous settlement with a rich history of uprisings against Spanish invaders[538] deep in the mountains of the *Cordillera del Bálsamo* in the Pacific Coast. This memory-making transports me to a time when, as a child, I could roam freely with my brother Julio through the mountains and climb trees to enjoy the scenery of what seemed impassable canopies of luscious emerald and hunter green tones reaching toward the skies. I recall

[538] See Fowler et al (1988), re.: the battle of tzinakantan in 1528 (from the Nahuat words *tzinakan* (murciélago/bat) and *tan* (lugar/place), place of the bats). See Barón Castro (1996).

his *siembras* of beans (*et*), squash (*ayut*), chiles (*chil*), jicama (*shicama*), and wild tomatoes (*tumat*), sprouting in his milpas surrounded by a rich vegetation[539]. His milpas grew near the family home, planted for the family's consumption. During those years, to plant a milpa, he would say that men who sow the land would cut the shrubbery where they planned on sowing maize using ancestral agricultural hand tools such as *machetes* and *cumas* in the non-rainy season (*tunalku*). They would pile the cuttings high and let the sun dry them before burning them, just before the rainy season in late April or May (*xupan*). According to my grandfather, these controlled burns would leave the topsoil enriched with minerals. A few days later, when the moon was right, the men who sow the milpa would return and using a *chuzo* or long stick with a sharpened edge to make holes on the ground, they would deposit a few kernels of *maíz criollo or sinti* (maize) per hole, which they would cover with loose dirt by a swift motion of their feet, creating a landscape design of straight grooves over the gentle slopes and plains, known as *surcos* (grooves). After sowing maize, a young milpa would sprout in a few weeks, which would need to be weeded by hand several times to ensure that maize plants could grow healthy.

The rainy season would help the young maize plants grow and mature, until *elotes* (*elut)* or young corn[540] [on the cob] could be harvested by hand around August/September, and *atoladas* took place to celebrate the first harvest. *Atoladas* are outdoor gatherings of family and friends to celebrate the first harvest and drink *atul* or *atol, atole*, a sweet and delicious ancestral corn drink served hot; during *atoladas*, women serve corn tamales made of young corn dough, wrapped in fresh corn husks, topped with sweet cream. A few weeks later, the uncut corn ears ripened, and the corn stalks are bent in half or 'doubled' (*la milpa es doblada*) to avoid rot; the *milpa* remained doubled in the fields until the maize stalks dried and the mature corn ears are collected around November or December, in the dry season (*tunalku*). This seasonal cycle, ruled by the movement of celestial bodies, repeats year after year. My grandfather used to tell all kinds of stories to my siblings and I, as we gathered around in the patio of the house to shell corn under the stars. This is how I first learned to read the skies and developed great appreciation for *las historias de los más viejos* (the stories of the elders), stories that replay in my mind, *una y otra vez* (over and over) today, about the ghosts of the past and life as it was.

Decades later, *Tata* Fidel Flores, a beloved and well-respected Nawa-Pipil spiritual guide, long-time community organizer and leader in *Kushkatan*, shares with me a similar recounting, adding that in his birthplace, el Cantón San Ramón -- a remote hamlet deep in the mountains of the Municipality of San Antonio del Monte, in *Centzunat* -- similar agricultural traditions have been practiced since he can remember. He emphasizes that ceremony is an essential part of sowing and harvesting maize for his community, stating with pride that "*Las ceremonias de siembra, las rige el calendario que los cargadores del tiempo nos han enseñado para sembrar y colectar los frutos de nuestra Madre Tierra, desde hace muchos siglos"* ("Ceremonies of sowing are ruled by

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[539] Many species of fruit trees such as jocotes, mangos, matas de huerta (banana trees), arrayanes, guayabas, mandarinas, zapotes, mamey, cerezos, anonas, caraos, and others.

[540] In Nawat-Pipil and nahuatl, there are different names for corn, depending on its stage of maturity. For Instance, *Elut* is young corn on the cob and *sinti* is mature kernels, grains, or seeds that can be planted and are considered sacred.

the calendar, which those who carry out the counting of time have taught us about sowing and harvesting the fruits of our Mother Earth, since many centuries ago") (Flores 2019. Interviews). He adds that since he was a little boy, his father and grandfather taught him that "*nada pasa sin la voluntad de los grandes abuelos*" ("Nothing happens without the will of the great ancestors") (Ibid). By "*grandes abuelos*" *Tata* Fidel means the mountains, the rivers, the oceans, the moon, the sun, the stars, and our elders who have passed. He adds that to ensure that they always accompany us through our journey in life, especially when it comes to sowing and harvesting Maize, "*necesitamos primero pedirle permiso a ellos antes de hacer algo y siempre demostrarle agradecimiento a nuestra Madre Tierra por todo lo que recibimos de ella*" ("we need to first ask permission of them, before we do something and always show our gratitude to our Mother Earth for everything that we receive from her") (Ibid). As we start descending the mountain to the ceremony grounds through a very steep and narrow winding pathway that is hidden among tree canopies and other thick shrubbery, *Tata* Fidel tells me that he learned to cultivate the land from his father since he was a very young boy. In this interview, he states:

> *Yo nací y me crie en estas montañas y no fui a la escuela. Por eso la gente me decía, "Ve, ay viene ese 'indio de potrero'". Pero cuando yo aprendí a cultivar la tierra, también aprendí a cargar siglos de conocimientos ancestrales sobre mis hombros, acerca de la fuerza exuberante de nuestra Madre Tierra que se han venido transmitiendo de generación en generación a través de la historia oral y la memoria histórica de mi pueblo. Nuestra cosmovisión está ligada al conocimiento de nuestra sagrada tierra y de la agricultura. Eso es inseparable y no se puede negar. Tal vez no tenga escuela, ni soy profesional, pero sí se muchas cosas valiosas que quiero dejarle a mi gente.*
>
> I was born and raised in these mountains, and I did not go to school. So, people would tell me, "See, there comes that 'paddock Indian'". But, when I learned to cultivate the land, I also learned to carry on my shoulders, centuries of ancestral knowledges, about the exuberant strength of our Mother Earth, which have been passed down from generation to generation through oral histories and the historical memory of my people. Our cosmovision is linked to knowledges of our sacred land and of agriculture. That is inseparable and it cannot be denied. Perhaps I am neither educated, nor professional, but I do know many valuable things that I want to pass onto my people.[541]

While talking, he stops briefly to point out a hawk that is circling over us, shrilling loudly, and he continues to share: *"Nuestra lengua, el Nawat-Pipil, fue reducida a mero 'dialecto,' nuestra espiritualidad fue calificada como 'paganismo' o 'brujería,' y*

[541] My translation.

nuestras costumbres como puro 'salvajismo'. Nuestra identidad ha sido negada por siglos" ("Our language, Nawat-Pipil, was reduced to a mere dialect, our spirituality was qualified as paganism or witchcraft, and our traditions, as pure 'savagery'. Our identity has been denied for centuries[542]") (Ibid). He pauses to show me through a small clearing, *el río frío, frío* (the cold, cold river), as he calls it, several hundred feet below, where his family gets water every day from *se amel* (*un ojo de agua* or a waterhole). I think immediately about the abrupt, steep terrain that they must climb up and down, several times a day, to fetch water on their heads in the unforgivable heat and humidity of the tropics. Pointing down with his finger at the ground, he warns me to be careful as we reach a point where the descend nears 45-degrees and the bottom of the mountain is not yet visible from where we stand. My heart is pounding fast.

Tata Fidel goes on, stating that "*Nuestros abuelos y abuelas le dieron vida a nuestra cultura porque supieron vivir en armonía con nuestra Madre Tierra y crearon un sistema de conocimientos científicos muy poderoso, que conocemos como tultekayut"* ("Our grandfathers and grandmothers gave life to our culture because they knew how-to live-in harmony with our Mother Earth and created a powerful system of scientific knowledges that we know as *tultekayut*") (Ibid). He explains that *tultekayut* refers to ancient Nahua wisdom or knowledges learned from the heart, *el camino florido a la espiritualidad* (the flowered path to spirituality) about Indigenous understandings of the world and life in *Anahuac (*Nahuatl name for Mesoamerica that means place surrounded by big waters*)* acquired through deep reflection. *Tutelkayut,* he says, teaches us about our consciousness of being in the world and the universe and being connected to one another or Nahua principle of unity (Field notes 2019).

As we reach the sacred grounds where the ceremony will be taking place that morning, *Tata* Fidel begins instructing the first group of spiritual warriors-in-training that he is preparing, how to set up the wood for the fire and where to place the flowers, fruit offerings, water, and spices we brought; he invites all of us to remove our shoes to be in direct contact with Mother Earth and to position ourselves in specific spaces within the circle "*para que haya dualidad"* (so that there is duality), he explains. I stand next to him in the circle and across from *Tata* Nicolás Sánchez-Vides, the other spiritual guide, long-term community leader and organizer present at the ceremony. *Tata* Fidel reminds us to meditate on our intentions and to be present in space and time, offering our fasting as part of our preparation for the ceremony, prior to starting the fire. With a serious tone, he tells us that when foreigners come to visit him and ask him to do a ceremony for them to experience, he warns them that ceremony is sacred and it is not intended as entertainment -- "*la ceremonia tiene un propósito*" (ceremony has a purpose) -- he affirms; he continues to explain that, if people do not come with good intentions, the universe will ask for retribution.

There is a long silence in the circle. Everyone seems pensive. He goes onto breaking the silence, sharing the story of a European woman, who he says, a few years ago came to see him insisting that he did a ceremony for her because she had never seen one. "*Ella hizo que salieran miles de arañas de sus escondites. Yo nunca vi tantas arañas por estos rumbos… y el sagrado fuego se nos apagaba… algo no estaba bien. Meses*

[542] My translation.

después me di cuenta que [ella] murió" ("She caused thousands of spiders to come out of their hiding places. I never saw so many spiders around here… and the sacred fire was going out on us… something was not right. Months later, I found out that she died") (Ibid). The rustling of leaves is heightened by a deep silence and the warm breeze on my face reminds me of where I am at this moment. I look around me… *Tajtzin* Carlitos, *Tajtzin* Silverio, *Nantzin* Rosa Miriam, *Tajtzin* Porfirio, el Dr. Brizuela, *Nantzin* Noemy, *Tajtzin* Julito, *Tatita* Nico, *Natzin* Blanquita, *Tajtzin* Mariano, Yuli, *Tajtzin* Eugenio, *Tata* Fidel, me. The mountain ridge where we are standing is shady and serene, offering breathtaking views of the meandering river below and the expanding mountain range on the horizon barely visible through the dense tree canopies. Except for large birds cawing in the distance and the placid sounds of running water, it is a very quiet space that *Tata* Fidel describes as "enchanted".

A smoking censer is passed around signaling that the cleansing process is starting; a rich scent of *estoraque*[543] fills the air. *Tata* Nico faces the East and blows the *caracol* invoking the first of four directions, as *Tata* Porfirio commences his invocation:

> *Gran corazón del cielo y de nuestra Madre Naturaleza, pedimos permiso de encender el sagrado fuego este día. Gracias por la vida, gracias por la luz, gracias por el aire, gracias por el mar. Gran corazón de la sagrada tierra, pedimos permiso para realizar esta ofrenda, gracias por la vida que nos da la sagrada lluvia, para que el maíz, el ayote, la chilipuca*[544]*, y la yuca crezcan y nos alimenten. Corazón del cielo y de nuestra Madre Naturaleza, gracias por este momento. Te pedimos permiso de realizar esta pequeña ofrenda. Gracias por la vida. Umeteo. Umeteo. Umeteo.* (Fieldnotes 2019).
>
> Great heart of the heavens and of our Mother Nature,
> we ask for permission to light the sacred fire on this day.
> Thank you for life, thank you for light, thank you for air,
> thank you for the sea. Great heart of the sacred land,
> we ask permission to make this offering. Thank you for
> the life that the sacred rain gives us, so that corn, squash,
> *chilipuca* (a variety of bean), and yucca can grow and feed us.
> Heart of the heavens and of Mother Nature, thank you
> for this moment. We ask your permission to do these
> small offerings. Thank you for life. Lord of Duality[545].
> Lord of Duality. Lord of Duality.

The *caracol* sounds again, this time is *Tata* Silverio, blowing it. *Tata* Silverio continues:

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[543] *Estoraque* is the resin of the balsam tree, used in Nawa-Pipil ceremonies as incense to cleanse negative energies (Fieldnotes 2019).
[544] A variety of large, comestible beans of various colors (Nahua knowledge, time immemorial).
[545] Principle of duality (Nahua knowledge, time immemorial).

> *Gracias al gran espíritu de nuestra Madre Tierra que nos da frutos y alimentos. Gracias Madre Tierra. Esta humilde ofrenda se la damos al Gran Creador de la vida para saciar las plantas que están conectadas con el cielo y la tierra y atraen sus energías para la germinación de la vida. Te damos las gracias por tú presencia y porque nos esperas en tu vientre el día de nuestra muerte. Tú que estás viva y nos mantienes vivos con tu sangre. Hacemos esta ofrenda para el Gran Creador. Te pedimos perdón por el daño que te hemos hecho al contaminarte. Pedimos al planeta Júpiter sus energías positivas del cosmos para que nos traiga la lluvia* (Fieldnotes 2019)
>
> Thank you to the great spirit of our Mother Earth that gives us fruits and nourishment. Thank you, Mother Earth. We give this humble offering to the Great Creator of life to quench the plants that are connected with the heavens and Earth, and attract their energies for the germination of life. We thank you, for your presence and because you wait for us in your womb on the day of our death. You who are alive and keep us alive with your blood. We make this offering to the Great Creator. We ask your forgiveness for the harm that we have done to you, by contaminating you. We ask the planet Jupiter that its positive energies from the cosmos, bring us the rain.

Tata Porfirio blows the *caracol* as *Tata* Eugenio continues:

> *Gran Creador del cielo, te doy gracias ejekat por la oportunidad de estar aquí presentes. Guíanos en esta ceremonia. Pido a nuestra Madre Tierra que nos guie en estos momentos para que los abuelos estén presentes. A cada uno de mis hermanos y hermanas, que nos de energía para salir adelante. Gracias corazón del cielo, danos fuerza y luz. Padiush. Padiush. Padiush* (Fieldnotes 2019).
>
> Great Creator of the heavens, I thank you *ejekat* for the opportunity to be here. Guide us in this ceremony. I ask our Mother Earth to guide us in these moments and for the ancestors to be present. To each of my brothers and sisters, to give us sacred energy to get ahead. Thank you, heart of the heavens, give us strength and light. Gracias. Gracias. Gracias.

Tata Julito blows the *caracol* and continues:

> *Corazón del cielo, corazón de la tierra, corazón del aire, corazón del agua, corazón del Sagrado Fuego,* (inaudible). *Gracias por darnos permiso y poder para estar aquí unidos y amándonos como hermanos y hermanas Fieldnotes 2019).*
>
> Heart of the heavens, heart of the Earth, heart of the air, heart of water, heart of the Sacred Fire, (inaudible). Thank you for giving us permission and power to be here united and loving each other as brothers and sisters.

Tata Eugenio and *Tata* Silverio proceed to kindle the firewood, which is neatly assembled in a log-cabin style, containing a mixture of local spices in its center. White, yellow, red, and purple wildflowers, colorful fruits, and their leaves are specifically arranged to delineate the first circle surrounding the fire, along with three intercalating morro *wajkal*[546] filled with water. In the second circle, the four senior spiritual guides take their places. Behind them, in a third circle, all of us kneeling, eyes on the fire, palms facing the sky. On this day, *tekpat*, the *pedernal or* flint -- sign of human sacrifice -- is honored during the ceremony by the spiritual guides to remember the struggles that the gods underwent in the creation of humanity and the world, according to the *Tata* Fidel, which he says, is part of the Legend of the Suns[547] (Fieldnotes 2019). There are other interactions in the ceremony that the group decided not to share.

A few hours later when the ceremony is over, we sit around the timbers, reflecting. *Tata* Fidel tells us that we cannot leave the ceremonial site until the energies of the sacred fire have completely dissipated. He *states "la ceremonia se acaba cuando el sagrado fuego nos dice que se acaba y debemos estar presentes en este espacio hasta poder resguardar sus cenizas"* (the ceremony ends when the sacred fire tells us that it is over, and we must remain present in the space to safekeep its ashes"). He begins to recall and explain to us the most salient moments of the ceremony that he observed, to help us reflect on them. One by one, the spiritual guides share knowledges that they bring with them about medicinal plants and animals, the stars, recent dreams, omens, dance and song, and stories that they relate to specific moments during the ceremony. Of significance that day, were knowledges shared about the meaning of the Sacred Fire and how it responded to us, as individuals and as a community (Fieldnotes 2019).

"*El fuego*" (fire), states *Tata* Fidel, "*es uno de los cuatro elementos sagrados de nuestra cosmovisión Nawa-Pipil*). *Está ligado a la quema de monte y preparación de la tierra para sembrar la milpa, antes de la llegada de la lluvia* (is one of the four sacred

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[546] Container made from the *jícaro* fruit also known as *morro* or calabash tree (Nahua knowledge, time immemorial).

