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Bodies in Movement, Minds of Nature: A History and Ethnography of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations in Xicago

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Religious Studies

by

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September 2021

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ABSTRACT

Bodies in Movement, Minds of Nature: A History and Ethnography of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations in Xicago

by

Yanitsa Iztaccihuatl Buendía de Llaca

Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations are social and religious groups that practice Toltec and Aztec philosophies and physical disciplines (such as Danza) in accordance with Aztec aesthetics and with a belief in Aztec calendric practices and other forms of moral behaviors, through the study and interpretation of Mesoamerican history.

This phenomenon speaks to ways in which the colonial project is challenged and even subverted. People practicing these Revitalizations inhabit in-between spaces which are hard to categorize within the parameters of the categories of race and religion. In Mexico, people in these Revitalizations are not classified as Indigenous in the census, even though they identify as such; at the same time, they are considered religious groups/organizations despite rejecting the category of religion within their groups.

As a consequence of the mobility of people and ideas between Mexico and the U.S., Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations have served Mexican and Chicano/a/x people as a way to connect with what seems to be an "Aztecization" of an Indigenous identity. This dissertation explores how practitioners from Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations engage with different types of practices to form what I argue is a "racio-religious" identity.

The primary method used in this dissertation to gather data around Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations practiced transnationally was ethnographic research in an institute for Toltec

teachings in Chicago, Ill. Besides engaging in participant observation in the institute, I interviewed student-practitioners in Chicago and key teachers of Revitalizations in Mexico and Chicago. In addition, I used internal literature—that is, literature produced by members of the Revitalizations from the 1960s to the current day—to gain a historical perspective of concepts and internal vocabulary.

This dissertation illustrates that through a set of practices and embodied knowledges (from Aztec Dance to everyday use of the calendar) practitioners of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations reproduce "racio-religious" identities that embody racial and religious nuances, despite government classifications and the historical erasure of pre-colonial societies.

Table of Contents

Introduction

In 2015 Xiuhtezcatl Martinez, a 15-year-old stood in front of the United Nations to deliver a urgent discourse about climate change, youth, and Indigeneity. In his introduction he switched from Nahuatl to Spanish to English: "Tlazokamati, Tonanzin tlali Coatlicue (…) buenos días, good morning everybody." In 2017 Xiuhtezcatl published a book summarizing his labor as an environmental youth-activist, an artist, and a 'Mexica', an American and Indigenous youth reconnecting with his Aztec roots. Xiuhtezcatl Martinez grew up in a family of Danzantes (Aztec dancers). From his father's side, Danza (Aztec dance) was part of the family tradition back in Mexico, and now the practice had extended to Colorado where he had migrated. Xiuhtezcatl grew up as many children in Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations today, with a sense of a solid tradition that positioned him as Indigenous person from Mexico, tracing a direct lineage to the Aztecs. Xiuhtezcatl represents a public persona that grew up inside Toltec and Aztec Revitalization movements. Like him, some of the subjects in this dissertation are first- and second-generation Americans tracing their Mexican heritage through Toltec and Aztec Indigeneity. Some are "spiritual seekers" (a la Bender)[1] connecting in different levels to the racio-religious (Weisenfeld 2016) identity that these groups provide. Others, like Xiuhtezcatl carry a family lineage within the Revitalization and inherited the knowledge since childhood. Akaxe, the teacher with whom I worked for this dissertation and whose institute I focused on was also, like Xiuhtezcatl and his father, born inside a Revitalization Movement and migrated to the U.S. as an adult. In contraposition most of

[1] For Courtney Bender (2007) are individuals that do not belong to a religious community but that "participate in a theological lineage" (4) that informs their religious/spiritual experience.

Akaxe's students in Chicago were new to the Revitalizations and came to the U.S. as children or were born on the U.S. Groups of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations are a growing phenomenon on both sides of the border; their positionality and discourses force scholars to redefine both Mexican and Indigenous identities and the role of religion in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

This dissertation focuses on Toltec and Aztec Revitalization Movements as racio-religious groups that question ideas of nation, race and religion by reclaiming Aztec and Toltec practices and knowledges. In the dissertation, I follow a transnational approach that examines the connections of the Revitalizations in Mexico and in the U.S. by Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans. I use the phrase Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations as an umbrella term to refer to many groups that adopt practices and aesthetics of the Aztec and that believe in practicing Toltec philosophy and spirituality. However, in the U.S. there is still a wide preference use for the term "Mexicayotl" to broadly describe nationalistic and spiritual movements that draw from Aztec and *Mexica* society.

I implement a transnational approach that draws from studies on mobility as an empirical and human practice to analyses both the geographical movement of people and the abilities of the body to move. In this sense, I link both human mobility and corporeal movement as practices that are integral for the understanding of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations. Where people move to and how people move are markers that racialize, genderize, and even criminalize people every day around the globe. Thus racial categories become complicated and entangled with mobile practices.

In Mexico the idea of *mestizaje*, the mixture of Indigenous and Spanish, arose during the colonial period and a caste system imposed over non-European and mixed-race peoples in

colonized societies (New Spain, today central Mexico, one of them). With the creation of the nation-state the idea of *mestizaje* created a false notion of equality and national pride. However, Indigenous peoples who are not assimilated into the mestizo culture suffer from segregation and discrimination. Although race has always been a taboo topic in Mexico, in the last 10 years there are more academic and social conversations about racism and colorism in Mexican society[2]. A recent study from El Colegio de Mexico (COLMEX) found that people with lighter skin tones have more access to education, jobs, and social mobility in comparison to darker skin tones (COLMEX https://colordepiel.colmex.mx/vida/). It is in this Mexican national context that Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations arise in opposition to assimilation practices. Against all odds of cultural *mestizaje*, Revitalizers are reclaiming practices and knowledges of pre-Columbian Indigenous societies. While this is also problematic due to the present struggles of Indigenous peoples in Mexico it is also a phenomenon that questions the most "normalized" identities of Mexicans on both sides of the border.

In the context of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations where Mexicans reclaimed an Indigenous identity,[3] attention to mobile practices allowed me to explore notions of authenticity, racial boundaries, and belonging. It is usually the case that Indigenous people who move from their place of origin are questioned over the authenticity of their culture, especially after acquiring cultural *mestizaje* markers, and it can take one to two generations to lose contact with the Indigenous culture. On the opposite side of identities, Mexicans living in the U.S. have re-discovered and reclaimed their Indigenous identities through

[2] Some scholars that are currently working on the topic of racism in Mexico are Mónica G. Moreno Figueroa (2010), Emiko Saldivar (2014), and Federico Navarrete (2016).
[3] My understanding identities is built on Gilberto Giménez (2009) theory of social identities.

comparing themselves to Native Americans and other communities of color. This is why mobile practices and the idea of spatial identities add to the complexity of both national and racial identities.

This dissertation raises questions around topics of race, religion, and production of embodied knowledge in colonized societies. Therefore, **this dissertation asks**: who can reclaim an indigenous identity, especially after assimilation to the Mexican national project of *mestizaje* (despite the fact that Indigenous communities still have a place in Mexico)? How do practitioners of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations perform and live "Indigenous" identities? And how are Toltec and Aztec Revitalization practices aligned (or not) with the understanding of 'religion' as a humanistic category?

This dissertation is situated at the intersections of religious studies, anthropology, history, and Chicanx studies. It draws on ethnographic methodology, specifically in observant-participation in *Matinauhkalli,* a Chicago-based institute for the teaching of Toltec practices where I conducted my research. I chose this field site because of Chicago's larger Mexican population and because of its teacher, Akaxe Yotzin Gomez, and the way in which he formulated and disseminated thought and practice around Mesoamerican history.

Throughout this dissertation I demonstrate how the group I worked with developed a sense of reformation, distancing themselves from other groups that ascribe to Mexicayotl.[4] To do so people from Matinauhkalli arise as 'exceptional' and construct their practices and

[4] Mexicayotl is the term used (mainly in the U.S.) to describe groups that revitalized Toltec and Aztec culture in Mexico and the U.S. The term was taken first from the *Crónica Mexicayotl* that narrates the early history and migration of the Aztecs by an Indigenous intellectual, Fernando Alvarado Tezozomoc. Later, in the 1950s the term Mexicayotl was used in the Movimiento Confederado y Restaurador de la Cultura de Anahuac, to describe the reinstatement *Mexica* culture.

discourses as separate from what other Calpullis[5] do in the U.S. I tried to be consistent with the type of vocabulary used in the dissertation, privileging the way people in Matinauhkalli express themselves about what they do and what it means for them to have these practices in their everyday life. The refusal to use words like "religion" or "spirituality" by student-practitioners in Matinauhkalli forced me to rethink my own assumptions about these concepts. I generally use "the knowledge" as they do to refer to a set of practices and belief system constructed and entangled through embodied practices such as Danza, the study of Mesoamerican symbols through the reinterpretation of Codices and the Aztec Calendar, and the writings and interpretations of Mexican teachers of these disciplines.

Statement of the Problem

The main issues in this dissertation are the entanglements of understandings of race and religion in a transnational context. Thus ideas of belonging, "authenticity", and the creation and reproduction of both embodied knowledge and history (and who creates and interprets them both) are essential to the understanding of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations.

These phenomena have been studied both in Mexico and the U.S. Usually the approaches between Mexican and U.S. scholars vary in some interpretation of how to see these groups and where to focus the attention of the research. These two paradigms correspond to the positionality of scholars in both countries and the racial projects[6] they are embedded in. It is not the same to be a Mexican scholar and interpret these groups from the views of *mestizaje* and the Mexican racial project that assumes racial mixture and national equality, than from a

[5] Calpullis are the social organizations of the Mexicayotl. They represent both the physical space where people gather to learn and also the community that is constructed in that space. It is common to see people referring to the Calpullis as an extension of the family system.