[547] The Legend of the Suns is one of the most important texts about the Nahua conception of the world, compiled in a sixteenth-century, anonymous manuscript known as the *Códice Chimalpopoca* (1945) (Johansson 2009; Bierhorst 1992).

elements of our Nawa-Pipil cosmovision (It is linked to the burning of shrubbery and preparation of the land, for the sowing of maize, before the rainy season), he tells us. "*También marca la transición de cada ciclo de 52 años de la cuenta del tiempo, con la gran ceremonia del Nuevo Fuego, porque nos ayuda a limpiar las malas energías del pasado y a hacer espacio para nuevos comienzos, pero eso ya casi no se practica por aquí, se ha perdido mucho*" (It also marks the transition between each 52-year cycle of the Nahua calendar, with the big ceremony of the New Fire, which helps us cleanse bad energies from the past and make space for new beginnings, but these things are not practice as much around here, we have lost a lot). "*El fuego nos da fuerza, nos restora, y nos transforma*" (Fire gives us strength, it restores us, and it transforms us). He continues, "*Pero si no estamos preparados para recibirlo, el fuego nos absorbe y salimos débiles de una ceremonia, en vez de salir sanos y limpios*" (But, if we are not prepared, fire can absorb us and we come out weak from a ceremony, instead of leaving a ceremony healed and cleansed) (Ibid). *Tata* Fidel turns to me and tells me:

> *Las llamas estaban danzando altas en tu dirección.*
> *¿Te fijaste, Violet? No va a ser fácil para ti, pero debes seguir la voluntad de los abuelos. Cuando ellos te escogen para andar por este camino y aceptas su llamado, hay que estar preparado para lo que viene. Debes documentar todo esto para que quede grabado para siempre. Es una buena señal para nosotros. Este es el encargo de nuestros abuelos. La pluma que hallaste esta mañana, con la que soñó Julito anoche, la reveló el Sagrado Fuego*[548] *hoy (Fieldnotes 2019).*
>
> The flames were dancing high in your direction.
> Did you notice, Violet? It will not be easy for you, but you must follow the will of the elders. When they choose you to walk this path and you accept their call, you must be ready for what is coming. You must document all this to be recorded for posterity. It is a good sign for us. This is your charge from our ancestors. The feather you found this morning, that Julito dreamed about last night, was revealed to us by the Sacred Fire, today.[549]

[548] Before the ceremony, a conversation took place among Nawa-Pipil spiritual guides to decide what could be shared with the outside world about the Sacred Fire that day. It was settled by a dream that one of the *Tatas* had the night before, that a person would find a feather in their path to the ceremony in the morning, and that person would be committed to write what they saw, to let the outside world know that Nawa-Pipil traditions are alive, and they continue to be practiced in Kushkatan every day. I was shocked to learn that a feather that I found at my doorstep when I left my house for the ceremony hours earlier, in a city that is 70 kilometers away from the ceremonial grounds, would be discussed by the *Tatas* prior to the ceremony and have this outcome. Thus, it is important for me to state that the knowledges that I am documenting in these pages about the ceremony that I participated in that day, have been requested and approved by the *Tatas*, for me to share with the outside world.

[549] My translation.

We end the gathering with a stern reminder by *Tata* Fidel that we must respect *tekpat* (pedernal, flint) because, he says "*es un cuchillo de dos filos -- para bien o para mal -- que los guerreros espirituales llevan consigo siempre y por eso, debemos armarnos de sabiduría para poder continuar la lucha de nuestros ancestros y saber cuándo usarlo*" (It is a double-edge knife -- for good and bad -- that spiritual warriors carry with them always, and for that reason, we must arm ourselves with wisdom to be able to continue the struggle of our ancestors and know when to use it). He proceeds, "*Esta es la misma sabiduría de los astros y de nuestra Madre Tierra, de los cuatro puntos cardinales… de la luna y del sol. El conocimiento aumenta más al recibir estas energías sagradas del cielo*" (This is the same wisdom from the stars and our Mother Earth, of the four cardinal points… of the moon and of the sun. Knowledge increases more when we receive these sacred energies from the sky). "*Hay que creer*" he says (We must believe) (Ibid).

The way back to the house is intense. It is past midday, and the sun is beating down on us. One by one, we line up like ants on the narrow path and make our way to the top of the mountain. The steep terrain teaches me a lesson or two about gravity, and Blanquita -- who is carrying a load on her head -- gives me a hand up the hill, as my shoes fail the test and let me slip on my knees. I let the group pass me to catch my breath and dust the dirt off my jeans. We are drenched in sweat and very thirsty. *Tata* Fidel passes me by, holding onto his walking stick, and jokingly tells me that I need to work the *yuca* fields with him once or twice to get in shape. Wiping the sweat off my forehead, I nod in agreement. We laugh. When we finally make it to the top -- *Nantzin* Carmencita -- *Tata* Fidel's wife is waiting for us with food and a cold *tamarindo* drink. She explains that it is made with water from the *manantial* downhill (water hole), which is a gift, because in El Salvador, 99 percent of surface waters are contaminated with human waste and dangerous industrial chemicals, placing 80 percent of the country under water stress ("We Are Water," Foundation Report 2022). These are the inhumane conditions in which Indigenous communities are forced to live and one of the many reasons they put their bodies in the line of fire to protect the social ecologies where they live, which they consider sacred. *Nantzin* Carmencita has prepared a feast for us, *pollo en alguashte* (chicken in pumpkin seed sauce) and freshly made thick corn tortillas, still smoking from the clay grill. She serves the food in clay bowls made a few miles west, in Witzapan. Amid pleasant conversation and laughter, we devour the food and some of us make time to play with the neighborhood dogs that join us on that occasion for some scraps.

Meanwhile, the spiritual guides discuss among themselves the location for their final ceremonial investiture site, citing that it must take place at a sacred site. For the past several months, *Tata* Fidel and *Tata* Nico have been leading the first school for the formation of Nawa-Pipil spiritual guides known as *Kalmekat Kushkatan*, and I have been included in all meetings and trainings in the field and invited to take notes and document this historical process of Indigenous self-determination.

During the lively conversation, *Tata* Nico shares, in his usual soft and calm voice, that Nawa-Pipil spiritual guides need to continue learning and disseminating knowledges about the Sacred Fire and how it relates to Indigenous agricultural practices in the region, specifically, how the sowing of sacred maize is connected to human survivance, which he states, has been passed down from generation to generation since time immemorial. He

states that it is very important to keep cultural traditions alive, citing that "*Por ejemplo, el día de la cruz, en Kushkatan es una celebración Indígena que la iglesia Católica ha cooptado y que la gente ya no recuerda y por eso, lo mal interpretan como una cosa religiosa*" (For instance, the day of the cross in El Salvador, is an Indigenous celebration that the Catholic Church has coopted, and that people no longer remembers and therefore, they misinterpret as a religious thing). He explains that during this cultural celebration that takes place on May 3, every year, people make a cross usually of the *jiote*[550] tree and place it in the patio of their houses, decorated with seasonal fruits and colorful paper chains and/or *papel picado* (perforated paper), a *Mexica* artform that dates to pre-contact times. He adds that people nowadays think that they must do these rituals to protect their homes from the devil, adding:

> *La verdad es que esta ceremonia la solíamos hacer los pueblos Indígenas de esta zona, para celebrar la llegada de las primeras lluvias cada año, para ofrendar por una buena cosecha a nuestro señor Xipe Totec,*[551] *y agradecer a las cuatro direcciones por todos los regalos que nos dan. Esta celebración coincide con los movimientos de los astros y siempre se ha hecho desde miles de años antes de la invasión española. No es una celebración católica.* (Fieldnotes 2019).
>
> The truth is that this ceremony used be done by Indigenous peoples of this region, to celebrate the first rains, each year, to make offerings to our Lord *Xipe Totec* for a good harvest, and to thank the four directions for all the gifts. This celebration coincides with the movement of the stars and it has always been done thousands of years before the Spanish invasion. It is not a catholic holiday.

Tata Nico adds:

> *Ahora la gente cree que la cruz que se celebra en esta fecha, es la cruz de Cristo y que esta es una celebración de la iglesia*

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[550] Other names for the *jiote* tree (bursera simaruba) in Mesoamerica are *chacaj, indio desnudo, palo chino, palo mulato, chacah, chacah colorado,* and more (West Indian birch, Turpentine tree, tourist tree). This species propagates easily and are used for incense, medicinal uses, and fencing land in Mesoamerica for its resistance to winds. With the first rains each year, the lustrous copper-colored outer bark of *palo de jiote* peels off as in "flayed skin" (Maya-Ethnobotany.org).

[551] *Xipe Totec* ("the flayed lord") is the Nahua deity of life-death and reincarnation; he is associated with nature's fertility, water, agriculture, and war; he flayed himself to give food to humanity, symbolic of the way maize seeds lose their outer layer before germination. He is also associated with pimples, eye diseases, and possibly plague. His flayed skin symbolizes rebirth and the renewal of the seasons; this is why Nawa-Pipil communities in Kushkatan make a cross with the *Jiote tree* branches to welcome the first rains each year and make offerings to the four directions for a good harvest (Martínez y Escamilla, 2022).

> *Católica, y hasta le rezan*[552] *a Dios antes de comerse la fruta que le ofrendan a la cruz. Pero no es la cruz de Cristo, sino las cuatro direcciones o puntos cardinales* (Fieldnotes 2019).
>
> Now people believe that the cross that is celebrated on this date is the cross of Christ, and that this is a Catholic holiday, and they even pray to God before eating the fruit they offer to the cross. But, it is not Jesus' cross, but the four directions or cardinal points.

He elaborates,

> *Muy parecido a esto, es la confusión que existe aquí con la celebración católica del día de la Virgen de Guadalupe y la celebración de nuestra Madre Tierra -- Tunantzin -- que los pueblos originarios de Kushkatan ya practicaban por siglos mucho antes de la invasión y que coincide con la segunda cosecha del maíz, pero la gente ya no sabe eso* (Fieldnotes 2019).
>
> Similarly to this, is the conflation that exists here with the Catholic celebration of the Virgin of Guadalupe and the celebration of our Mother Earth -- *Tunantzin* – that Indigenous peoples had been practicing centuries prior to the invasion and that it coincides with the second harvest of Maize[553], but people no longer know that.

Tata Nico is referring to a Catholic celebration that takes place in El Salvador every December 12 (it also takes place in most Latin American countries), when parents dress their young children in traditional Indigenous vestments to visit the *Basílica de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* (1953), in Antiguo Cuscatlán (also known as *La Ceiba de Guadalupe* in reference to a sacred tree[554] that stood in situ in the now disappeared *Señorío de Kushkatan*) to pay homage to the nearly five-hundred-year-old legend of *Tepeyac* (mountain in Northern Mexco). On this occasion, boys wear plain muslin pants and shirts, and straw hats, and girls wear long colorful taffeta stir skirts, muslin *huipils*, and bright ribbons and flowers on their heads. Salvadoran families gather for a short

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[552] One such prayer that is commonly recited in *Kushkatan*, during this celebration is: *"Apártate de mi Satanás, que parte de mí no tendrás, el día de la cruz diré tres veces Jesús, Jesús, Jesús..."* (Get away from me Satan, you will not have a part of me, on the day of the cross, I will say three times Jesus, Jesus, Jesus..."). This prayer is recited before taking a fruit from the altar that has been created from various offerings (My memories and fieldnotes 2019).

[553] In El Salvador, there are only two seasons. The rainy season (*xupan*) or winter is roughly between May and October and the dry season (*tunalku*) or summer is between November and April (Fieldnotes 2019).

[554] The ceiba tree or *ceiba pentandra* of the Malvaceae family is one of the most majestic and sacred trees for Maya and Nawa-Pipil communities for its imponent heights. Indigenous cosmovision consider ceibas to be a representation of the universe that functions as a portal connecting the underworld (roots), with the middle world where humans live (trunk), and the 13 skies (canopy), symbolizing life, perpetuity, grandeur, strength, and unity.

Catholic peregrination to honor the Virgin of Guadalupe, offering her songs, prayers, flowers (mostly roses), intricately designed streets carpets of colorful sand dust for the procession, a special mass, fireworks, which culminate in a serenade. These are some of the manifestations of devout Catholic faith that Salvadoran families offer for the many miracles they believe she has conceded to them. On this occasion, La *Basílica* de *Guadalupe* is surrounded by many traditional food vendors and mechanical rides, creating an atmosphere of celebration. For many, the Virgin of Guadalupe represents the notion of sanctuary (Memories and fieldnotes 2019).

While the legend of *Tepeyac* and the Virgin of Guadalupe surfaced among Mexica communities in the second half of the seventeenth century in Mexico, it is well known in El Salvador. The oldest written accounts that exist of it are in Nahuatl (*Inin Huei Tlamahuizoltzin /Relación Primitiva or* Primitive Account and *Nican Mopohua/Aquí Se Dice or* Here is told). The latter is considered the main source of the Guadalupian tradition and has been attributed Antonio Valeriano (1650), one of the most erudite Indigenous writers of the time (Von Gobeser Hoepfner 2013: 155). The legend of *Tepeyac* tells the story of a Mestiza virgin -- Mary Mother of God of Guadalupe -- whose multiple apparitions in 1531 (ten years after the fall of Tenochtitlan), to an Indigenous man (now Saint Juan Diego *Cuauhtlatoatzin*) culminated in her asking him to convince Friar Juan de Zumárraga, the Bishop of Mexco at the time, to build a chapel in her honor in the Sierra de Guadalupe Mountains. As proof of her apparitions to Juan Diego, the Virgin asked him to climb the *Tepeyac* and cut roses for Zumárraga, which he collected and delivered to the bishop wrapped in his *tilmatli* (*manto tejido*/woven cloak). The legend says that when Juan Diego opened his *tilma*, the roses fell to the ground and an image of the Virgin was revealed, stamped on it, which is on display at the Basílica de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe in Mexico City (Ibid).

There are accounts of numerous pilgrimages to *Tepeyac* that started to take place, attributing many miracles to the Virgin of Guadalupe, which resulted in almsgiving and penance to "*La Morenita*" (the little dark-skinned one), attracting the interest of the church (Ibid 152). Years later, Bernal Díaz del Castillo in *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* (1568), attributed the painting of the *Virgen de Guadalupe* on Juan Diego's tilma to *el indio Marcos*, also known as *Marcos Cipac de Aquino,* whose artistic talents have been compared to Michelangelo (Ibid 155). Juan de Torquemada documents in Book 10, Chapter 7, of *Los veinte y un libros rituales y monarquía indiana* (1615), that the *tepeyac* sanctuary,[555] once consecrated to *Tonantzin,*[556] was transformed by Franciscan friars into a chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary (Ibid 151).

According to Miguel León-Portilla (2014), Nahua philosophies describe *tepetl/tepeyac* as a sacred site where the waters of God dwell and germinate life from within the earth (Ibid 52, 53). The place where flowers are found is the home of the *Tloque Nahaque* (*el dueño del cerca y del junto* or the owner of the fence and the joint). The names given to the mother of God are *Ipalnehmohuani* (*aquel por quien se vive* or that for whom one lives) and *Tlalticpacque* (*el dueño de cuanto hay en la tierra* or the owner of everything that there is on earth) (Ibid 102, 103). Thus, León-Portilla reveals

[555] See *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España* (Bernardino de Sahagún, 1969: 352).
[556] *Tunantzin* in Nawat-Pipil (Sánchez Vides 2019 Interviews).

that what Juan Diego contemplated when he described the flowers at the top of the mountain coincides with *Xochitlalpan* (*la tierra florida* or flowery land) and *Tonacatlalpan* (*la tierra de nuestro sustento* or land of our sustenance), where according to Nahua tradition, the Lord of the Rain, *Tlaloc*, dwelled. Flowers are described traditionally as beautiful, and fragrant, tasty and that gave contentment" (Ibid 52, 53, 56). It is possible that the adaptation of the Spanish model of apparitions to Indigenous cosmovision[557], as described in *Nican Mopohua,* allowed stronger Native identification with the Guadalupian tradition, but there is no doubt that prior to European contact, the Mexica pantheon honored *Tunantzin* in *tepeyac.* Nawa-Pipil leaders in El Salvador affirm that the devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe is evidence of strategies used by colonizers to destroy Indigenous cosmovision by converting their sacred sites into Christian spaces, replacing their deities by Christian figures, and otherwise forcing Native peoples to assimilate to Western religious ideologies through violent means (Interviews 2019).

Other Nawa-Pipil agricultural traditions practiced in recent years to affirm the sacred genealogies of corn in El Salvador include the drawing of a cross of ashes in every corner of the *milpa*. The cross symbolizes the four sacred directions in Nawa-Pipil cosmology, and it is intended as protection for the *milpa* against heavy rains, winds (*los huracaneros* or the ones who make hurricanes), plagues, witches, or anything else that can destroy the season's crops. The ash cross's signification among Nawa-Pipil communities does not represent the Catholic cross, although some people have used both meanings in the last few decades. The ashes used to make the cross usually come from the *kumal* (grill), where women make tortillas (*tamal* or flat corn bread) every day before sunrise. Some people say they also use ceremonial ashes for protecting the harvest. The praxis of cooking the corn with lime and grinding it by hand using a millstone (*metaj*) at dawn, is called *nextamali*, and the elders associate it with Venus (*mapipil* or 'the five sons of the hand'). The fingers represent the five points of a star, and the hand is the foundation of all mathematical counts for the Nawa-Pipil, which is based on a quintesimal system or a count of five using the hand. When combined, ten fingers and ten toes, this allows for a vigesimal count system. Venus, the morning star, according to Nahua cosmology announces the arrival of each new day from the east (*kalikatunal)* and the opportunity it represents for women to prepare sacred nourishment for their loved ones. In this way, food preparation, which comes from the blood of the land and the gifts of water through ancient knowledges of agriculture and astronomy, and the counts of time in both, the 260-day festival calendar and the 365-day solar calendar (Lara-Martínez 2012: xii-xiii; interviews with Flores and Sánchez-Vides in 2019).