[6] I borrow the term "racial project" from Michael Omi and Howard Winant. Omi and Winant define racial project as: "efforts to shape the ways in which human identities and social structures are racially signified, and the reciprocal ways that racial meaning becomes embedded in social structures" (13).

U.S. point of view, where Mexicans are racialized as inferior (and in some cases as "Indians") because of Mexico's history of miscegenation and skin color. It is also not the same because, with the exceptions of Olga Olivas (in Gutierrez 2018)[7] and Baruc Martinez (2010) , Mexican scholars tend to favor an *etic* perspective on their research. By contrast, American scholars are not only writing about Danza, or claiming Chicanx experience and being Danzantes and providing an *emic* perspective.

In my dissertation I propose to bridge the U.S. and Mexican approaches to the study of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations as both have particularities that complete the study of these phenomena. In addition, I propose to see Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations in movement and in communication with both cultures (the Mexican and the American) while borrowing and learning from each other's experiences in a process of identity construction.

The first studies of Toltec and Aztec Revitalization were done by U.S. scholars in Mexico who wanted to study the Indigenous populations in Mexico City and encounter restorationists[8]. In *The Truths of Others. An essay on Nativistic Intellectuals in Mexico* (1977) Alicja Iwańska divides the groups she encountered as "realists" and "utopians". The "realists" being Indigenous peoples studying higher education in Mexico while reflecting on their condition as "Indians", while the "utopians were the participants of the Movimiento Confederado y Restaurador de la Cultura de Anahuac (MCRA), the largest group of Restorationists in Mexico in the 1940s (see chapter 1 for more historical details about the

[7] Olivas Hernández book, Danzar la fontera has not been available in the library system, neither I was being able to purchase it. However, Gutiérrez Zúñiga's (2018) review presents a summary and analysis on Olivas Hernandez' work.

[8] In chapter 1 I present the historical trend of the Aztec Restorationist Movement. Early and mid-twentieth century restorationists advocated for the restoration of Aztec culture in central Mexico. In opposition, the group I worked with (and other contemporary groups) are not engaged with ideas of restoration, but with ideas of "reformation", that is they want to change and improve how restorationist have interpreted some of the philosophy of Danza and the use of the Calendar.

movement). The other study was made by Judith Friedlander (1975) who focused on the Indigenous experience for people from Hueyapán, a town in the State of Morelos, a few hours from Mexico City. Friedlander, similarly, to Iwańska, observed the distinction between "real" "Indians" (in Hueyapán) and mestizo Restorationists in Mexico City. Following Iwańska and Friedlander's approach, Lina Odena Güemes was the first Mexican anthropologist to publish a comprehensive analysis of the MCRA. In her book, *Movimiento Confederado Restaurador de la Cultural de Anahuac* (1984), Güemes interprets the MCRA as a post-revolutionary (Mexican Revolution 1910-1920) nationalistic group. Although scholars studying the MCRA referred to them by using different terms (e.g. restorationists, utopians, etc.), people in the MCRA use the term "Mexicayotl" to refer to their doctrine which aspired to reintroduce "Mexica" culture into the Mexican nation.

In addition to Güemes' approach more contemporary Mexican scholars have delved into the study of the MCRA and other similar groups, naming this phenomena as "movimiento de la mexicanidad" or simply "mexicanidad" (literally translated to English as Mexicanity). Renée De la Torre and Cristina Gutierrez Zúñiga (2017) have collaborated to link historically contemporary movements of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations with both the Conchero Movement and groups in the Mexican New Age. Their interpretation positions groups of "mexicanidad" as religious enclaves for Mexicans seeking to connect to an idea of cultural "roots". Another important scholar contemporary with De la Torre and Gutierrez Zúñiga is Francisco de la Peña (2002), who studied groups of "mexicanidad" as emergent cults in Mexico. Peña's most recent book *Los hijos del sexto sol* (2002) is the most comprehensive historiography and account of the "mexicanidad" groups in Mexico. Unlike the first three women scholars of these phenomena (Iwanska, Friedlander, and Odena Güemes), the later

scholars did not see “mexicanidad” as a “caricature” of Indigenous people, but as a human experience and groups that responded to social problems of nation and belonging.

In the U.S., “mexicanidad” was re-translated, from Spanish to Nahuatl, as Mexicayotl, the term used by the MCRA in the 1940s, interestingly, Chicano groups in the U.S. have little connection to no knowledge about the MCRA. In the U.S., the Mexicayotl is seen as part of a political movement for Chicanas/os/x communities to re-appropriate their Indigenous/Mexican culture. Jennie Luna (2011) and Ernesto Colin (2014) are the two main scholars on the topic. Both of them are also part of Danza circles in California and have added not only the *emic* perspective but also the Chicano context to the study of Mexicayotl.

It is common to see a first approach to Toltec and Aztec revitalizations through the study of Danza, or ethnography of Danza groups, due to its public visibility. However, as will be shown in this dissertation, the practices of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations go beyond dance, incorporating not only other physical disciplines but also the study of culture, language, symbols, calendar, and Mesoamerican history. All of these practices give practitioners a set of knowledge and create an imagined and effective community that goes beyond nationalism and targets a belief system of self-identification.

Theoretical Framework

This dissertation examines Toltec and Aztec revitalizations as transnational movements, with an emphasis between Mexico and the U.S. due to the fast pace that groups and practitioners in Toltec spiritualities in these two countries are increasing. However, this phenomenon has reached other geographical locations like Chile, Spain, France, and even Japan. I use Tim Cresswell’s (2006) framework on mobility to link human mobility through

migration with bodily movement in Toltec practices. [9] On one hand, people and ideologies are moved across the border, forming transnational communities; on the other, people move their bodies to revitalize, perform, and achieve a sense of being. Mobility becomes a central axis through the dissertation that allows me to see these revitalization movements as transnational practices between Mexico and the U.S. Through mobility as a theoretical framework that allows the analysis of different forms embodied movement, I analyze the historical grounds of the Mexicayotl Movement in Mexico and its aims of reformation in Chicago. I argue that embodied knowledge happens through both physical practices and study sessions that allow practitioners to incorporate movement, symbols, and notions of time into their own bodies and everyday lives.

Toltec and Aztec revitalization physical practices include an implicit code of ethics for its partitioners, who learn behavioral changes through the disciplines themselves, but also through the teacher's word, and elders' examples. In addition, depending on the group, they follow behavioral guidelines on how to be "in the world". These guidelines are vast and vary from group to group, but what they have in common is that they all weave not only a "proper" ethic but also a decolonial framework to liberate brown/indigenous bodies. To understand the practices of these groups I use a performance and dance studies framework, especially Diana Taylor's (2013) contribution of the archive and the repertoire that situates embodied knowledge in the same level of intellectual importance as the text, or the archives.

[9] I use the term "Toltec practices" to refer to different types of disciplines and practices, such as the study of the Tonalpohualli (calendar), Danza (similar to Aztec dance, but referred to as Danza Macehual in this context), and the study of Mesoamerican history for spiritual and identity-building purposes, among others. I refer to these as Toltec practices because the people I worked with use this term. I have also noticed that this term is more and more common among groups reviving indigenous Mexican spiritualities and pre-colonial practices. The term works in opposition to "Mexicayotl" (Colín 2014; Luna 2011, 2012; Valadez 2012), "mexicanidad" (De la Peña1994, 2002, 2009; De la Torre 1996, 2000, 2004, 2007; Gonzalez 1996, 2005; Gutiérrez Zúñiga 2008), and "neo-Aztecs" (Galinier 2013).

This dissertation argues that Toltec and Aztec Revitalization movements are sustained by embodied knowledge and practices that are particularly complex and refined, as they are constructed not only from bodily practices such as Danza (Aztec dance), but also from the understanding, interpretation, and rewriting of Mesoamerican history through the use of non-Western temporal framing (i.e., Aztec calendar) and ceremonial re-enactment of the Mesoamerican past.

Some of these practices seem to align with notions of religion and spirituality. However, I am careful to not box peoples experiences into a language that they do not use themselves. Instead of talking about "religion", people in Toltec and Aztec Revitalization usually referred to the knowledge as a set of guidelines that help them explain to outsiders what they do, believe in, and why they behave or think a certain way.

Despite my efforts to not use "religion" I include it when its temporarily accepted by student-practitioners and the teacher I worked with. In addition, "religion" is helpful to classify these groups as "racio-religious". The temporary acceptance occurred on some occasions, especially when newcomers would question their place in the organization Matinauhkalli. "But we are a religion", they would challenge the teacher, and he would define "religion" as something that "reconnects us". "This knowledge reconnects us with who we are, with our ancestors" (Fieldnotes April 7, 2019). Judith Weisenfeld (2016) created the category "racio-religious" to present the historical groups of Black Americans that form and re-defined their identities by understanding and defining their distinctive position as racialized and religious subjects in the U.S. context of the 1920s. Racio-religious as a category serves to explain phenomena such as Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations not only because of the temporal parallels (these movements started in Mexico also around the 1920s),

but because of how people redefine their racial identities, despite what government institutions declare. In addition, these efforts are made through historical re-interpretations of the past and the establishment of a sacred lineage. Since the beginning of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations, practitioners identify and sustain a pan-Indigenous identity, despite the fact that they are seen as mestizos by scholars and the Mexican government. Revitalizers efforts to re-Indianize themselves come from a doble effort that connects them racially and religiously to Mesoamerica, either by performing Indigeneity or by studying Mesoamerican and colonial history.