2.d Conclusion

As shown above, the Nawat-Pipil language and its mytho-poetics construct the human body as the repository of ancestral knowledges that are central to Indigenous philosophies, thus propelling the energies of the body from the realm of agriculture to the realm of astronomy and into the sacred. In this process, any fragmentation that may occur

[557] See Stephens May (1995).

in and to the body is metaphorical and intended for the benefit of humanity to ensure its futurity.

To survive, everything that humans and other beings need is alive and comes from the entrails of the Earth, which has been compared to *chicomoztoc* (the place of the seven caves), the mythical place of human origins for Mexicas. These seven caves correspond to the seven openings in the human body: eyes, ears, nostrils, mouth, urethra, vulva/penis, and anus. Therefore, *chicomoztoc* is considered a breathing and living entity, as humans are and therefore, it must be nourished and cared for, respected, and paid back with our bodies when we die. Everything that we have taken from Mother Earth during our lives must be returned to her when we die. In this reciprocal exchange, the dead become the seed of Nawa-Pipil mytho-poetics, for they recover the historical memory of communities.

As such, *Nanahuatzin* is a Nawa-Pipil reflection about the similarity between the seed of the fruit and the seed of a woman's womb (*xinach),* whose unit sprouts multiple and infinite offspring (*pilahuan*) from a single source, the calabash fruit (*uajkal*) and the separated woman's head (*tzuntekumat*). This story allows us to observe the leap from the concrete and palpable to the abstract and infinite. From its sowing or burial (*tuka*), the head/the womb (*xinach*) becomes a gourd tree. Its seeds (*ix*) create many vegetable shoots or [human] sons (*pilahuan: ne tepewas*). The tree grows toward the sun/stars (*tunal*) and each day the sun enters a home (*kal*), it makes its cosmos by bringing in the sun energies into a human dwelling. The same happens with corn (*sinti*): when the kernels fragment from the cob, they make it so, the unit becomes the origin of infinite diversity of grain, and similarly, the origin of Indigenous peoples, its diverse languages, and cultures. In Nawa-Pipil philosophies, the dissemination of a single unit generates difference. The fragmentation or dispersion of a single fruit/body part results in many seeds/sons, becoming the multiverse and the plurality of its people (Lara-Martínez 2012: xvi).

Further, the birth of *ne tepewas* results from the separation of the unit -- the *calabash/squash* -- which is unique and singular and engenders the multiplicity of living things. *Ne tepewas* are the multiple seeds/sons that detach from a single primordial being, the head, the womb, the fruit, the corn on the cob. Each of the fractions of a unit reproduces the totality of the single primordial being, as understood by the notion of fractals and quantum physics (Ibid xvi, xvii). *Ne tepewas* disseminate water, care for, and reproduce the vegetable world and show that the most essential elements of life are received in grace and must be shared with others, in grace, to form a collective utopia that is expressed as a multiverse. But nothing in the cosmos is static. Celestial changes are attributed to the movements of the sun and the moon and their cycles of transformation toward their opposites, given that energy cannot be created not destroyed, it is only transformed (Ibid xviii-xix). In this way, from the blood (*i yesiu*) of the Earth gives birth to the vegetable world, which animals and humans eat. But the Earth demands gratitude and sacrifice, human blood to sustain itself, which we give her as an offering when we die. In the Nahua tradition, the saying *sintli ne toeso* (*el maíz es nuestra sangre*/corn is our blood), refers to maize being the Nahua staple for humanity, which has its roots on Nahua agricultural traditions dating back millennia (Samstrom 1991: 125).

From this Indigenous conception of the body, the world, and the universe, Lara-Martínez proposes that it is possible to theorize about a fragmented Salvadoran identity whose histories of resistance and survivance against colonialism, empire, and war prevent it from assuming a decolonial destiny (Ibid 94). In this context, Salvadoran identity must rely on its fragmented parts (*kujkupeutuk),* its head and bones (*tzuntekun huan umit*), its watchful eye (*ix*), its historical memory (*eltapach*), and its life energy (*tunal*), to continue forging a path to regenerating and recovering ourselves, from 'being broken,' which includes developing a meaningful appreciation for our cultural roots and carrying on strong revitalization efforts of Indigenous languages and philosophies, as ways to move forward. By re-membering ourselves through our various co-constitutive parts, it is possible to become those who care for each other and the planet through Indigenous conceptions of womanhood as a sacred site that illuminates our genealogies of maize and the cosmos and restores a woman's right to life, justice, and dignity.

Section 3: *Nusihuapiltzin* - "Gender and Genre"[558] Metatextualities in Kushkatan

In this section, I unfold the plot of *Nanahuatzin*, through a metatextual[559] 55-minute play titled *Nusihuapiltzin* (*Mi Pequeña* or My Little One), co-written and performed by *Las Tres Prietas*[560], a troupe formed in 2016, by three young Salvadoran women who self-identify as Afro-Indigenous descendants. They met while studying theater at El Centro Nacional de Artes[561] (CENAR) and identified with one another's stories, lineages, corporealities, and dreams, deciding to come together to transmit their collective vision through art. *Nusihuatpiltzin* is their graduation capstone project. In an online Salvadoran feminist magazine, *La Brújula*, a recent article titled, "*La Cachada*[562] *y Las Tres Prietas: Mujeres que nacieron para los rscenarios*" (The Catch and The Three 'Colored' Women: Women Born for the Stage), explores the popularity and success of two unlikely[563] women-only, women-led insurrect theater groups that have emerged in recent years in the Salvadoran performing acts stage. When asked why the name, *Las Tres Prietas* respond:

> *La colectiva la hemos ido sosteniendo, ayudándonos desde cómo nos identificamos, que va más allá de un tono de piel, sino es sentirse menospreciada, no encajar en los cánones de belleza, sabemos que si nos buscan es para un papel de las malas, villanas, papeles así ofrecen, nosotras tenemos más que contar que hacer esos papeles. Nos preguntan '¿Por qué se dicen así?' queremos reivindicar este color porque la gente lo relaciona con lo despectivo, lo malo, lo feo, por eso nos nombramos así, prietas.*

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[558] A definition of "gender and genre" will be discussed in-depth later, in this chapter. See Chacón (2018) .

[559] The concept of *metatextuality* was coined by Gérard Genette (1992), based on Julia Kristeva's notion of *Intertextuality* (1960). It refers to a form of intertextual discourse in which one literary text makes critical commentary on another, explicitly or implicitly, to legitimize certain tropes or the narrative at large. By implicit references, Genette expects an implied reference, not stated, but understood in what is expressed. So, when a text criticizes and interprets another text, their relationship will be a metatextual relationship. Metatextuality can explain, deny, or approve another text (Mirenayat 2015: 535).

[560] In El Salvador, the term *prieta(o)*'s meaning is associated with having darker skin and most times, it is used in a derogatory manner, as an insult. The artists/co-founders of *Las Tres Prietas* company explained to me that they adopted this term, as an act of political reclamation, as a source of pride for their ancestral roots and histories of resistance and survivance, to visibilize through their darker skin, their feminist stance on contemporary social problems, and to find the beauty of Earth's in the brown tones of their skin (My fieldnotes 2019).

[561] National Center for the Arts. My translation.

[562] *Cachada* is a slang word heard often at public markets and on the streets, expressed with gusto by small-stall saleswomen (*las vendedoras*), which means 'bargain' or an opportunity to buy something at a discounted price; it is adapted from the English verb 'to catch' and the Spanglish word 'cachar' (My cultural insights).

[563] *La Cachada* is a theater group led by women who sell products in small stalls at public markets or in the streets. The article about *La Cachada* and *Las Tres Prietas* emphasizes race, gender, class-based oppressions as the main intersections they identify with; both companies do not fit into the national imaginary of what a theater company should be, according to the Eurocentric standards that the country upholds, limiting theater opportunities to lighter skin, educated people.

> We have been supporting the collective, helping each other out from how we identify ourselves, which goes beyond skin tone, but we feel belittled if we do not fit into the canons of beauty, we know that if they're looking for us it's for a bad role, villains, roles like those, is what they offer us, we have more to tell than to just perform those roles. They ask us 'Why do you call yourselves that?' we want to revindicate our skin color because people associate it with that, which is derogatory, bad, ugly, that's why we call ourselves that name, 'colored.' (Ponce 2023)

Nusihuatpiltzin is their adaptation of *Nanahuatzin*, based on recent versions of the Nawa-Pipil myth of creation told to them by Nahua elders from of Santo Domingo de Guzmán in Centzunat, their research and interpretations of Lara-Martínez's expansive investigation of Schultze-Jena's ethnographic fieldwork with Itzalku communities in the 1930s, and technical assistance from *El Colectivo Tzuntehejekat*. It is within the liminal spaces of oral/aural tradition and the above efforts of *Las Tres Prietas* and the community that I locate a metatextual relationship between *Nusihuatpiltzin* and *Nanahuatzin*. I propose that this approves, expands, transposes, and most importantly transcends Nahua oral/aural tradition, through time and space, keeping Nawa-Pipil stories and the Nawat-Pipil language alive, along with its cultural traditions and rich history. In the artists' words, the metatextual relationships between the play and the myth of creation manifest as a living text, as follows:

> *El teatro no solamente se queda en las tablas de los teatros, sino que se mueve a todos los rincones, llega al calor de las comunidades en donde las pláticas interminables asoman luego de una presentación, ahí surge la sabiduría de quiénes nos antecedieron y dejaron un poquito de elles para que sigamos... Caminar con la comunidad, acompañarnos es un gran aprendizaje, por ahí queremos ir.*
>
> Performance not only remains in the stages of theaters, but it moves in all corners, arriving to the warmth of communities where everlasting conversations appear after a performance is over, there, the wisdom of those who endowed us with a little of themselves emerges so that we can continue…
> To walk with the community, to accompany each other is a great learning, that's where we want to go.[564]
> (*Las Tres Prietas'* Facebook page. March 27, 2023).

Ana María Alonso, Natalia Bolaños-Müeller, and Tania Ramos -- artists/co-founders/co-directors of *Las Tres Prietas* -- write a contemporaneous text of

[564] My translation.

Nanahuatzin, based on multiple versions of this story to re-examine Nahua genealogies of corn, humankind, and the formation of the universe, which they juxtapose through the performing arts, with the violent realities of European colonization in El Salvador that are not over. To arrive at their artistic conception of *Nusihuapiltzin,* the artists pose the question, "What hurt us?" to which they answer "Indigenous invisibilization," "cultural negation," "the 1932 Matanza," "the lack of education for girls," "our experiences of discrimination because of the color of our skin and our gender," "feminicide," "forced migration," "family separation." In this light, they articulate that *Nusihuatpiltzin* is not just based on the Nawa-Pipil myth of *Nanahuatzin,* but also on the lived-experiences of their mothers, aunts, grandmothers, sisters, and the women in their lives, today, which they situate within the country's contemporary realities to relate to what the characters of the story say and do, and why they say it/do it.

Some of the main themes that emerge in the play include, genderism, sexism, violence against women, forced migration, and the historical marginalization of women as well as their contemporary struggles for liberation. They incorporate the Nawa-Pipil story of creation and the four elements of Nahua cosmology into the current national reality, centering the loss of Indigenous identity, sacred knowledges about the creation of life, and spatial and temporal relationships between a woman's body-as-territory and land, in relationship to the cosmos to recover the Nawat-Pipil language and its orality/aurality, and cultural traditions. They explore relationships between body, movement, and sound to highlight family dynamics related to gender-based violence in the home and family separation, which they associate with forced migration, pain, and decolonial love. According to Bolaños-Müeller, the most challenging aspect of the plot for them is to reinterpret and artistically represent for the audience -- through sound and movement -- the dismemberment of a woman's body and the violence of the story itself, in a way that people are not triggered or retraumatized, and are able to appreciate the curative power of what it means to talk about what hurts Salvadoran families and women in particular (Quiroz 2020).

Nusihuapiltzin is set in contemporary times, focusing on the struggles of two young girls *Yanci* and *Yita,* who are Nawa-Pipil descendants, and do not know anything about their origins or anything about their mother. They are being raised by their grandmother *Mama Nena,* who while making *atol,* does not want to talk about their family's past to protect everyone from painful family secrets. The father of the girls, *Fidencio,* is absent from the girls' lives when he migrates abroad after killing *Tesolinda,* his wife and the girls' mother. Upon the girls' insistence, the grandmother finally gathers the courage to tell them their story, determined to heal them. Unlike in *Nanahuatzin,* most of the characters in *Nusihuapiltzin* are women and are played by women, an important feature in transforming *Nusihuapiltzin* into a "gender and genre" contemporary metatextual production. Granddaughters, *Yanci* and *Yita,* represent *ne tepewas* (the Lords of the Rain), and *Mama Nena* (grandmother) and *Tesolinda* (mother*)* represent *tantepus lamat* (iron-toothed old woman). This different kind of writing, which sees the past and the future simultaneously, is a Mesoamerican millenary double-gaze strategy that frames *Nusihuapiltzin* through the *Nanahuatzin* story, centering gender and genre, to talk about the current realities that Indigenous women are experiencing in El Salvador today, to help us think through it (Chacón 2018: 17).

The play uses mainly untranslated Nawat-Pipil and some Spanish words to narrate the plot of the story, addressing the Spanish colonial logics of race, gender, sexuality, religion, class, space and place, language, etc. imposed on Indigenous communities to recover the power of telling a story, from a Native perspective, where it belongs. According to *Las Tres Prietas*, European heteropatriarchal logics are responsible for the unprecedented levels of violence against Indigenous women and girls, in El Salvador, resulting in the loss of life of thousands of women at the hands of men, but also for erasing cultural and spiritual legacies through unspeakable violence, including the Nawat-Pipil language and its orality/aurality. This attempted silencing of Native tongues threatens the intellectual sovereignty and self-determination of Indigenous communities in El Salvador, and has attempted to render them invisible, affecting particularly Indigenous women who are the knowledge keepers in the community. To counter colonial legacies that hurt Indigenous communities, *Nusihuatpiltzin* celebrates the lives, souls, and voices of Indigenous women who can no longer inhabit either their bodies or their territories, which includes thousands of Salvadoran women and girls who have been brutally murdered and disappeared by men, and whose names will neither be said, nor re-membered (Luna 2018).

Of *Nusihuatpiltzin* and other recently written plots by *Las Tres Prietas*, such as *Iyulu Ne Siwat* (*Corazón de mujer* or Heart of a Woman) *El llamado de Tunantzin* (Our Mother's Calling), and *Shuchikisa* (*Florecer* or Flowering), *Las Tres Prietas* state: *"Todas las obras coinciden en conectar con las abuelas, con ese deseo que tenemos las mujeres, esa añoranza, son un homenaje a ellas, a lo que nos contaban, poder reconectarnos con la tierra, recordar la sabiduría de ellas"* (All of our plays coincide in connecting with our grandmothers, with that desire that we women have, that longing to pay homage to them, to the stories they used to tell us, to be able to reconnect with the Earth and remember their wisdom) (Ponce 2023).

The young artists envision to become a self-directed theater company that tells their own [women] stories arising from the Salvadoran collective memory to emphasize what hurts and oppresses them, such as colonial ideas of race, gender, class, religion, citizenship, the loss of Indigenous languages, environmental injustice, violence against women and girls, forced migration, and other contemporary social problems. They also seek to travel to rural communities around the country that lack access to the performing arts to share their gifts. They see themselves as a demonstration project in and for the defense of sacred life, which they explain by stating: *"Los saberes, conocimientos o necesidades que las comunidades poseen y quieren contar de manera diferente son las artes prietas que buscan lograr un reencuentro con las abuelas para revitalizar sus historias"* (The knowledges or needs that communities possess and wish to tell in their own ways are the 'colored' arts that seek a re-encounter with our grandmothers to revitalize their stories") (Ponce 2023). In 2022, *Las Tres Prietas* started a traveling school for the 'colored' performing arts, that affords children from marginalized and remote rural communities an opportunity to participate in theater to learn and recover their cultural heritage, so that they can reclaim their rights to ancestral knowledges, languages, and traditions through a framework of "theater for life" (Ibid).

While conducting research in El Salvador in 2018 and 2019, I had the opportunity to see *Nusihuapiltzin* performed twice. The first time I saw the play, it was performed in a

stage at the *Universidad Tecnológica de El Salvador* (UTEC) in San Salvador, for a large campus and urban audience. Sitting front and center were mostly elderly women from Witzapan, who are the knowledge-bearers and cultural consultants for *Las Tres Prietas*. This is a very important decolonial turn that resists cultural extractivism and appropriation of Native understandings about the world in El Salvador, where knowledge production about Indigenous communities often rests in the hands of foreigners. This decolonial opening demonstrates that Nahua artistic and knowledge production is being co-created from below, between the older and the younger generations, ensuring this way, a viable future for Indigenous languages and traditions to perdure that sustains Indigenous claims to intellectual sovereignty and self-determination over their lives.

The second time I saw *Nusihuapiltzin*, it was performed outdoors in *El Llanito*, one of the many massacre sites of the 1932 Matanza in Itzalku, Centzunat. On this occasion, the play was performed mostly for an Indigenous audience during the commemoration ceremonies of the 1932 ethnocide, bringing the *Nusiwapiltzin* myth of creation in a full circle, for the first time, to the very grounds were Schultze-Jenna gathered it, decades earlier. As the sounds of Nawat-Pipil could be heard loud and clear, travelling freely through the air, the trees, and dispersing far away in all directions with the wind, it was a very powerful moment to be present in the sacred grounds where hundreds, if not thousands of Indigenous bodies are buried in mass graves, to witness the echoes of the past, that refuse to disappear.

As I watch the young women perform a contemporary gendered interpretation of *Nanahuatzin*, through *Nusihuapiltzin*, I reflect on what it is like for 30-50,000 *abuelos and abuelas* -- who were brutally massacred in these spaces and whose bones lay, without resting peacefully, in these grounds -- to hear their granddaughters fearlessly re-tell and re-turn their stories to their graves. The audience, mostly Indigenous, listens carefully, watching the young artists' every move. There is a profound silence and a profound felt absence in this space. It is as if every vocal expression uttered by the performers were coming from the dead below, who never returned to speak of their own death and completed their stories to fill the voids in the space. Those in attendance seemed to hold on to every word, as if holding on to the past, a past that was viciously taken without a record left behind. How a story is told, the language used, the sense of time and space used, as well as who tells it and when is told, begins to reveal a presence over an absence[565] to help us recover ourselves, which I think it is what has been lost within the violences of colonization. The right to self.

Both times I saw the play, although in very different settings, the artists exhibited exceptional renditions of their creative plot through carefully choreographed sound effects and lights, precise acrobatic movements, lively facial and vocal expressions, and rhythm to embody the main characters' personas. The costumes and props used are representative of a rural, marginalized life in El Salvador, making it very familiar to all of us in the audience. The strategic centering of the Nawat-Pipil language to communicate the story (at times, they used some Spanish words) was key to restoring it to its knowledge keepers. The scenery was made up of a single metal scaffold, which was used in multiple ways to depict various environs -- a rural home, the jungle, and other outdoor

[565] See Gerald Vizenor's notion of Native survivance "I take it that remembrance and survivance are part of that active presence in life and in literature" (2008: 40).

settings -- where the play unfolded. The intrinsic design of the set, yet the brilliant simplicity of its execution, in combination with other theatrical elements, made it possible for the audience to focus on the critical posture that women take in relationship to how the past informs the present. In this context, the artists deploy a politics of recognition (*ix-mati* in Nawat-Pipil means what the eye knows) to talk about existing power differentials in their communities and the materiality of a woman's body -- which has needs and feelings -- to reveal a living, breathing site endowed with sacred creative energies and genealogies that connect her to the land and the cosmos at once, and that survives invasion and occupation.

Of significant importance for this study is the artists' performance of gender, which is an overarching theme in the play, and it is amplified in multiple living dimensions such as time, space, movement, sound, light, etc. Through these lenses, the artists help us reflect about the female body, sex, pleasure, sexism, gender roles, gender-based violence, male violence against women and girls, adverse childhood experiences related to violence, family separation, forced migration, impunity, silencing, invisibilization, feminicide, etc. to interrogate not only the colonial logics that render women bodies as racialized, sexualized and gendered, but also the asexualized body of a mother figure. When Indigenous women question the gendered structures of power of the modern/colonial gender system and confront biases and prejudices against them through intellectual and cultural production reserved for those in proximity with White male cisgender heteronormative power, women liberate themselves and their bodies from the entrapments of colonial patriarchal logics and local gendered expectations.

Through *Nusihuapiltzin, Las Tres Prietas* are creating ontological openings in the modern/colonial gender system and local, machista, political imaginary to speak about Indigenous women's right to being, self-determination, intellectual sovereignty, and life, which is grounded in the body-as-territory and written in *herstory*. Linking a woman's body to territory and land is a transformative, radical act that threatens the patriarchal state, because it involves its defense and transforms her social and material conditions and positionality in society, disrupting the historical silences imposed on her, with living metaphors that counter bullets with living words.

Indigenous scholar Gloria Chacón refers to the process of blending ancestral stories with contemporary realities to conjure up a third meaning that denotes connections with the sacred, which is informed by community, language, the land, astronomy, the moon, the sun, water, etc. as Mesoamerican [Indigenous] *cosmolectics* (2018: 7-14). This amalgamation of the past and present or "*mirada doble*" (double gaze) or *Kab'awil* (in *K'iche Kab'awil* is represented by the double-headed eagle) functions as resistance to colonialism, a methodology for the empowerment of young women in education, the principle of duality in time, space, and movement that intersects politics, religion, spirituality, gender, philosophy, and the social experience (Ibid 16). *Kab'awil*, according to Chacón, is a different type of "weaving knowledge," a different type of writing, logic, and aesthetic grounded in Indigenous epistemologies taught by *las abuelas* 1,000 years ago, written by women through "gender and genre" in the *huipils* (embroidered blouses) they wear, which affords them the ability to maintain a critical gaze to sexist practices in Mesoamerica, under the guise of tradition (Ibid 18). As a decolonizing movement, K*ab'awil* helps Indigenous cultural producers imagine the possibilities outside of the

matrix of coloniality of power, of migration, of gender, and its ordering through storytelling, which remains in the mouths of women and the community (Ibid).

When the Nawa-Pipil knowledge-bearers and cultural consultants of *Nusihuapiltzin* -- who are mostly elderly women from Witzapan -- are asked for their opinions of the play, they respond with a smile: "*estamos contentas porque las nuevas generaciones pueden ver y oír las historias de los más viejos en la lengua natural, ya que a pesar de todo lo que ha pasado, seguimos vivas y así les estamos dejando nuestra herencia cultural*" (We are happy that new generations can see and hear the stories of our elders in our Native tongue and despite everything that has happened we continue to exist, and in this way, we are passing onto them our cultural legacies"). Another one adds, "*A mí me preocupa que la gente va a seguir diciendo que somos brujas, pero bien (shrugging her shoulders), eso es lo que nos contaban los abuelos y abuelas, y es importante que finalmente se reconozcan las historias de antes*" ("I am worried that people will continue to say that we are witches, but in the end, that is what our ancestors taught us, and it is important that our stories are finally acknowledged") (Interviews 2019).

I argue that, as a contemporary intellectual project of self-determination and sovereignty, *Nusihuapiltzin* lends to being analyzed through *Kab'awilian* cosmolectics (Chacón 2018), as these knowledges help us understand the critical postures that Nawa-Pipil women and their descendants take in relationship to the past and the present, specifically through women's explorations of race, gender, and sexuality. With the guidance of the knowledge-bearers and cultural consultants, the artists interrogate the Western, romanticized idea of the principle of complementarity ascribed to Indigenous peoples, which they say, minimizes and/or erases the violent reality that Indigenous women experience in their communities. This violence, the artists explain, is entrenched in the patriarchal system imposed through the European invasion and occupation of our land in 1524, but it is real for Indigenous women (Fieldnotes 2019).

As an Indigenous cultural production written through what Chacón refers to as "gender and genre" (2018), *Nusihuapiltzin* is informed by Indigenous epistemologies that rely on the double gaze to denounce the misogynistic practices and lethal violence that Salvadoran women are living today at the hands of racialized men, which manifest in the highest femi(ni)cide rates in the world, devastating thousands of families. The authors, producers, and performers of *Nusihuapiltzin* also rely on ancestral knowledges to speak of gender relations differently than the modern/colonial gender system imposed by European colonizers does. Yet they keep a critical eye on contemporary power relations between the sexes to demand Indigenous women to be seen by both -- Indigenous men and dominant society -- in more humane ways. This re-cognition of the other (*ix-mati*) is a re-signification of their political position in the world that understands the body of a woman as-territory and land in-relationship-to-the-cosmos, and it is a condemnation of the colonial logics that see women as biological threats to the patriarchal system and degrade, murder, and disappear them to silence their voices where they are. *Ixmati.*

In writing and performing *Nusihuapiltzin, Las Tres Prietas* talk back to the persistent patriarchal idea that Indigenous women are uneducated, passive, submissive, backwards, 'out of place,' someone who does not belong in mainstream society – including the university -- someone who can be intimidated into silence. Displaced.

Attempted to be dispossessed of her [right to] self, her territory/land, of her intellectual capacity, her sovereignty. Dispossessed of her [right to] life. Disappeared. Eliminated. Insulted. Publicly humiliated. Described as immoral, dishonest. Indecent. Blamed for the deplorable material conditions in which she lives and even for her own violent murder. By responding to the question of 'what hurt us,' the artists shed light on Indigenous women's racialized, gendered, and sexualized oppressions, both within their communities and in dominant society, highlighting that the attempted colonization of an Indigenous woman's body-as-territory and land, by European invaders, will be fiercely contested. Refused. Resisted. The integrity of her body will be defended. Protected. Restored. The knowledge-bearers of Witzapan remind us that an Indigenous woman's body is conceived as a sacred site, where genealogical trajectories of corn and the universe reside. *Ixmati.*

In this light, *Tata* Fidel Flores and *Tata* Nicolás Sánchez-Vides give recognition -- *ixmati* -- to Nawa-Pipil women in their communities, explaining how the Mesoamerican sacred calendar has 260 days, which are associated with human gestation. They state that there are twenty human fingers and toes, which are the foundation for mathematical, agricultural, and astronomical knowledges and center the grammar of the body to help us experience and understand the world from the concrete to the abstract. Further, the *Tatas* connect the phases of the moon with the fertility of women's bodies and of the land, stating that each of us is a 'cosmos within the cosmos,' but that women's bodies are uniquely endowed with sacred energies capable of reproducing the universe (Field notes 2019). *Ixmati.*

Given this recognition, not too far from *El Llanito*, Nawa-Pipil communities in San Ramón, in western El Salvador are highly aware of the lethal nature of gender-based violence against women and girls and they are creating spaces to re-dignify and uplift the immense physical and spiritual labor of Indigenous women in their communities. Adjusting the glasses on his face, beloved Nawa-Pipil leader *Tajtzin Tamachtiani* (the elder who knows) Fidel Flores, states with conviction: "*Son las mujeres las que han tenido un papel central para que sobrevivamos cada crisis histórica que hemos atravesado como la invasión, la ocupación, las epidemias, las catátrofes naturales, las masacres, la guerra, y el desplazamiento forzado al que hemos sido sometidos por siglos*" (It is women who played a central role for Indigenous survivance during each moment of historical crisis that we have overcome such as invasion, occupation, epidemics, natural catastrophes, massacres, war, and the forced displacement to which we have been subjected for centuries)[566]. *Ixmati*. He pauses for a second and continues: "*las mujeres Indígenas son la constante figura que siempre ha protegido la santidad de la vida y a nuestra Madre Tierra; ella ha llevado a nuestras comunidades hacia el futuro, en sus hombros, con su sacrificio*" ([Indigenous] women are the constant figure that have always protected the sacredness of life and of our Mother Earth; she has carried forward our communities on her shoulders, through her sacrifice) (Zoom public event, 2020). "*Pues, si todos venimos de una mujer*. *Allí está claro*" (Well, we all come from a woman. There it is, clear). *Ixmati*.

[566] My translation.

Tata Fidel has been a leading force for Indigenous communities in El Salvador for over fifty years. During the time I lived there, he worked in the development of the first Nawat-Pipil school for the formation of Spiritual Guides in San Ramón, known now as *Kalmekat Kushkatan*, and successfully prepared the first 13 Nawa-Pipil men and women, who are now serving as *guerreras* and *guerreros espirituales*[567] in their communities. As an Indigenous leader, he affirms that women are central to Nawa-Pipil spirituality and that a women's sacred circle is a space where cosmovision, traditional knowledges of natural medicine, agriculture, food, and ancestral ways of healing and nurturing one another are passed on, through ceremony, and that passing on these sacred knowledges is possible only with and in her presence, not with and in her exclusion. I*xmati*. *Tata* Fidel explains:

> *Las ceremonias son basadas en conocimientos ancestrales como la cuenta del tiempo y los movimientos de los 20 nahuales o energías protectoras que a cada ser humano y no humano en el planeta le dan en el día en que nacemos. Cada nahual tiene sus características únicas que se manifiestan de forma diferente en cada ser. Los nahuales son evidentes por medio de las plantas, los animales, los sueños, y las piedras. Los nahuales fueron creados como intermediarios entre todos los seres y el cosmos y combinan los trece niveles de energía del calendario sagrado. De aquí, y en cada instante, los Nawa-Pipiles encontramos otros seres que poseen diferentes energías protectoras y juntos, nosotros vibramos a los ritmos del universo. Nuestras vidas son el resultado de las energías dinámicas del cosmos, en el tiempo y en el espacio. Todo está en movimiento. El movimiento busca balance y armonía. Entonces, cada ser tiene su propio tiempo, espacio, movimiento, balance y armonía. Las energías del cosmos que guían y protegen a todos los seres en vida, son basadas en los cinco días que corresponden a los cinco nahuales que siempre nos acompañarán en cada una de las diferentes facetas de nuestras vidas y que representan nuestra cruz energética. Nuestros cuerpos son parte del cosmos y es por esto que cada uno de nosotros llevamos los sagrados elementos del cosmos dentro de sí. Nosotros respiramos oxígeno, somos agua, venimos de la tierra, y vamos a regresar a ella cuando nos muramos. Todos los seres humanos y no-humanos, sentimos y vivimos con una consciencia universal.* (Entrevistas 2019).
>
> Ceremonies, are based on ancestral knowledges of counting time and the movements of the twenty *Nahuales* or protective energies that every human and non-human being in the planet is given on the day we are born. Each nahual has its unique characteristics and manifest differently in each being. Nahuales are made evident through plants,

[567] Spiritual warriors (my translation)

> animals, dreams, and stones. The nahuales were created as intermediaries between all beings and the cosmos and combine the thirteen energy levels of the sacred calendar. From here, and in every instant, the Nawa-Pipil encounter other beings endowed with different protective energies and together, we vibrate to the rhythms of the universe. Our lives are the result of dynamic energies in the cosmos, in time and space. Everything is movement. Movement seeks balance and harmony. Therefore, each being has its own time, space, movement, balance, and harmony. The cosmic energies that protect and guide all beings in life are based on five days that correspond to the five Nahuales that will always accompany us throughout the different facets of our lives and that represent our energetic cross. Our bodies are a part of the cosmos, and this is why we carry the sacred elements of the cosmos within us. We breathe oxygen, we are water, we come from the Earth, and we will return to it when we die. All beings, human and non-human, feel and live with a universal consciousness. (Interviews 2019)

Tata Fidel adds that each Nawa-Pipil spiritual guide carries ancestral knowledges and their cosmovision on their shoulders, all their lives, and their *compromiso* is to consecrate to the sacred fire, an Indigenous future, which rests on the worldview of their ancestors:

> *Esta es una labor de amor basada en la sabiduría ancestral del calendario Nawa-Pipil que nos dieron los cargadores del tiempo. Por eso es importante que en los círculos sagrados, nosotros aseguremos espacios igualitarios para la participación de la mujer Indígena. Siempre debemos buscar equilibrio y honrar las energías cósmicas por nuestros principios de dualidad y complementariedad. Así, durante una ceremonia, nuestros círculos son hechos de una dualidad viva… un hombre, una mujer, un hombre, una mujer; así es como nos han enseñado. (Entrevistas 2019).*
>
> This is a labor of love based on the ancestral wisdoms of the Nawa-Pipil calendar that was given to us by the carriers of time. This is why it is important that in sacred circles, we ensure equitable spaces for the participation of Indigenous women. We must always seek equilibrium and honor the cosmic energies because of our principles of duality and complementarity. So, during a ceremony, our circles are made up of a living duality… a man, a woman, a man, a woman; that how they taught us. (Interviews 2019).

He continues:

> *Nosotros todos somos los hijos de una mujer y debemos honrar su presencia en nuestras vidas. Las enseñanzas Nawa-Pipil son basadas en mitos de creación y en los cuatro elementos del Creador del cielo y la tierra; estas tradiciones no se deben romper, pero nosotros solo podemos dar el conocimiento ancestral de nuestros abuelos y abuelas a esos que lo reciben. (Entrevistas 2019).*
>
> We are all the children of a woman, and we must honor her presence in our lives. Nawa-Pipil teachings are based on myths of creation and on the four sacred elements of the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth; these traditions should not be broken, but we can only give the ancestral knowledges of our grandparents and grandmothers, to those who receive them. (Interviews 2019).

For *Tata* Fidel, it is very important that the Nawa-Pipil cosmovision and worldviews of the *abuelas y abuelos* is passed on to the spiritual guides he is training, through ceremony rituals that have been practiced in the territories of Kushkatan for thousands of years. Based on Nawa-Pipil cosmovision, women and men who become spiritual guides have a *compromiso* to protect life, community, and Mother Earth, he says. *Ixmati*. In this role, women and men who will become spiritual guides must also embrace political struggles in defense of the land and water.

In the last few years, political struggles in defense of land and water have become more complicated for Indigenous communities by the COVID-19 pandemic, but they have not been interrupted. For instance, spiritual guide and community organizer, Tata Nicolás Sánchez Vides explains that the defense of the Río *Sensunapan* in *Centzunat*[568] against the development of new hydroelectric projects means, for Nawa-Pipil women, to become more active in the political sphere to protect the ever-increasing frailty of social hydroecologies[569] in the region, against the economic interests of megaprojects. These spiritual and political struggles co-exist in the bodies of Indigenous women during a severe national water crisis[570] that has lasted over six years and are made worse when the pandemic is threatening everyone's survivance. *Ixmati*. Most importantly, he says that protecting the *Sensunapan* river also means protecting other Nawa-Pipil sacred sites, such as *El Chital Ponisca, Mactali At, El Pepeto, Siete Cerritos, Cementerio-Fosa Común y Casco de Hacienda Mirazalco, Poza Los Tadeos, Paso Hondo, El Jabío, Cacerío Las Carias,* and *Los Tozos*[571]. These sacred sites are central to maintaining alive Indigenous

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[568] "Centzunat," "Centzonatl," "tsentsun," "tzentzun": many, indefinite number; "at": water; many rivers (Meza 2012: 543).
[569] El Salvador's Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources estimates that the country is set to be uninhabitable.in 80 years if the water crisis continues, given that 90 percent of surface water (rivers and lakes) are contaminated by untreated sewage and agricultural and industrial waste (Palma 2019).
[570] Forty percent of Salvadoran do not have access to running water every day (Brígida 2020).
[571] Movimiento por la defensa de Tacushcalco (Facebook posting July 7, 2020).

histories, traditional beliefs and practices, and ways of living to preserve the already compromised local biodiversity that is connected to supporting their everyday lives.