The idea of being and not-being, fitting and not fitting at the same time brings moments of tension and what J.Z. Smith has referred to as "incongruity". For Smith incongruity happens in the clash of a colonized society and the intent to make sense of the old (pre-colonized) world and the new (colonized) reality. However, I depart from Smith's argument by positioning this type of 'incongruity' in the center of the Cartesian binary, a binary which does not work in context of Indigenous frameworks, especially Mesoamerican thought and Mexicayotl ideology, which assumes a form of dualism where opposites co-exist. This arrangement is differently than a binary position, where differences exclude each other. I also argue that the idea of 'incongruity' can be found in any religion, regardless of its connections to colonization. 'Incongruity', then, should be seen as a human experience, not a colonized experience. Examples of incongruities can be found throughout the dissertation and are mediated by embodied actions and discourse.

Methodology

My research combines both ethnographical work and historical approaches from primary and specialized secondary sources. With this approach I am not only exploring the intimacy

of Danza and Tonalpohualli (calendar) practitioners which has been constructed as "the knowledge", but also the ongoing creation of the history of these groups after colonization.

The historical reconstruction of Toltec and Aztec Revitalization Movements is possible because other scholars have contributed with archival research and ethnographic data before me. I used the dissertations by Baruc Martinez (2010), Jennie Luna (2011), Verónica Valadez (2012), and Ernesto Colin's (2014) book as both primary sources and specialized literature about the Movement. I also conducted archival research in the *Archivo General de la Nación* and the *Hemeroteca Nacional* in Mexico City in January of 2019. In addition, I visited the Nieva home, Calpulli Mexicayotl, where I had access to the magazine Izkalotl produced by the Mexicayotl organization between the 1960s and the 1980s.

Throughout my research interest in these movements I have acquired a significant number of books written by leaders of several Calpullis. These books were also important primary sources that helped me understand the philosophy of the Movement on different levels.

As an ethnographer I used two main approaches to learn from the people I work with. First, I assumed a positionality of collaboration. I knew they were the experts and I wanted to learn from them (both from the teachers of the Movements as well as the student-practitioners). My two main informants and friends during my research help me dig deeper and answer questions even after I have left the field. Relationships grew and helped me develop not only better research skills but also interpersonal connections, which are sometimes dismissed in the ethnographic process.

The names of almost everyone in this dissertation correspond to the names they use in their everyday lives. They are either their names of birth or their given Macehual names.

Their names contextualize the people I worked with not only as practitioners but also as historical subjects in the ongoing creation of the history of Toltec and Aztec Revitalization Movements. There are only a few times where I use the general form of student/practitioner instead of the name of the person to either keep anonymity or make generalizations. The names of Akaxe's teachers and the name Ocelocoatl are their real names. However, "Patricia" (in chapter 2) is an anonymized name. Besides the people I worked with, the name of the center, Matinauhkalli, is the name used by students and Akaxe. However, other place names in the Chicago area have been changed, including those of sacred places, because people from Matinauhkalli did not want to share the location of these places as a sign of respect towards what they consider sacred places.

To learn the disciplines I literally used my body as a tool. Besides the constant travel, I enrolled in all the classes I could take in Matinauhkalli from July 2017 to April 2020. I experienced and experimented as a fully immersed observant-participation, where sometimes I participated more than observed and relied on my body's memory and the telling of others to write my field notes when I was in Chicago. Ethnographers in dance studies and anthropology of dance have also used their bodies and wrote while dancing. Some of them had previous dance or performance knowledge that facilitated not only their fieldwork but their analysis on dance movement (e.g. Deidre Sklar (2001), Diana Taylor (2013), Elizabeth McAlister (2002), Hannah Kostrin (2017), Yvonne Daniel (2005)). Having performance knowledge is not a requirement to do research on bodily engaged topics, but it is important to recognize the multi-disciplinary relationships between arts and scholarship in the creation of histories and ethnographies such as this dissertation. Although I am not a formally trained dancer, I danced for most of my life. Between 8 and 13 years old I practiced ballet and

modern dance. From 14 to 17 I was a devoted *capoeirista* (Capoeira is a martial art disguised in dance movements created by Afro-Brazilian enslaved people). Between 17 and 21 I explored Afro-Caribbean dance, Afro dance, and Polynesian dance (mainly Hula), and Latin rhythms such as salsa, merengue, and cumbia. I also grew up in the *fandango* culture in Veracruz and danced with my friends in the *tarima* (a wooden platform) during the weekends. This background facilitated my immersion to Macehualiztli (Aztec Dance) in Chicago. And although my time there did not make me an expert in Danza I was able to adapt to the classes in a short amount of time.

Student/practitioners

I refer to people coming to Matinauhkalli as student/practitioners because the majority are both, although sometimes the role of one can overshadow the other. Some people are just students, which means that they only attend classes without engaging in ceremony activities, and others are only practitioners who come to ceremonies, without taking any classes. In general student/practitioners have a hard time defining what they do in Matinauhkalli.

I interviewed a total of 12 student/practitioners with diverse backgrounds and level of commitment in Matinauhkalli. From those 12, half of them are not part of Matinauhkalli anymore.[10]

Note about Language

As a *mexicana* with an immigrant family in the U.S. I navigated the Spanglish context of Matinauhkalli fairly easily. Although my primary language is Spanish and I feel more

[10] Some of these students left silently and some left angry because some of the ways in which their teacher treated them. I am aware that some organized and published a public letter that was shared in social media on November 30, 2020. The letter was not signed and the people I knew who had participated in some form did not want to make their names public. Since this letter and the allegations in the letter occurred after I had finished my fieldwork I did not follow with further inquiries.

comfortable speaking in Spanish, many of the students at Matinauhkalli felt more comfortable speaking in English, especially in informal situations. For most of them, English was the language learned at school, thus they had more advanced linguistic skills in English. However, all were bilingual and used Spanish in specific situations: when speaking directly to their teacher, Akaxe; when talking about specific things in Mexico, and when talking about the family. I decided to make literal transcriptions of my interviews and conversations with them to show the living language and the use of code-switching, i.e., how and when there was language interference with something other than English. Although none of them were Nahuatl speakers, they had learned in Matinauhkalli some Nahuatl words that they used situationally.

Although the main language of communication with students was English with students, my conversations with Akaxe were in Spanish. It felt odd to communicate in another language since we both are from Mexico. He sometimes addressed students in English, especially when he interrupted the Danza teaching with discourses and explanations. The classes on Tonalpohualli and Self-healing were taught in mainly Spanish and sometimes he would switch to English to answer student's questions and/or make interventions.

Although Akaxe has a class where he teaches beginner level Nahuatl, he only used a few words in Nahuatl. The greetings, names of instruments and regalia, and 'thank you', were some of the most common phrases that he and his students would use in Nahuatl. However, all the names of symbols in Tonalpohualli class were provided in Nahuatl without a translation.

A regular conversation with student-practitioners may be mostly in English or Spanish with the use of Nahuatl to refer to symbols that refer to reality and expectations. Some words

were used mainly in one language despite the code mixture. For example: 1) “Danza” was usually used in Spanish versus its English term (Aztec dance) or its Nahuatl (Macehualiztli); 2) “knowledge” on the other hand, was mainly used in English, instead of the Spanish term, *conocimiento*. Acknowledgements were always in Nahuatl. Instead of “thank you” or “gracias”, *Tlazohkamati* was the word used after speaking or having an interaction with the teacher, Akaxe. *Tlazokamati*, for some, has also been a replacement word to supply “Ometeotl” (Two-Lord), the phrase that Conchero and Mexicayotl groups used to end statements. The Nahuatl spelling use at Matinauhkalli, by Akaxe and his students, is different from the spelling in historical sources or other Nahuatl grammars. I use Matinauhkalli’s spelling to be consistent with the use of language by practitioners (e.g. Tezkatlipoca vs Tezcatlipoca).

Chapters Outline

The chapters are organized as a journey of introspection that goes from the more general topics to the most complicated questions. The way the reader approaches these chapters is similar to how student practitioners learn to “read”, interpret, and make sense of Matinauhkalli. First, the admiration and curiosity of a teacher like Akaxe, then the sense of belonging and the confusion of finding that Matinauhkalli is not a community, followed by the commitment to the practices and classes is how students relearn and reidentify as subjects in the world through embodied knowledge.

In Chapter 1, “Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations: a Racio-religious Movement and Identity of the Twentieth Century” I narrate the Mexicayotl Movement from the 1940s to the 1980s and how its participants have shifted from group affiliation to constructing a racio-religious identity that incorporates their racial experiences of being brown and their spiritual

experience of a belief system and the practice of ceremony. In this chapter I also provide a literature review and make a sociological distinction between the different groups that can potentially be recognized as Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations, from the Conchero Movement to the idea of Macehuales in Chicago.

Chapter 2, "A Life on the Move: Akaxe Yotzin Gomez, From International *Danzante* To Temachtiani" is a life-story of a Mexicayotl teacher, his transnational mobilities and the foundation of his Institute in Xicago[11] (Matinauhkalli), which aims to reform Mexicayotl. Through Akaxe's life the history of Mexicayotl, from 1980s up to today, is still being narrated. Within Akaxe's life one can see how it was to be born in the movement in the 1980s and how mobile practices to teach Danza and the calendar have contributed on the perception of Indigenous bodies in Western societies. I also explore how these teachings contribute to immigrant communities in the U.S., who seek to reconnect to Mexico and its indigenous roots through spiritual practices.

In chapter 3, "Matinauhkalli: Creating Walls of Space and Identity in Pilsen, Xicago", I focus on social space, starting with how immigrant communities created South Xicago to how Matinauhkalli becomes a space where power and gender relations get revealed. I shift my focus from the teacher of the movement, Akaxe, to the invisible labor his wife, Clarissa-Ixpahuatzin who aims to create a household and an institute for Toltec teachings in the same space.