Tata Nicolás sees the defense of Río *Sensunapan* as impacting everyone, but especially Indigenous women. *Ixmati*. During an interview with me in 2019, he stated:

> *El río es sagrado. Es un sitio de memoria histórica y de vida que favorece la pesca social, el cultivo de comida y de tule necesario para las artesanías locales que hacen las mujeres y los niños. Mas importante, el río le da acceso de agua a más de 16,000 miembros de nuestras comunidades. Las mujeres tienen una relación única con el agua. Ellas colectan agua y pasan una buena parte de su día con el agua. Las orillas del río también son el lugar donde nuestros abuelos que fueron masacrados en 1932, descansan. Estamos luchando para mantener y fortificar nuestras conexiones espirituales con la tierra y el agua. El río nos da una vida digna y las mujeres están en el centro de estas luchas. (Entrevistas 2029).*
>
> The river is sacred. It is a site of historic memory and life that favors subsistence fishing, the cultivation of food and tule needed for crafting artisanal activities by women and children[572]. Most importantly, the river gives access to sacred water to 16,000 members of our communities. Women have a unique relationship with water. They gather water and spend a good part of the day with water. The banks of the river is also the place where our grandfathers who were massacred in 1932, are resting. We are struggling to maintain and strengthen our spiritual connections to the land and water; the river gives us a dignified life and women are at the center of this struggle. (Interviews 2019)

Tata Nico points out that the new hydroelectric projects that are being developed in this region are violating the international geo-political arrangements set by the international community regarding Indigenous rights to self-determination and free and informed consent, which were drafted by the United Nations in the 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)[573]. He expands his conversation to explain that the structural violence to which Nawa-Pipil communities have been subjected to for

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[572] Environmental destruction prevents communities from obtaining medicinal plants, food, and building materials (Neuquen 1999 in Montenegro and Stephens 2006: 1866).

[573] It establishes a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity, and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world, elaborating on human rights standards and fundamental freedoms (UN 2007).

centuries is manifested in their perpetual state of "impoverishment" which he differentiates from 'poverty' and connects to the privatization of the land in 1882. He explains:

> *Nosotros no podemos romper el ciclo de empobrecimiento porque está diseñado a mantenernos así. Nosotros no tenemos tierra ni para vivir, ni para cultivarla. Esto nos ha forzado a rentar tierra y a trabajar por unos centavos, cultivando la tierra de otros. Trabajar la tierra es un trabajo pesado. No tenemos acceso a la vivienda digna y al trabajo remunerado, nos hace falta tener acceso al cuidado de salud, a la comida nutritiva, al agua potable, a la educación. Estamos oprimidos por el estado, por las corporaciones, y por gobiernos extranjeros. Estas opresiones se manifiestan cada día de nuestras vidas en las injusticias que vivimos, en la impunidad de las pandillas que nos victimizan, en la corrupción del gobierno, en el desplazamiento y el despojo forzado de nuestras tierras y del agua que continúan, en la explotación de nuestra labor, en las condiciones inhumanas de las prisiones, en el cierre de fronteras, en la detención prolongada y la separación de niños Indígenas de sus familias en las fronteras, en el alto nivel de feminicidio del país… No podemos vivir así. Nadie puede. Hemos sido invisibilizados por tanto tiempo, que ya nadie ve, ni nadie oye lo que nos está pasando. (Entrevistas 2019)*
>
> We cannot break the cycle of impoverishment because it is designed to keep us that way. We neither have land to live on, nor to cultivate. This has forced us to rent land and to work for meager wages cultivating someone else's land. Working on the land is hard. We do not have access to dignified housing and remunerative work, we lack access to health care, to nutritious food and drinking water, to education. We are oppressed by the state, by corporations, and by foreign governments. These oppressions show up every day of our lives in the injustices we have to live with, in the impunity of the gangs that victimize us, in the corruption of government, in the ongoing forced displacement and dispossession of our land and water, in the exploitation of our labor, in the inhumane imprisonment conditions, in the closure of borders, in the prolonged detention and separation of Indigenous children and their families at the borders, in the high feminicide rates... We cannot live like this. Nobody can. We have been invisibilized for so long, that no one sees or hears what is happening to us (Interviews, July 2019).

Tata Nicolás describes this prolonged impoverishment of Nawa-Pipil communities in Kushkatan as, *condiciones de muerte* (conditions of death).[574] His words take on new meaning in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, given that, according to a 2020 report by Amnesty International[575], in moments of global uncertainty and panic, conditions of inequality, racism, sexism, exploitation, extractivism[576], and state repression increase against Indigenous communities. These conditions of death are inscribed directly on the bodies of Indigenous women by the system that exploits them, affirms *Tata* Nicolás. This is supported by the documented high prevalence of malnutrition, parasitic, chronic diseases, disabilities, and the high incidence of premature births and maternal and infant mortality[577] that Indigenous women suffer (Montenegro and Stephens 2006: 1863). *Ixmati.* Similarly, conditions of death[578] in El Salvador contribute to creating a persistent image of Indigenous women as being 'already violated' or 'violable' (Simpson 2016), 'disposable,' 'lacking social worth,' 'abandoned' as in 'abandoned land' (Fuentes 2023). Yet, these conditions of death attempt to dislocate everything that Indigenous women do to resist and survive, including their refusal to disappear. In this context, *Tata* Nicolás states, "*el empobrecimiento en que vivimos es otra forma de matarnos, es simplemente un genocidio lento y silencioso que continúa"* ("The impoverishment in which we live is another way of killing us, it is simply a slow and silent genocide that continues"). The diversity of experiences of violence that women experience based on their unique positionalities in Salvadoran society includes state biopower, which systematic lets women live or die[579] by the deplorable material conditions in which they are forced to live and the inadequate resources they are given access to.

Tata Nicolás explains that the conditions of death in El Salvador for Indigenous women have become more complex since the COVID-19 pandemic surged in 2020, and the Bukele administration's declaration of a state of exception in March of 2022[580]. To

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[574] Recent data suggest that Indigenous peoples remain some of the most marginalized in every country in the Western hemisphere due to the severe effects of European invasion, which persists (Montenegro & Stephens 2006: 1859), which I juxtapose to Achille Mbembe's notions of viscerality/necropolitics (2019).
[575] Amnesty International (2020); Valencia and Sánchez (2020).
[576] I use the following definition of extractivism for this study: "Extraction isn't just about mining and drilling, it's a mindset – it's an approach to nature, to ideas, to people" (Simpson and Klein 2017).
[577] Public Health Studies suggest that in most Latin American countries Indigenous peoples have higher rates of mortality and morbidity than their non-Indigenous counterparts. In some cases, Indigeneity can be a proxy
indicator of poverty against which to measure health disparities (Montenegro & Stephens 2006: 1863).
[578] Native American scholar Gerald Vizenor calls health indicators "terminal creeds" (1990), which he states, tend to naturalize the high rates of morbidity and mortality in Indigenous communities and entrap Indigenous peoples into personifying state narratives of 'high-risk' categories of people that must be surveilled by the state and 'saved' from themselves, without the state attempting to understand and change the root causes of the socio-historical and economic conditions that have contributed to their health disparities.
[579] See Foucault (1990).
[580] As of February of 2023, the state of exception has resulted in the forced and indefinite detention of an estimated 60-70,000 women and men, under suspicion of being affiliated with gangs. Those detained do not have access to proper legal defense and human rights organizations are voicing concerns about significant human rights violations (Silva Ávalos 2023).

make meaning of these complexities, *Tata* Fidel says that the one who provides the labor of love, care, and healing for the families is the Indigenous woman. *Ixmati*. She prepares the *masa* for the *tortillas* and cooks the beans for her family's daily sustenance at sunrise, walking long distances in suffocating humidity and heat, to fetch water on her head; she breastfeeds her children even when her body's hunger pangs make it difficult to produce milk and nurse, while men traditionally work the fields. *Ixmati.* He adds that Indigenous women's bodies are overwhelmed by the system, every day by the poverty, discrimination, and marginalization they face. Often alone, she must find ways to stay strong and be able to sustain her family's needs without meeting her own needs. *Tata* Nicolás explains that, to make matters worse, protecting the land and water are issues that cannot wait and that also fall on the shoulders of women. As a result, Indigenous women are being fragmented in many different directions to preserve their families, their lives, the land, water. Their body becomes a sacrificial ground in so many ways. *Ixmati.*

When Indigenous elders become sick and die in Kushkatan, it is Indigenous women who bear the burden of caring for the sick and for the dead. As elders die, the Nawat-Pipil language -- which is currently classified as a critically endangered language[581] -- is rendered a little more silent each day. The ancestral knowledges within the Nawat-Pipil language, those ontological openings that connect Indigenous communities' pasts to their futures, also die with them. *Ixmati.* Through the death of elders in the community, Nawa-Pipil youth are dispossessed from a rich cultural inheritance that has preserved ancestral ways of knowing, thinking, and being in the world for centuries. These knowledges have been passed through the ingenuity of women, who persist teaching the language in the intimacy of the home, despite ethnocidal conditions that have threatened their lives simply for speaking a Native tongue. *Ixmati*. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated death and dying among Indigenous communities, who have had to endure it alone, without much help from the government. When Indigenous children die, Indigenous alterities and futurities also die, and the promise that another world is possible with them and for them dissipates. It is in moments of crisis, which are often, that Indigenous communities in Kushkatan rely on women to survive. *Ixmati*.

Yet, Indigenous women's bodies are subjected to demands for authenticity by everyone. These demands rest on them being able to wear their traditional vestments, which are no longer affordable to them. And when they do, they are deemed not truly Indigenous for they may lack the ability to speak their native languages fluently. Wearing their traditional vestments and speaking a Native tongue also function for the modern/colonial gender system, to differentiate Indigenous women from other women, and highlight their otherness, for which they are discriminated against and called pejorative names. For instance, *Nantzin* Noemy, a spiritual guide who resides in Salvador, often relates that she is subjected to name-calling, mockery, and questioning in the streets because she wears a *refajo* and a *huipil* to work. She is a teacher. On her way to work, she states that she is often called "*La india María*" mostly by men, who do so to ridicule her[582]. She says that often, she ignores these tauntings, but that sometimes she

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[581] According to the Endangered Languages Project. Cambell; King; Lemus (2014).

[582] *La India María* is the name of a popular Mexican comedy of the 1970s, which portrays the life of an Indigenous woman who migrates to the city in search of work, facing many challenges. While some critics

tells them firmly: "No, soy la India Noemy" (No, I am Noemy the Indian). *Nantzin* Antonia Ramírez, an elderly cultural consultant from Witzapan relates in detail her experiences with racism, genderism, classism, discrimination, and marginalization in Chapter 1 of this study, through her empowering Nahua songs. Her recollections of her everyday experiences with racism and discrimination confront the state of impoverishment and exploitation in which she has had to live for years, which she relates directly to the lack of opportunities she had as an Indigenous girl and woman. Nantzin Anastasia López López, another Witzapan cultural consultant, also sings in Nawat-Pipil to denounce the injustices she has suffered because of her Indigenous ethnicity, gender, and class. *Ixmati.*

Positioned against these and other structural violences, I witnessed how several Indigenous women in Western Kushkatan gathered around the sacred fire in San Ramón or Nawitzalku to share their ancestral community practices, which they define as their political position to think about the world where they want to live, free from abuse and oppression, exploitation, disease, and death. *Ixmati.* During the time I spent in El Salvador in 2019, I was invited to participate in ceremonies every other week, for several months, by *Tata* Fidel and *Tata* Nicolás. It is in these intimate spaces on remote mountain tops that I witnessed the resistance and survivance of Nawa-Pipil men and women, through their storytelling and traditional practices that keep their cosmovision alive. These moments of resistance and survivance were marked by a practice of gratitude and offerings, prayer, ancestral teachings, and the intensity of energies revealed around the sacred fire. No two ceremonies were alike.

In these circles, the men and women who attended shared information about themselves and about their ancestral beliefs with a spiritual resolve that, they say, is in the shadows, the stones, the wind, the leaves, the land, their songs. Memories of the past came alive around the sacred fire: "*Las abuelas y abuelos estaban presentes en las energías del sagrado fuego"* ("Our grandfathers and grandmothers were present in the energies of the sacred fire") says *Tata* Fidel. *Ixmati.* "*Sus nombres fueron llamados y vueltos a llamar, y las palabras que ellas/ellos decían, hoy las dicen otros, y las historias que ellas/ellos repetían, hoy las repiten otros"* ("Their names were called and recalled, and the words they used to say, now others are saying, and the stories they repeated, others are now repeating"). *Ixmati*. Only a few times, there was complete silence, which the *Tatas* instructed us to listen to attentively, for its messages.

Among the many conversations that came up in these circles and in my interviews in Witzapan, I highlight traces of ancestral community practices that the women shared and that shed light on their resistance and survivance, articulating a refusal to domination and victimization. *Ixmati.* These conversations are especially important in the context of gang-related killings and disappearances taking place in the neighboring villages and hamlets. I note here that there were several instances when the young men would not attend mountain top ceremonies, because of recent killings, but the women would be there. These are the words spoken by Nawa-Pipil women in the spaces of death of Kushkatan, who – out of fear-- asked to not be named: *"La ceremonia es un espacio de vida que es como el eje de las luchas de cualquier mujer, en cualquier parte del planeta*

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state that the show confronts racism, classism, genderism, others believe that it bluntly reproduces the violences of colonialism against Indigenous women.

que se levanta para proteger la vida" (Ceremony is a space of life that centers the struggles of any woman, in any part of this planet, who rises up to protect life). *Ixmati*. She adds, "*Cuando nos revelamos ante el sagrado fuego (acercando sus manos hacia su corazón), proponemos soluciones comunitarias contra todo lo que amenaza y daña nuestros cuerpos"* (when we reveal ourselves in the realm of the sacred fire (moving her hands towards her heart), we propose community solutions against anything that is threatening to harm our bodies). *Ixmati.* Another woman states:

> *Cuando el sistema oprime y viola a hombres, mujeres, a los de dos-espíritus (comunidad 2SLGBTQ +), a la madre tierra, sin salvar a nadie o a nada de su paso, estas opresiones son opresiones coloniales que fueron aprendidas en los cuerpos de mis abuelas. Para no reproducirlas en los cuerpos de nuestras hijas, necesitamos re-posicionar nuestras luchas contra el sistema, como luchas contra nuestro colonialismo interno y des-aprender todo lo que los europeos nos enseñaron. Ixmati.*
>
> When the system oppresses and violates men, women, the two-spirit (2SLGBTQ + community), our Mother Earth, without sparing anyone or anything from its path, these oppressions
> are colonial oppressions, and they were learned on the bodies of my grandmothers. To not reproduce them on our daughters bodies, we need to re-position our struggles against the system, as struggles against our own internal colonialism and un-learn everything that they (Europeans) taught us.

A third woman adds: "*La explotación en que vivimos es generada por el capitalismo, pero viene más que todo de los hombres, que mantienen al capitalismo explotando nuestros cuerpos… mi labor malpagada beneficia a las corporaciones, al capitalismo, a los ladinos*" (The exploitation we live under is generated by capitalism, but comes mostly from men, who are sustaining capitalism on our bodies… my underpaid labor benefits corporations, capitalism, and ladino men). *Ixmati.*

Another woman adds:

> *El racismo y la discriminación también son aprendidos en los cuerpos de las mujeres Indígenas porque son los cuerpos con menos valor. El racismo privilegia a un cuerpo blanco más que a un cuerpo Indígena, y la explotación de nuestra Madre Tierra también es lograda con los cuerpos Indígenas; nosotros damos a luz, criamos a nuestros niños y a los niños de nuestras patronas; cocinamos, molemos el maíz, hacemos tortillas, lavamos la ropa, volvemos a cocinar, y todavía trabajamos un poco más fuera de casa… todo se logra con mi labor, todo se extrae de mi cuerpo y del cuerpo de nuestra Madre Tierra, para que otros vivan bien. Ixmati.*

> Racism and discrimination are also learned on the bodies of Indigenous women, since the most unvalued body is the body of an Indigenous woman. Racism privileges a white body, more than an Indigenous body, and the exploitation of Mother Earth is also sustained on an Indigenous woman's body – we give birth, raise our children and the children of our bosses, we cook, grind the corn, make tortillas, wash clothes, cook again, and still work some more outside the home… everything is sustained on my labor, everything is extracted from my body and from our Mother Earth, for others to live well.