[11] Inside my dissertation I use the term Xicago to refer to the geographical and cultural containment of Mexicans in Chicago. The use of "x" has been adopted by Chicagoan artists to resemble the "x" in Mexican Spanish, common specifically in toponyms that still have a Nahua influence (e.g. Mexico, Mexica, Xochimilco, etc.)

Chapter 4, “Bodies in Movement: On Becoming a Macehual, Physical Practices and Discipline” explores how discipline is negotiated between students and their teacher. Fluctuating between Michael Foucault’s (1994) theory of discipline to Nahua philosophy in the Huehuetlatolli (Nahua wisdom teachings), this chapter explores practitioners sense of discipline within their minds and bodies and forms of conduct within the institute Matinauhkalli, but also the expectations built around their ethno-religious identity. To do so I analyze the physical disciplines students learn in Matinauhkalli and the ones I was able to participate as a student myself. I specifically focused on Danza practice because this practice is shared with other groups of Toltec and Aztec revivals in Mexico and the U.S. I do a brief analysis on the other physical disciplines (archery and warrior discipline), their importance and how they impact the overall pedagogies of the Macehual; however, these disciplines are not common among Mexicayotl groups. In addition, this chapter explores the process in which student/practitioners decide to change their first names to a Nahuatl name, given by their teacher, Akaxe. In sum, this chapter focuses on how different forms of knowledge are learned and embodied in practitioners who considered themselves Macehuales.

Finally, chapter 5, “Minds of Nature: Time, Nature, and the Dispute of Religion” situates the category of time and nature as central for the understanding of the word religion in Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations. In this section I show how practitioners negotiate the category of religion and how this is allowed in the internal discussions about ‘nature’ and ‘science’ as more accepted categories by practitioners. I also analyze two forms that practitioners in Chicago use to create moral actions within their communities and surroundings. Although the Tonalpohualli (the Aztec Calendar) has also been considered an astrological text, Macehuales in Chicago argue that it is “pure science”. Their textual interpretation and study of Codices

constructs ways in which they learn to understand themselves in a different way than before and how they understand basic concepts of nature such as the sun, the rain, plants, birds, and some mammals (dogs, coyotes, and ocelots) depicted in the calendar.

Chapter 1. Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations: Twentieth Century Racio-Religious Movements and Identities

> "Para el maestro Meza enseñar estas clases es una manera de enseñar que hay orgullo e identidad en Mexico, porque cuando se les enseña a los niños sobre los sacrificios y *esas cosas* entonces nadie quiere ser indígena." (For Maestro Meza, teaching these classes is a way of demonstrating Mexican pride and identity, because when children are taught about [Aztec] sacrifice and such things, then nobody wants to be Indigenous.) (Fieldnotes, July 26, 2018).

> "Nos enseñaron a sentir vergüenza de los que somos, nos dijeron que éramos unos pinches indios que sacaban corazones. ¿Cómo se reafirma ese mensaje hoy en día? Cuando ves gente morena en la tele es para darles el kilo de ayuda, cuando hablas de pobreza, desigualdad, crimen, siempre pones a prietitos y cuando hablas de temas aspiracionales pones a los güeritos." (They taught us to be ashamed of who we are, they told us we were fucking Indians who tore out hearts. How is that message reaffirmed now? When you see dark-skinned people on TV it's about giving them charity. When you talk about poverty, inequality, and crime you always show dark-skinned people; and when you talk about aspirational things you show light-skinned people.) (Tenoch Huerta, Mexican Actor, interviewed by Úrsula Fuentesberain, *Gatopardo*, May 2, 2018.)

Introduction

My mother and I are walking in downtown Mexico City. We are on a family expedition, searching for my maternal great-great-grandfather's old photography studio. We are chatting about the modernization of Mexico, the French influence of the late nineteenth century, and the fast growth of technologies in the country. While searching for the exact address on our mobile phones we get distracted by smoke coming towards us. The smell is familiar; it is *ocote* (Montezuma pine), a substance that has been burned in Mexico for spiritual and healing purposes since pre-Hispanic times. In downtown Mexico City it is common to see women dressed in *huipiles* (Indigenous dresses) or men in white clothing performing *limpias* (energy cleansing) for a modest price. The spectacle we encounter is not new. When I was a

child my parents were *danzantes* (performers of indigenous dances) under the teaching of Don Faustino Rodríguez, from Tepetlixpa, a village south of Mexico City. So my mother and I are familiar with the smells, sounds, feelings, and images displayed as living pre-Hispanic codices. We do see one unfamiliar thing, however: a man walking through the smoke. He has long hair and his body is covered with black paint. All he wears is a loincloth and a large feathered headdress. His face is also painted; a thick black strip across his nose, like the gods in the codices. He is barefoot and walks quickly, with purpose. It seems to me that he is going to war, or to an encounter with the Spanish conquistadors. But we know that he is a modern Mexican just like us, acting out a role from the past. This scene, played out all over Mexico, is part of the contemporary Danza phenomenon.