She sighs, stopping for a moment to let her thoughts fill the air. A final thought is offered:

> *Una mujer Indígena que es oprimida tiene más opresiones que el más oprimido de los hombres, aunque nosotros compartamos la vida dentro del mismo sistema de opresiones, la mujer sufre doble porque somos oprimidas primero, porque somos Indígenas y segundo, por que somos mujeres. Ixmati.*
>
> An oppressed Indigenous woman has more oppressions than the most oppressed Indigenous man, although we both share life within the same system of oppressions, the woman suffers doubly since we are oppressed, first, because we are Indigenous and second because we are women.

The women clap and cheer. One of the *Tatas* says:

> *Las opresiones del sistema son justificadas en los cuerpos de la mujer Indígena. La cultura del silencio se aprende en casa, cuando la mujer se calla para que su compañero hable. Por eso, nuestras luchas deben ser contra un sistema explotador y extractivista, racista y patriarcal que oprime a las mujeres Indígenas, pero que también oprime a los hombres. Ixmati.*
>
> The oppressions of the system, are justified on Indigenous women's bodies. The culture of silence is learned at home, when the woman is silent so that her partner can speak. Therefore, our struggles should be against an exploitative and extractivist, racist, and patriarchal system that oppresses women, but it also oppresses Indigenous men (Interviews

2019).

Several months later, Nawa-Pipil women from the San Ramón mountains gathered with other women in a very different space, a cyberspace, to confront the COVID-19 pandemic. The questions that they raised were geared towards the future, in the context of a much more constrained world that forced them to keep their distance from each other, and to be afraid of one another, while still carrying their *compromiso* as *guías espirituales*. In this space, they state:

> *Aquí estamos, luchando por sobrevivir. Las cosas son más difíciles estos días. Seguimos siendo discriminadas y vistas como inferiores por cómo nos vestimos, cómo hablamos, cómo nos vemos. Pero mi primera preocupación es sacar adelante a mis hijos y a mi comunidad. Hoy estoy aquí, luchando por mi Madrecita Tierra y con sus bendiciones y la guía de mis abuelas, seguiré en la lucha. Ixmati.*
>
> Here we are, struggling to survive. Things are harder these days. We are always discriminated and seen as lesser beings because of how we dress, how we speak, how we look. But my first concern is to carry forward my children and my community. I am here today, fighting for Mother Earth and with the blessings and guidance from my grandmothers, I will continue in the struggle.

There is silence in the space for a moment. She resumes her thoughts with a "*Pues, aquí estamos caminando juntas en esta lucha*" (Well, here we are walking together in the struggle). *Ixmati.* Another woman follows without hesitation:

> *Nosotras llevamos la espiritualidad y la sabiduría de nuestras abuelas Bartolina Cisa, Prudencia Ayala, y Nana Sabina en nuestros corazones y eso es un gran compromiso. No vamos a ser las que fallen en honrarlas. Somos mujeres de medicina y no llevamos, ni hablamos de odio contra ningún hombre o contra nadie, creemos en la dualidad, sabemos que el planeta está en crisis. Necesitamos tanto de la una, como de la otra para sobrevivir estas luchas y necesitamos decolonizarnos y reconocer quienes somos… y pensar desde nuestros corazones para hacer este tipo trabajo. Ixmati.*
>
> We [women] carry the spirituality and wisdom of our grandmothers Bartolina Cisa, Prudencia Ayala y Nana Sabina within our hearts, and that's a big *compromiso*. We cannot be the ones who fail to honor them. We are *mujeres de medicina* and we do not carry or speak of hatred against men or anyone, we believe in duality, and we also know

> that the planet is in crisis. We need each other to make it in this struggle, and we need to decolonize ourselves and recognize who we are… and think from our hearts to do this.

A woman with a red head cover introduces herself briefly and with a big smile and an energetic voice she states: "¡*Presente*! *con el cuidado y la protección de mis abuelas*" (Present! With the care and protection of my grandmothers). *Ixmati*. There is silence. The oldest woman online joins in, welcoming everyone and offering an invocation prayer. She starts by calling in the names of her ancestors to the room, while asserting:

> *El COVID-19 es una plataforma que afila la condición de vulnerabilidad de las mujeres Indígenas. Estamos aquí para afirmar un espacio para nosotras y nuestras comunidades en el mundo, y lo hacemos con el espíritu de justicia en un espacio donde de comparten diferentes ideas, siempre con nuestros ojos hacia el futuro y nuestros corazones en el pasado. Queremos justicia, queremos cambio. ¿Cómo queremos que el fruto de nuestra labor, que hacemos con nuestros cuerpos, circule? ¿Tendrán nuestros hijos un futuro? ¿Qué tipo de futuro nos espera en un contexto donde vivimos la vida en espacios de muerte por esta pandemia y por la realidad nacional? Umeteot, Umeteot, Umeteot. Ixmati.*
>
> COVID-19 is a platform that sharpens the condition of vulnerability of Indigenous women. We are here to affirm a space for Indigenous women, in our communities, and in the world, and we do so in the spirit of justice in a space where we share different ideas, always with our eyes toward the future and our hearts in the past. We want justice, we want change. How do we want the fruit of our labor that we create with our bodies, to circulate? Will our children have a future? What kind of future awaits us in the context of living life within the spaces of death of this pandemic and our national realities? Umeteot, umeteot, umeteol. *Ixmati.*
> (Zoom event September 2020).

To answer these questions about their future, Indigenous women urge us to frame the colonial/modern gender system and heteropatriarchy as a regime of death that has been killing Indigenous women and men from hunger, disease, forced displacement and dispossession, rape, and war for centuries. And now, with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, Indigenous women and men see the system as killing them by robbing them of the sacred air they need to breathe. *Ixmati.* Yet, Indigenous women remind us that they share the same world with so many of us but, they live in very different conditions,

prompting us to answer the reasons for our indifference to their suffering. As I listen to Indigenous women from various organizations share their perspectives in sacred circles and witness their voices resonate within the realms of cyberspace, I notice that the women always conjure up the presence of their ancestors and fill the space with a calming strength, in stark juxtaposition to the landscape of *de-esperanza* described earlier and the harsh realities that surround them in modern/colonial spaces. Without hesitation, they highlight their messages about *compromiso*, share their collective solutions, and sacred offerings to dismantle the social, political, economic, and spiritual problems that they are confronted with, daily. They envision conditions of possibility for the children of their children, a different reality from the historical memory of their grandmothers and grandfathers, invoking the critical double gaze of *Kab'awil* to connect to multiple dimensions and ground themselves in the advice of their elders to envision a future for their children, reminding us that women struggles are not separate from men's struggles because we all share this planet.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown through Nawat-Pipil myhto-poetics and epistemologies of lifeworlds alternatives readings to the deathworlds that the Spanish colonization imposed through the colonial/modern gender system in the aftermath of the 1932 Matanza, the 1980s war, and the new forms of war of the postwar years in El Salvador. These ancestral oral/aural traditions shed light on the courageous resistance and survivance of Nawa-Pipil women and men who have dared to keep the language alive safeguarding a vibrant, resonant philosophy that affirms women's sacred connections to the universe. These Indigenous perspectives are the living histories of our abuelos and abuelas and they counter the violences of the West and make possible conditions of possibility for imagining a decolonized future. By highlighting how ancient systems of knowledge about agriculture and astronomy and the sacred are grounded on the grammar of the body and our concrete lived experiences, the Nawat-Pipil expounds abstract thought and makes visible an Indigenous philosophy that highlights our inter-relatedness to the sacred.

Given the socio-historical conditions of perpetual war in the Kushkatan territories for the last five hundred years, I offer that the Nawa-Pipil language and its mythopoetic oral/aural tradition are living cultural legacies that by the mere fact of being here confront, subvert, and resist European colonization and its violent impositions. When we listen to our elders tell their ancestral sacred stories, through younger generations, they create ontological openings to the past that endow us with hope for Indigenous futures, bestowing us a *Kab'awilian* moment in time and space that creates decolonial spaces where the recognition of the other – *ixmati* – is possible.

By showing that pre-colonial Nawa-Pipil notions of womanhood are conceptualized within the realm of sacred energies that create life, through the *Nanahuatzin* myth of creation, and considering that the Nawat-Pipil language does not have equivalent words to European languages to delimit gender, I posit that Indigenous knowledges unsettle European understandings of the colonial/modern gender system that are connected to ideas of race, gender, sex, class, nationality, etc. imposed through colonization.

While *Nanahuatzin* is the story of a woman whose head is separated from her body to prepare for birthing life to *ne tepewas* (the lords of the rain, who discover maize 10,000 years ago and engineer its cultivation through their knowledges of water and the movement of the stars), the primordial dismemberment of this woman's head, is a metaphor for creating sacred life. This Indigenous metaphor likens human fertility to the process of sowing the land describing the fragmentation of [the body of] a woman who gives birth to a child to the fragmentation of a cob into many kernels. Out of one intact [primordial] body, another one or many other ones emerge(s). Life and its potential for continuing is the culmination of this fragmentation process. Giving birth is a sacred process conceived similarly to sowing the land, for the cultivation of maize brought nourishment to ancient societies and radically transformed life. *Tata* Fidel and *Tata* Nicolás attest to agricultural practices through Nahua-Pipil epistemologies of *ne gilitana ne i yesiu ne tal* (the blood of the land) and affirm that re-membering ancient stories of creation and living by the precepts of a culture of sacrifice and gratitude -- through ceremony and the sacred fire -- is very important for Nawa-Pipil communities in El Salvador, as these practices not only honor Indigenous cultural traditions, but also Indigenous futurities.

In this way, the re-telling of *Nanahuatzin* through *Nusihuapiltzin* by a group of young women writers and performers who identify as Afro-Indigenous descendants -- a K*ab'awilian* embodiment of two life forces from opposite sides of the planet that through feminist solidarities fiercely resist European oppression -- is an empowering discourse from below that troubles the colonial logics of femi(ni)cide. By telling the story of *Nanahuatzin* through *K'abawilian* "gender and genre," *Nusihuapiltzin* depicts women as healers and intellectuals who speak and write back to empire in their Indigenous tongue. *Las Tres Prietas'* re-telling of a sacred ancient story of creation, dismantle the Western idea that any kind of physical mutilation that would have taken place in the *Nanahuatzin* story, is not associated with Indigenous men beheading Indigenous women's bodies. Instead, they assert that the fragmentation of the woman's body in *Nanahuatzin*, is about a subject in control of her body and sexuality, and her creative energies that are free from men's control. Most importantly, the separation of the woman's head from her body that adheres to the man's body, honors the principles of duality, complementarity, and it embodies Indigenous notions of the double-gaze. By the younger generation telling a story of *los más viejos* and centering gender, *Las Tres Prietas* create spaces of life that transform the body from a spatialized, sexualized, racialized topography to a boundless corporeality that charts its destiny in a different writing, a woman's autonomy to defend her body-as territory, as land against the colonial violences that continue to occur.

The testimonies of *Tata* Fidel and *Tata* Nicolás have shown that the alarming number of racialized and sexualized women and girls who are murdered in abhorrent, shocking ways by racialized men, with impunity of the Salvadoran state, serve as a continuity of the larger settler colonial project in Central America, which seeks to eliminate the biological threats to the nation to extract the land and fulfill the endless colonial capitalism needs to consume it all. Both Nawa-Pipil elders bear witness to the genocidal policies of 1882 that effected land dispossession from Indigenous communities through legal violence, and of the subsequent atrocities committed by government forces in 1932, and thereafter. Indigenous women's testimonies, such as that of María Tula and

others who chose to remain anonymous, also attest to the conditions of death in El Salvador, in which they are forced to live every day. Most importantly, they state with conviction what they must survive and unambiguously center the lives of their children and the well-being of the planet as the reasons for their *compromiso* to keep defending their bodies-as territory and as land in Kushkatan. These feminist decolonial claims restore ancestral notions of lifeworlds as seen in the mytho-poetics of Nawat-Pipil stories.

The brutal murder of Carla Ayala in 2017 shattered her, causing irreparable damage to her body and to her dignity as a woman, as a human being. It shattered her right to life, to being alive in the company of her loved ones. It shattered her right to be safe from violence and abuse. It shattered her right to spend precious time with her mother, who was always by side and bravely accompanied her to her graveside, as any loving mother would gently accompany her child to sleep. It shattered her right to be a wife, a mother for her two sons, who would now grow up without her presence in their lives. It shuttered her loved ones and her community's right to be with her through the seasons year after year, by senselessly taking her away to the chasm of colonial deathworlds. Forever.

"Que este hecho no quede impune" (that this killing does not go unpunished).[583]

The poem song below was written at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic by a Nawa-Pipil descendant in diaspora, and it is dedicated to all Indigenous women where they are.

In Shuchit in Kwikat: Siwat **[584]**
(*Shuchitzin pal Sinti* 2020)

Tikmatiwit tiejekat wan tikwikatiwit takwikat tuyulishkalyu, taketzalis wan sentaltaishkejketzalis, iwan ne itajpal ne shupan ejekat pal ujujti tik shijshikipil shijshiwit

Tikmatiwit titet wan tikwikatiwit tik tujtukechtan, ne ieteka ne tamumutilis wan ne takaktuk intaelnamikilis ne ijinnoya ne tujtunoya…

Tikmatiwit tiapan wan tikajkawtiwit ma ne tamatilis ka ikman mutalu iwan ne itatzutzunalis ne wejwewet tik ne uk miktan ne tujtuyulmekaw.

Tikmatiwit tital wan tikmakatiwit iyulkwilis ne shinach ka an shuchikisa ka innijtik ne nejneshti wan ka yawi kimaka tajtakil iwan ne iajsilis ne ajachtu ajawetzilis.

Tisiwat katka

Tisiwat

Tiutisiwat senpa

Flor y Canto: Mujer
(Florecita de Maíz 2020)

Hemos sabido ser viento y llevado cantando identidad, lengua y cosmovisión, con fuerza de huracán por rumbos milenarios …

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[583] Words in a letter from Carla Ayala's mother, María Isabel Palacios, to the President of the Republic of El Salvador, Salvador Sánchez-Cerén, dated San Salvador, January 18, 2018 (Barrera).

[584] Translation to Nawat-Pipil by Cultural Consultant Tajtzin Juan Valentín Ramírez, Witzapan, 2023.

Hemos sabido ser piedra y cargado en nuestros hombros, el peso del terror y la memoria silenciada de las abuelas de nuestras abuelas…

Hemos sabido ser río y dejado que el conocimiento ancestral fluya al ritmo de tambores, desde lo más profundo de nuestras venas…

Hemos sabido ser tierra y dado vida a la semilla que hoy florece entre cenizas y que dará frutos con la llegada de las primeras lluvias …

Fuimos mujer

Somos mujer

Seguiremos siéndolo

Conclusion

With *la voluntad de mis abuelos and abuelas* (the will of my ancestors), the guidance of modern-day *tajtamachtiani* (los que saben/those who know) – *los tatas y las nanas* -- and the power of Nawa-Pipil ancestral knowledges that emanate from a millenary language, in this dissertation, I have endeavored to create an anti-colonial space to respond to the violences of the modern/colonial epistemicide in Kushkatan, that have perdured close to five centuries. Focusing on the political and discursive recovery of Indigenous critical theory from below, through various forms of 'poetic of embodiments' such as music, song, poetry, performance, agriculture, and ceremony, this incomplete project about Nawa-Pipil cultural and spiritual repertoires bears witness to a history of Indigenous resistance, resilience, and resurgence in El Salvador that is poised to persist through time and space. As such, this study remains an open invitation for decolonial and anti-colonial scholars to continue carving spaces for the Nawat-Pipil canon to transcend the limitations imposed by European and North American modernity.

As a Central American feminist of color who survived war and was forced to migrate north and separate from my family, at an early age, I rely on border thinking and my immigrant consciousness to feel, think, and reflect with my heart, about the durable processes of colonization in 'the field'/my home, that have affected my life, personally and politically. Therefore, throughout this dissertation, I have centered a *Kab'awilian* methodology or Indigenous 'double gaze' and *ojo de venado* (deer's eye) to help me re-read with the eyes, ears, and heart of the one who saw the past (*yultaketzalis*), re-member past traumatic events of the dead (*ilnamiki*), re-cognize *the Other* (*ixmati*), and make meaning of present conditions in El Salvador, through these poetic embodiments in the Nawat-Pipil language and its stories. In this light, I have shown how this study makes an important contribution to Central American Studies, Indigenous Studies/literature, culture, and languages, Nawa-Pipil philosophies as a subfield of Philosophy, Oral History, Memory Studies, Immigration Studies, and Gender and Sexuality Studies and why it is important to collectively recover – with the knowledge keepers of the Nawa-Pipil canon -- Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world that our ancestors intended to pass on.

In tracing the work that I have done in these past chapters, I highlighted how Indigenous perspectivism (de Castro 1998) is part of Nawa-Pipil stories, which are filled with human, plant, animal, spirits, and other beings that live in an interrelated world and therefore, perceive each other differently to how we perceived them. In this Indigenous conception of the world, human culture is not universal to other beings in the world, but humanity is a required condition of all beings, which makes Indigenous myths, radically different from Western paradigms. Thus, the Nawa-Pipil stories that I have shared in these past chapters, such as *Miktan* and *Nanahuatzin*, function as a critique of European and North American modernity from below, that transcends the limitations of borderized spatialities and disconnected temporalities of epistemicide.

Further, in these chapters, I have utilized the Nawat-Pipil and Nahuatl languages to show that we can recover and re-situate what is neither visible, nor audible to the European and North American canon, through our mother tongue, as Indigenous languages are trans-territorial sites where the movement of Indigenous poems, songs, theatrical performances, and stories is possible across borders and Indigenous voices can

be seen and heard with the heart, from anywhere. Thus, knowledges I have utilized come from the collective theorizing and the perspectivism of the every-day nanas and *tatas* who tell these stories in Kushkatan. As humble as they may appear, they come to us from a rich and ancient literary corpus and as such, they are recovering critical Indigenous theory through memory-making, place-making, and countermapping the geographies of the West, with the stories of the elders. In this light, my dissertation is a convergence of three case studies that the *tatas and the nanas* in Kushkatan highlighted to me, as relevant in their everyday lives and that lend themselves to being re-read through Indigenous epistemologies to help us understand that there are alternative ways of understanding the world.

In Chapter 1, the focus of this study is on a close reading of the state of the Nawat-Pipil language through the analysis of three contemporary Nawat-Pipil songs in the context of biopolitics and neoliberalism, through a theoretical framework of the coloniality of power (Quijano 2000). Using *testimonio*, critical ethnographic methods, Indigenous epistemologies of *yultaketzalis*, and the sacred energies of *ejekat* (aire/air), I analyzed three Indigenous a cappella songs written and performed by *Nantzin* Antonia Ramírez (*metzas nawat* (*la india pipil* or the Pipil Indian woman), *ne wijwitzapanchin* (*los mingueñitos* or the little people from Witzapan), and *ne nawat suchikisa* (*el náhuat florece* or Nawat flourishes). I relied on my positionality as an Indigenous descendant from *Kushkatan* and my Nawat-Pipil skills to critically see and hear through *yultaketzalis,* the sonority of Nantzin Antonia's political and poetic discourses.

My theoretical and literary analyses of the Nawa-Pipil songs show that the lyrics of her songs expose multiple and sedimented layers of state violence perpetrated against Indigenous communities, and simultaneously, they make audible what for decades has been deemed as 'silence' or as 'noise' by the biopolitical and neoliberal acoustics of 'multiculturalism' in contemporary El Salvador.

Further, through Indigenous soundings*,* Nawat-Pipil women in Witzapan are creating alternative spaces that visibilize them and foreground Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies that affirm spaces of resistance to challenges the limitations imposed by the biopolitics of the state, and the logics of neoliberalism. These power structures, seek to resonate "difference" and re-center European colonial ideals of race and gender in the contemporary socio-cultural and political imaginaries of the Salvadoran nation. Despite the precarity of the Nawat-Pipil language today, Nawa-Pipil women are embodying Indigenous soundworlds and continuing to re-affirm Native presence in the *Kuhskatan* territories and beyond, transmitting the life of a language deemed 'moribund', in the aftermath of the 1932 Matanza, which has curative powers for Indigenous survivors as well as for the nation. When the tatas and the nanas are asked for their feelings about being able to openly sing in Nawat-Pipil, without fearing for their lives, they respond with a big smile and state "*ne nawat nemi yultuk*" (the Nawat languages lives").

In chapter 2 of this dissertation, I traced the forced migratory journey to the U.S. of a Salvadoran family who experienced precarity in their daily lives. I did so, utilizing newspaper reports. Through the theory of the coloniality of migration (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2015), I exposed the connections between the media, racial capitalism, and the asylum-migration policies of the U. S. that, through the Steinle case (2015), re-activated a specific conjuncture of racism in the 2016 presidential elections, resulting in harsher

migration controls that two years later, placed the family in the Rio Grande's water resulting in the father and her infant daughters' death. I conducted an Indigenous reading of their tragic drowning, using three literary texts: *Miktan* (precolonial, in Nawat-Pipil), and two poems, *Michcuicatl* (colonial, in Nahuatl), and D*ear Little One* (contemporaneous, in English). Although each of these texts is situated in distant geographies and seemingly disconnected temporalities, together, they allowed me to understand what it means to drown from an Indigenous perspective, at various modern/colonial spatialities and temporalities, which highlighted the lethality and deathworlds of forced migration in the unceded, occupied Mesoamerican territories. Utilizing epistemologies of *ilnamiki* and *ojo de venado*, and the sacred elements of *at* (water) and *tal* (land), my theoretical and literary analyses of the close readings, show that Nawa-Pipil communities and their descendants in *Kushkatan* hold onto ancient praxes of *seeing the present with the eyes of the past (ilnamiki) con ojo de venado*, to grapple with the violences of the colonial wound that are not over and that have not healed. By juxtaposing the polyvocal intertextual perspectives of two ancient Nawa texts, one pre-colonial, written in Nawat-Pipil, and another one written during colonial times in Nahuatl, with a contemporary poem written in English by an Indigenous descendant living in the U. S. diaspora, I highlighted important connections to locate the energy of living words of our storytellers, from *Kushkatan* to *Aztlan*, to help us re-envision a more humane hereafter.

In this chapter, I analyzed the 2017 brutal murder and disappearance of policewoman, Carla Ayala, by several male police officers, through newspaper reports and the Nawat-Pipil myth of *Nanahuatzin.* This myth of creation tells the story of a woman in fragments, whose sacred relationship with the land makes it possible for her head to give birth to maize and the start of agriculture, creating an exponential source of life for humanity's benefit that has lasted through time immemorial. This myth of creation is retold through a modern-day play titled, *Nusihuapiltzin,* which responds to the pain caused by femicide in modern-day El Salvador. I unpacked the concept of femicide utilizing the coloniality of gender (Lugones 2007), to shed light on the violences of the modern/colonial gender system that has resulted in El Salvador having one of the worst feminicide rates in the Western hemisphere, in contemporary times.

In my theoretical and literary analyses of the Ayala case, I have shown that the heinous killing of a policewoman by her fellow policemen and the ensuing disappearance of her body function as a signifier of the unrestrained excesses of the modern/colonial gender system in El Salvador and I propose that the systematic disavowals of a female body's right to full personhood reveal intimate connections with the colonial logics of deathworlds, for these violences are written on the territory and on the bodies of women. The metatextual reading of *Nanahuatzin* through the play *Nusihuapiltzin* sheds light on the centrality of the human body in the production of knowledge in the Nawat-Pipil language, highlighting that lived experiences manifest into agricultural and astronomical knowledges to explain the first appearance of maize and the sacred connections between the body of a woman and the cosmos. These connections were of high significance in the Mesoamerican region as shown through various mythopoetic stories of creation, which were expressed in the tradition of the ball game. Further, by juxtaposing Nawat-Pipil conceptions of womanhood explained by epistemologies of *ne gitilana iyesiu ne tal* (the

blood of the land), *ixmati* (recognition of the other), *ojo de venado*, to make meaning of Indigenous lifeworlds, with the *testimonio* of Indigenous women and men about ceremony, the sacred fire, and agricultural practices and celebrations, I strived to document how Indigenous knowledge systems are powerful decolonial approaches that are responding to the epistemicide of modernity that continues to this day. These sacred ancestral understandings of the origins of life, as diverse as they may be in various Mesoamerican regions, continue to be foundational to Indigenous women's contemporary claims of body and territory. They, signal conditions of possibility for conceiving new worlds, where women and girls' futurities are uninterrupted by the violences of the West.

In addition to theorizing the harsh realities of modern-day life in El Salvador through Indigenous epistemologies, poetry, songs, plays, memory and place-making, countermapping and storytelling, I have positioned each of these case studies to function as sites to interrogate the coloniality of power (Quijano 2000) and the coloniality of being (Maldonado Torres 2007), through the ongoing processes of race-formation in El Salvador. This is especially important to deliberate because both the oppressors and the oppressed in all case studies, may generally appear similar, with a limited hierarchy of power based on skin color. What emerges from these literary and theoretical analyses, although they are not specifically intended to focus on analyzing racial and ethnic dynamics, is an ambiguous process of identity-formation that is resisting the dominant narrative of mestizaje and crafting a more nuanced Salvadoran identity that is informed by the trans-territorial and trans-national nature of forced migrations of Salvadoran families at the outset of the 1980s war, and in the aftermath of the neoliberal policies adopted in the region following the 1992 Peace Accords. In addition to these global forces, the constitutional recognition of Indigenous people in 2014, by the government of El Salvador, created a multicultural society that did not exist since around La Matanza of 1932, which Almeida (2008) refers to as a "holdover" period, which would allow for a more robust civic engagement, particularly, among younger generations of Salvadorans -- at home and abroad – who may be critically interrogating their racial/ethnic origins and cultural roots, and questioning the impact of ethnocide/epistemicide in El Salvador, at a personal and at a political level, to shed light on their internalized oppressions.

Further, these case studies show that there is a 'glocal' dynamism taking place in the territories of El Salvador and wherever Salvadorans reside around the world, that is transforming how Salvadorans identify ourselves. The question of who can claim an Indigenous identity, who is a mestizo/a, cannot be answered in this study. More research needs to be done to better understand how these biopolitical structures of power imbedded in neoliberal governmentality, may be creating opportunities for Indigeneity to become a strategic cultural, political, transnational, spiritual, and linguistic identity, etc. that can one day become a salient Salvadoran identity. The impact of these shifts on the politics of mestizaje and its structures of power remain to be understood, as not every Salvadoran is nowadays identifying as mestizo based on emerging histories and social movements across the hemisphere that are mobilizing transnational solidarities and evidencing what has been attempted to be destroyed, by the violences of modernity.

Ultimately, an important finding of this dissertation is the curative power of the Nawat-Pipil language being spoken publicly for the first time in many decades, following the 1932 ethnocide. For Indigenous communities, this is especially important to witness,

because the mother tongue has been an intended target of the epistemicide of modernity that took place in this region of Mesoamerica. For instance, by being able to sing in Nawat, the elders of Witzapan become alive, and their faces fill with smiles and pride. Nantzin Antonia said once that there is power in naming, and so we did. By countermapping the geographies of the West, with Nawat toponymics safeguarded in the historical memory of the community, we started a collective project of reconstructing community and reclaiming Indigenous presence in the land, which affirms Indigenous place-making and a sense of belonging. One young man who was learning about toponymics told me in awe, "I never paid attention to this, but this is truly a blueprint of my inheritance" (Fieldnotes 2019).

Documenting ceremony, while a very sensitive topic, the *tatas* who requested that this be done, had a specific purpose in mind. They explained to me that as they are getting older, and their health is deteriorating, they wanted to ensure that their sacred knowledges were not lost or forgotten. So, they crafted a response to the violences of epistemicide and decided that their spiritual knowledges on a particular day, could be shared with the outside world, with the will of *los grandes abuelos y abuelas*. And the day they chose, they stated that they received many good signals that what they were doing was the right thing. With a gentle smile, the tata who was leading the ceremony said, "*Gracias Gran Creador, por echarme una manita, llevaba este peso grande en mi conciencia y ahora, ya todo va a estar bien*" ("Thank you Great Creator for giving me a hand, I was carrying a heavy weight on my consciousness, but now everything is going to be alright") (Interviews 2019).

There may be healing that is taking place with small participatory research projects, such as this one, where Indigenous communities have ownership of the stories being told about them or are involved in framing the problem and the solutions. While we faced and overcame many hurdles in the process of gathering information for this project, what I saw in the end, was a community that is strong and resilient despite the national climate of *desesperanza* that surrounded my time in El Salvador, in 2018-2019.

For instance, not every moment we spent together was hopeless, there were many joyful moments we shared, such as when eating a traditional meal together after a ceremony (*ticucos*, *yuca*, sopa de pollo, etc.), or when we rode up the mountain, standing up on the back of a pick-up truck on a winding scenic dirt road. Those were liberating moments where we could laugh freely at nearly being bounced off the truck, with every rock we hit. There was singing, laughter, dancing, and lots of learning for all of us, including some disagreements, which were always negotiated respectfully. There were also times when we were discouraged by the locals from riding the bus to specific rural *cantones* (hamlets) in *Itzalku* to attend the *cofradías*, because they would say "If you go there, lady, you're not coming back"; or a time when mostly women were present at a ceremony because the young men had to stay home, to avoid being targeted by organized crime violence.

Despite the abundance of bad news and violent events taking place in the vicinity, the spiritual leaders maintained the focus of the group on learning and on building community. One of the most powerful memories I have, that filled many of us with hope, was participating in the first Nawa-Pipil School for the Formation of Spiritual Guides, *Kalmekat Kushkatan* (Kushkatan House of Wisdom). The mission of spiritual guides is to

carry Nawa spirituality on their shoulders and to consecrate the cultural legacy of the *grandes abuelos* to the Sacred Fire. *Tata* Fidel states that "This is a project of ancestral wisdom that is ruled by the Nawa calendar and the four carriers of time in accordance to the teachings of our ancestors". He adds that "It is particularly important to create spaces for women in the formation of Nawa spiritual guides, because we all come from a woman, and we must honor her presence in our lives." *Tata* Juan Portillo states that "The spirituality that we will impart, is based on the creation of the Earth and the four sacred elements of the universe and these traditions cannot be broken". *Tata* Nicolás Sánchez-Vides expands that "The knowledge that spiritual guides will receive is based on ancestral knowledges, ritual practices in the territories, and Nawa cosmovision".

Every week for several months in the summer-winter of 2019, we would gather in a circle at INTI (Instituto Nacional Tecnológico Industrial Francisco Morazán), in San Salvador, with *Tata* Fidel, *Tata* Nicolás, and *Nantzin* Noem*y;* sometimes *Tata* Juan and *Tata* Sebas would join us to discuss the curriculum and the lesson plan for the week. Many high school students would come by the circle and interact with us, with interest. I was the note taker. On early Sunday mornings, we would meet on sacred sites in the mountains of Centzunat, and do a ceremony and then, enjoy a meal. It was in these circles at mountain tops, that the men and women of *Kalmekat Kushkatan* shared their ancestral knowledges with each other about agriculture, medicinal plants, the birth process, the stars, storytelling, the sea, and much more.

Some of the curriculum that the *tatas* covered for *Kalmekat Kushkatan*, included the historical memory of the invasion and occupation of Kushkatan, the emergence of the republic, the subjection of Indigenous peoples, Nawa-Pipil spirituality and cosmovisión, the Nawa calendars, the four carriers of time, Nawa protective knowledges, the stars and the sacred temple, rituals and ceremonies, the sacred fire, and personal reflexions. Sometimes, Dr. Luis Melgar Brizuela, an Indigenous literature faculty at *La Universidad Nacional de El Salvador* (UES) would join us. We would return home by 4 or 5 PM, tired and sunburned, but filled with knowledges and ideas.

Towards the end of eight weeks of instruction, we researched the design for the traditional ceremonial outfit that the aspiring espiritual guides would wear on their graduation day. We travelled to the town of San Sebastián in the Department of San Vicente to buy colorful textiles and have their outfits made. On August 16, 2019, there were 10 graduating spiritual guides in the One Reed (*Se Akat*) graduating class.

This is an important historical moment for Nawa-Pipil communities in Nawitzalku and San Ramón, Department of Centzunat, because it signals a resurgence of Indigenous espiritual practices and traditions that is an act of self-determination an empowerment by the communities. I attach in this dissertation, one of the few existing historical photographs of their graduation day inside a mountain cave, as a testament of their spirit of resistance and survivance that will continue to prevail through time.

Table 1

Nahua-Pipil Epistemologies	**Meaning**	**Chapter**
Cuauixtic	Native seed from the tropics (mucuna Pruriens) used as talisman for protection against *mal de ojo* (evil eye) in Mesoamerica. The phrase o*jo de venado* (*ojo)* refers to the state of always being acutely aware of one's surroundings and relying on instinct and speed to make decisions to survive, similar to the idea of being '*woke*' claimed by African American communities in the USA.	2
Ilnamiki	To re-member, to put together the past	2
Ixmati	To recognize the Other, or what is in front of the eye	3
Kab'awil	Mesoamerican philosophy of the double gaze	1, 2, 3
Ne gitilana ne iyesiu ne tal	The blood of the land	3
Nican Nahua-Pipil	Here we are, we the Nahua-Pipil	Title
Te Miki tay Tupal	What is ours does not die	1, 2, 3
Yultaketzalis	To reflect or listen through the eyes of the one who speaks, to speak from the heart, to create knowledges from the heart, the raise the mother tongue	1

Table 2: Nawat Words Used

WORD	MEANING	CHAPTER
Abya Yala		2
Achachuapan	Department of Ahuachapán, El Salvador (home of the oaks)	1
Amat/Amatl	Paper made of the bark of trees (Nahuat/Nahuatl)	1
Anahuac	Place surrounded by the waters	1, 3
Apan	River	2
Apanahecat	Apaneca, Ahuachapán (place of the river of abundant winds)	1
At	Water	1, 2
Ateotl	Ateos, Department of La Libertad, El Salvador (place of the deity of water; sacred water)	1
Atlacatl	Water human being/people; water reed; scepter or symbol of leadership; lord of the reeds	2
Atul	Atol, atole drink	3
Ayujwach	Alhuashte or pumpkin seed paste	1, 2
Calhuco	Caluco, Department of Sonsonate, El Salvador (place of lodging; of crows)	1
Centzunat	Department of Sonsonate (place of many waters, rivers)	1, 3
Chicomoztoc	Nahuatl - Place of the seven caves	2
Cihuatan/Sihuatan	Ciudad de Aguilares, Department of San Salvador, El Salvador (place of women, of Cihuacoatl)	1
Co	Suffix, locative	
Coban	San Antonio del Monte, Department of Sonsonate, El Salvador (hills of San Antonio del Monte)	1, 2, 3
Coxutepec	Cojutepeque, Department of Cuzcatlán, El Salvador (mountain of coyotes, turkeys, pheasants)	2
Cuauhtemallan	Guatemala, Goathemallan (place of many trees or eagles)	1, 2
Cuyut	Coyote, as in the animal or also a term used for a smuggler	2
Ejekat	Wind, air	1, 2
Elkawa	Verb – to forget, to forgive	2, 3
Eltapach	Liver; place for memory	3
Elut	Young corn on the cob	3

Et	Beans	3
Goazapa	Guazapa, Department of San Salvador, El Salvador (river that dries)	1
Ijiu	Sacred energy	1
Istak takat	*Chele;* a fair skin person	2
Ish/ix	Eye; seed	1
Ishmitechan	Municipality of *Cara Sucia*, Department of Ahuachapán, El Salvador	1
Itzalku	Izalco, Department of Sonsonate, El Salvador (place of obsidian)	1
Izcuintlan	Izcuintla, México	1
Kakash	Cacaxte; frame to carry heavy load on one's back; skeleton; scaffold	
Kakti	Caites/Sandals	1
Kuhkul/Kujkul	Devil-like figure; ghost figure	2
Kujkumutzin	*Pupusas*; corn tortilla filled with cheese, beans, herbs, pork, etc.	2
Kujkupeutuk	Separated body (see myth of *Nanahuatzin*)	3
Kumal	Comal de barro; grill made of clay	1
Kuska	Necklace	1, 2
Kushkatan, Kuskatan	Place pf Jewels	1, 2, 3
Kushtal	Shoulder sack	1
Kweyat	Refajo; wrap around women's skirt	1
Ma	Hand	1
Makwil	Number five	1
Mapipil	Hand (children of the hand)	1
Mekapal	Cord, used to tie *kakash* to head, to secure heavy load to head	1
Metzas Nawat	'India' Nahua/Pipil (title of song, see Antonia Ramírez)	1
Metzhuia	To menstruate	2
Mezti	Moon	2
Mexco	Mexico	1, 2, 3
Michcuicatl	(Nahuatl) canto de pez; fish song (see *Cantares Mexicanos*)	2
Michin	Fish	
Mictlan	Nahuatl - the infraworld	2
Miktan	In the depth of water	2
Mil/Milpa	Corn field	2
Nanahuatzin	The one with ulcers (diminutive); see Nahua myth of creation	3
Nantzin	Reverential for elderly woman (nana - affectionate)	1, 2, 3
Nawa	Nahua (people)	1, 2, 3

Nawal	Alter-ego animal of a human-being, a living presence	2
Nawan	Referring to the Nawat Languages	1
Nawat	Nahuat language	1, 2, 3
Nawat Mujmusta	Nahuat Para Todos Los Días (See Nawat Dictionary, Hernández Gonzáles 2019)	3
Nawitzalku	Nahuizalco, Department of Sonsonate, El Salvador (place of the four Izalcos)	2, 3
Ne ikman takamet	The elderly	1
Ne nawat suchikisa	The Nahuat Fluorishes (title of song, see Antonia Ramírez)	1
Nusihuapiltzin	My little girl (name of a play by *Las Tres Prietas*)	3
Ocelot	Jaguar	3
Oya Norte	(Nahuatl) To migrate to the North (to the USA)	2
Perulapan	Perulapán, Department of Cuzcatlán (place of the muddy waters, river of mud)	2
Petat	Petate or mat made of tulle, used to sleep	2
Pilahuan	Offspring	3
Pipil	Boy, nobleman	1, 2, 3
Quiquizque	The ones who are always away, absent	2
Rio Paxaca	Río Paz, between the Ahuachapán-Guatemala Border	1
Salas	Men's pants	1
Shicama	Jicama	3
Shinach, shinachti	Female genital organs; semen; seed; verb to fertilize	1, 2, 3
Shunpe	Men's hat	1
Sihuatehuacan	Department of Santa Ana, El Salvador (sacred place of women)	1
Sinti	Mature corn on the cob, wrapped in husks	3
Tacupan	Tacuba, Department of Ahuachapán, El Salvador (place of the ball court)	1
Tajtzin	Reverential, for elderly man (tata - affectionate)	1, 2, 3
Tajpiani	Caregiver of the land	3
Tajtaketza Ipal Itzalku	Pláticas de Izalco (King 2012)	2
Taketza	To speak a language;	1
Takushkalco	Tacuscalco, Department of Sonsonate, El Salvador (place of the javelin)	1, 3
Tal	Tierra, land	1, 2
Talua	Verbo to run, to keep one foot on the ground	2

Tamachtiani	The one who teaches, teacher	1, 2, 3
Tameme	A person who carries a heavy load on his back	2
Tamuyautin	The disappeared	3
Tanwaketzalis	Invocation	2
Teczacuangos	Santo Tomás y Santiago Texacuangos, Department of San Salvador, El Salvador (place of elevated rocks, of silence)	
Tehuantepec	Tehuantepec, Oaxaca, Mexico	1
Tekiw	Reciprocity	2
Tekpan-Itzalku	Nawa-Pipil state of Izalco, Department of Sonsonate, El Salvador	1
Tekpat	Flint or double edge knife made of obsidian	3
Tet	Piedra, something hard	2
Tepewas	Lords of the Rain	3
Teutepegua	Teotepeque, Department of La Libertad (place of the sacred mountain)	1
Tit	Fire	1, 2
Tlacopan	Tacupan, Tacuba, Department of Ahuachapán, El Salvador (place of the ball court)	1
Tlacuiloqueh	(Nahuatl) The ones who draw words, who write	2
Tlaloc	Deity of rain, lord of the waters	1, 2
Tonantzin	Our mother Earth	2
Tuka	To sow the land; to have sex; to bury something	2
Tullan	Place of Reeds	2
Tultecayut	Flowered path to Nahua spirituality	3
Tumat	Tomato	3
Tunal	Life energy; sun	1, 3
Tunalku	Dry season; summer	3
Tuyulu Takwika	Our Heart Sings (name of website, see Sonia Megías' *Cancionero*)	1
Tzontli	(Nahuatl) Hair, hair dress, crown	1
Tzuntecumat	Cabeza separada (see story of *Nanahuatzin*)	3
Tzuntejekat	Cabeza de viento; air head [See *Colectivo Tzuntejekat*]	1
Tzuntekun	Regeneration	3
Tzunxilut	Hair of baby corn or light-haired person	2
Umit	Bone	2
Wajkal	Round container made from a gourd to carry water	3
Wipil	Embroidered women's blouse	1

Witzapan	Former name of the town of Santo Domingo de Guzmán in the Department of Sonsonate, El Salvador (river of thorns)	1
Witzapanchin	Mingueñito or person from Witzapan	1
Witznawat	Cuiznahuat, Department of Sonsonate, El Salvador (place of the four thorny trees)	1
Witzti	Thorns	2
Xalatenanco/Shalatenanco	Department of Chalatenango, El Salvador (place walled by waters and sands)	1
Xaput/shaput	Cave	2
Xinach/xinachti/xinaste/ shinach/shinachti/shinaste	Internal female genitals, womb; semen; seeds to sow the land; birthing (Hernandez 2019: 119)	1
Xinachtia/Shinastia	To fertilize the land, the body	2
Xipe Totec	Flayed Lord: deity of life/death, reincarnation, associated with fertility, water, agriculture, war	
Xiquilite/Shiquilite	Jiquilite; Indigo	2
Suchit/xuchit	Flower	1
Xochiquetzal/shuchiketzal	Nahuatl - Deity of sexual love, artistry, and delight also known as Macuil Xochitl/Nawat	3
Xochilt tlahtolli	Nahuatl - Flower speech, poetry	2
Xoconochco	Soconuzco, Chiapas, Mexico	1
Xuayua	Juayúa, Department of Sonsonate, El Salvador (place of the waters of the heart, deep waters, river of red/purple orchids)	1
Xuchikisa Nawat	Cuna Nahuat (name of the language revitalization program; see Dr. Jorge Lemus); Nahuat language cradle	1
Xupan/shupan	Rainy season; winter	3
Yaquis	Those who left/migrated	1
Yul/yulu	Heart; sacred living energy	1
Yulmati	To believe	2
Yultaketza	To speak with the heart	2
Yultuk	Life	2



Spiritual Guides *Se Akat, Kalmekat Kushkatan*. From Left to right: Nicolás Sánchez Vides, Eugenio Flores Pérez, Silverio Morales, Yulissa Zuleyma Flores Patrix, Fidel Flores, Rosa Miriam Arévalo, Noemy Ernestina Contreras, José Carlos Paíz Pérez, Julio César Mauricio Hernandez. Not pictured: Porfirio Flores Pérez and Blanca Lidia Pérez. August 16, 2019. San Ramón, Department of Centzunat, El Salvador.



Second Graduating Class of *Kalmekat Kushkatan*. Department of Centzunat, El Salvador. 2021.



From left to right: Nantzin Noemy Ernestina Contreras; Violet Barton; Tata Fidel Flores; Tata Juan Portillo; Tata Francisco Jiménez; Tata Nicolás Sánchez-Vides. Planning meeting for the curriculum of Spiritual Guides of Kalmekat Kushkatan. Picture taken at INTI, San Salvador, El Salvador 2019.



Tajtzin Fidel Flores Hernández is a beloved and well-respected Nawa-Pipil community leader for several decades, a *tajpiani*, spiritual guide, and a *tamachtiani* from the Municipality of San Ramón in *Coban* (San Antonio del Monte), Department of Centzunat in Western El Salvador. He is one of the founders of the *Consejo Coordinador Nacional Indígena Salvadoreño* (CCNIS/ National Coordinating Indigenous Council) in 1992, and the founder of the *Asociación Coordinadora de Communidades Indígenas de El Salvador* (ACCIES / Coordinating Association of Indigenous communities in El Salvador) in 1990. He has published several primers on the Nawat-Pipil language, a yearly *Nawat Tunalpuhualli* (calendar), and is currently writing his autobiography. Tata Fidel is one of the founders of the first Nawat-Pipil school for the formation of Spiritual Guides, *Kalmekat Kushkatan*, in 2019, and has been an active advocate for Indigenous rights in El Salvador, testifying for the United Nations Indigenous Forum on several occasions. He is an active leader in the *Consejo Ancestral de los Comunes de los Territorios de Izalco* (CACTI / Ancestral Council of the Territories of the Commons of Itzalku) and is involved in various organizing fronts in El Salvador. Tata Fidel has dedicated his life to fighting for the dignity of Indigenous peoples in Kushkatan. His *compromiso* he says is based on "fulfilling the mandates ordered by his ancestors, to teach Nawa knowledges and transmit them to the community to disseminate Nawa worldviews." He adds: "To fulfill my ancestral commitment, I need the support of institutions and people who are in solidarity with our struggle, where they

are, to make our reality known... where we come from, and where we are going, as a sovereign Indigenous people …"



Tajtzin Nicolás Sánchez Vides is a beloved and well-respected Nawat-Pipil community leader, a *tajpiani*, a defender of the water and land, a spiritual guide, a *tamachtiani* (one who knows), originary from *El Cantón Pushtan* in Nawitzalku, Department of Centzunat. He is one of the founding members of El Movimiento Unificador Indígena de Nawitzalku (MUINA/Unifying Movement of Nawitzalku). He is an active political organizer working for the Defense of *Takushkalco,* a sacred site being demolished to build a residential development, and *Tatanoy Sensunapan* (el abuelo Río Sensunapan / grandfather Sensunapan River) against hydroelectric projects. Tata Nico is one of the founders of the first Nawat-Pipil school for the formation of Spiritual Guides in 2019 and has been an active advocate for Indigenous rights in El Salvador, testifying for the United Nations Indigenous Forum on several occasions and travelling abroad to speak on behalf of the community. He is an active leader in the Consejo Ancestral de los Comunes de los Territorios de Izalco (CACTI / Ancestral Council of the Territories of the Commons of Itzalku), and is involved in various organizing fronts in El Salvador, concerned with the protection of *Tonantzin* (our Mother Earth). Tata Nico states that his organizing efforts are "a mission that has been entrusted by The Creator and our grandmothers and grandfathers." He affirms that "our Nawa-Pipil culture and identity are based on the spirituality of our ancestors, which is manifested through our worldview, language,

music, dance, natural medicine, ancestral planting practices and our commitment to the Sacred Fire" and he has dedicated his life to fighting against colonialism for the liberation of his people.



Nantzin Noemy Ernestina Contreras, a beloved high school teacher, a *tamachtiani* of the Nawat-Pipil language, an Indigenous advocate, is originary from Sensutepeque, Department of Cabañas. She is a spiritual guide, an active member of Nawat-Pipil communities in Western El Salvador, working closely with Tata Fidel Flores and Tata Nicolás Sánchez Vides in *Kalmekat Kushkatan*, the *Asociación Coordinadora de Communidades Indígenas de El Salvador* (ACCIES / Coordinating Association of Indigenous communities in El Salvador), and *El Consejo Ancestral de los Comunes de los Territorios de Izalco* (CACTI / Ancestral Council of the Territories of the Commons of Itzalku), to preserve Indigenous knowledges and traditions in Kushkatan, especially the Nawat-Pipil language. She has dedicated many years of her life to supporting Indigenous resistance. Her *compromiso* (commitment) as a Nawa-Pipil spiritual guide is "to remain faithful to Nawa cosmovision and to strengthen ties of humanity and cooperation between Indigenous peoples around the world, sharing Indigenous wisdom, art, music, dance, food, and ancestral spirituality". Nantzin Noemy has been central to the development of women's sacred circles and Kalmekat Kushkatan, and is a kind and devoted carrier of knowledge, always seeking for opportunities to grow and develop herself and her community,

particularly advocating for Indigenous women's rights, coordinating many educational workshops. Nantzin Noemy is a *tejedora* (weaver) of community networks and she is well known for her deep sense of compassion, her loving, caring ways with others, and her beautiful smile.



Nantzin Antonia Ramírez, is a Nawat-Pipil song writer, composer, and performer from the Municipality of *Witzapan* (known as Santo Domingo de Guzmán) in the Department of Centzunat, in Western El Salvador. She is a well-known and beloved active maternal Nawat-Pipil *hablante* (speaker) for her valuable contributions to keeping the Nawat-Pipil language and knowledges alive. Nantzin Antonia's first public performance was at the Mexican Embassy in El Salvador, in 2014, where she launched her most famous song, *Ne Nawat Shuchikisa* (El Náhuat Florece, the Nawat-Pipil [Language] Flourishes), which is recognized transnationally. She has participated in multiple talks, recitals, and concerts at the Universidad Nacional de El Salvador (UES, National University of El Salvador), the National Museum of Anthropology, La Casa Tomada, the Cultural Center of Spain, and the National Theater of San Salvador, among others. She frequently visits universities, where she teaches Nawat-Pipil to students, as a guest-speaker. In 2022, *Ne Nawat Shuchikisa* was included in the production of the play "*Casamiento Indígena in*

Izalco" (An Indigenous Marriage in Izalco), a production of the National Folkloric Ballet, of the Ministry of Culture of El Salvador. A few of Nantzin Antonia's songs have been published in the choral songbook *Ne Nawat shuchikisa* (Náhuat Flourishes) by Spanish Composer Sonia Megías, which is a collection of musical creations by Nawa-Pipil composers in El Salvador. She has also been published in *Nechilwiat Katka Ka Seujti* (They Told Me This Once), a compilation of 52 Indigenous stories in the oral tradition compiled by anthropologist Josué Ramos. Nantzin Antonia's invaluable contributions to keeping Nawat-Pipil alive are an intangible heritage to humanity.



Tajtzin Juan Valentín Ramírez García, is a *tamachtiani* native of Witzapan, born to Catarino Ramírez y Gregoria García. He has two brothers, Vicente and Job, and one sister María. He studied elementary and middle school in Santo Domingo de Guzmán, high school in El Instituto Nacional Thomas Jefferson, and he attended La Universidad Modular Abierta in Centzunat, obtaining his Elementary school and English as a second language teacher's credentials.

Tajtzin tamachtiani Valentín learned to speak Nawat from his parents and people in Witzapan. In high school, he met a teacher who worked on the Centzunat Student Circles, *Tajtzin* Julio Castro, who guided him to do community service teaching Nawat to other students. In 2006, after he was already working as a teacher, he received professional

development training from the Universidad Don Bosco, to help implement the Nawat language with second grade and older students. This process continued until the year 2010. With the guidance of *Tajtzin* Julio Castro, *tamachtiani* Valentín began imparting Nawat courses to teachers in Centzunat. In 2012, *Tajtzin* Julio Castro arranged for *tamachtiani* Valentín to translate to Nawat, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's novella, *The Little Prince* for the grandchildren of Nantzin Consuelo Zunsin, which he did, in consultation with other active maternal nahua-hablantes (nawat speakers). This task took him about two months. *Ne Kunetatuktianitzin* was released in February 2022, and it is the first

western literary children's book translated to the Nawat language in El Salvador.

Tamachtiani

Valentin states that his dream is "to find ways to revitalize his language" and because of this, he

feels satisfied about the ongoing language revitalization efforts that several people and institutions have been leading in recent years, and for this reason, he has participated in some of

these activities. Currently, he does different projects to support himself, and when possible, he

teaches Nawat to those who want to learn it. He is involved with *La casa de la Cultura* of Witzapan and with other institutions that invite him to participate in cultural events. He is also

known for his musical talents.



Nawa-Pipil communities of San Ramón, Centzunat. Nawa-Pipil New Year Ceremony. San Andrés Sacred Temple, Dept. of la Libertad. El Salvador. March 12, 2019.



From Left to Right: Tata Nicolás Sánchez Vides, Nawitzalku Leader; Tata Fidel Flores, San Ramón Leader. Department of Centzunat, El Salvador, 2019.

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