Aztec dance performance has become a public and urban phenomenon across Mexico. It is a sign of indigenous authenticity and a reminder of a pre-colonial past that gets reproduced through what I call Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations. These performances also attract tourists and serve as a way for dancers to collect money in public places. The accompanying *limpias* (spiritual cleansings) can be done in 15 minutes for the small amount of 100 pesos (less than 10 U.S. dollars). The dancers will sometimes pass a hat around after each Danza, explaining how they will use the donations. For example, in 2017, in La Placita Olvera, Los Angeles, California, a group of Aztec dancers asked for money to visit the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos in Jalisco, Mexico. In Mexico and the U.S. these danzantes have become a part of—even helping to create—the Mexican landscape. They and their performances represent a type of identity that disrupts, yet feeds into, the Mexican nationalist ideals of *mestizaje* (the "mythological" blending of Europe and Indigenous Americas).

In Mexico City it is common to see Aztec dancers and Concheros[12] performing in groups. However, individual dancers, playing a flute and/or a small, one-handed drum can be seen going from house to house in various *colonias* (neighborhoods) requesting donations. In these instances homeowners become momentary tourists as they watch and listen to a representation of ancient indigeneity by the dancer/musician. Analogously, Stephanie Nohelani Teves writes that Hawaiian *hula*, is a "performance, negotiated at the intersection of ancestral knowledge and outsider expectation, manifest in… daily contradictions and complexities" (Teves 2018, 2). Similarly, I see Aztec and Conchero dances as occupying an intersection between old and new Mexico; the former lies outside the dance tradition, while the latter is part of it, but both movements share a national identity and negotiate racialized Indian and mestizo categories.

In this chapter I explore the historical development of the different groups and peoples behind the creation of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations, and examine the construction of identity that results from these movements—a neo-Indigenous identity that challenges notions of mestizaje, Europeanization, and racial purity.[13] Yet ironically this construction of identity builds on ideas of "authenticity" sustained by a visually salient pre-colonial past. In this dissertation I move away from the generalized label "Mexicayotl" (in Spanish Mexicanidad, literally translated as "Mexicanity") to acknowledge historical processes and the specificity of each group that makes up the movements under discussion. To do this requires appeal to a wider category that I am calling Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations.

[12] The distinction between Concheros, Aztec dancers, and Macehuales is explained later in this chapter.
[13] For Jaques Galinier (2013), the neo-Indian cannot call himself Indigenous because of state policies which adopt a disturbing Amerindian discourse and because of cultural appropriation by people who are not "authentically" Indigenous. I agree with Galinier's decision to add a new category to these phenomena, but I also see the colonialist insistence that assimilation plays a role in mestizising the population.

Adherents in these groups, much like the Aztecs themselves, trace their spiritual lineage back to the Toltecs (Toltecayotl), while employing and interpreting the symbols and vocabulary that emerged in the "classical" period of the Aztec Empire (1430-1521). Thus, these Revitalizations could be understood as Toltec Revitalizations (since most of their practitioners reclaim a Toltec lineage), but I choose to call them Toltec and Aztec because of the historical impact of Aztec culture and aesthetics on contemporary Revitalizations.

In many cases, danzantes represent an in-between, uncomfortable otherness that does not comply with the racial categories of the nation-state. Danzantes are usually not regarded as *indígenas,* because most of them are monolingual or bilingual Spanish speakers and have adopted an urban lifestyle, or have a high level of mobility between their towns and large cities. They also openly express their culture instead of guarding it. And in some cases, especially after the 1980s, more light-skinned mestizos and otherwise middle-class Mexicans became danzantes. This disrupts the Mexican *imaginaire* of indigenous peoples being those who live in the highlands, far from cities, and who belong to the poorest sectors of Mexican society.

In Mexico, racial categories are established though negotiations between the forces of state assimilation, social mobility, and institutionalized discrimination. Recognized Indigenous groups in Mexico do, in fact, mostly live in the rural highlands, and "urban" Indians are seen as being "out of place." According to the census of the *Instituto Nacional de Geografia e Historia* (INEGI, Mexico), in 2020 only 6.2% of the total population of Mexico was considered Indigenous. However, one of the most problematic aspects of the Mexican census is that it categorizes Indigenous groups based on cultural categories. In other words, this tiny percentage is responding not to ethnic/racial identification, but to linguistic

proficiency as the single category for denoting "indigeneity." Out of that 6.2%, 11% of the Indigenous population live in states outside their place of birth, indicating the high levels of mobility between Indigenous communities and urban areas. Although the Mexican census added a new self-determining category for Black and African ancestry in 2020, language remained the only method for defining Indigenous affiliation and self-determination. Therefore, in order to be classed as Indigenous, a person had to be a speaker of at least one Indigenous language (INEGI, 2020). What this demonstrates is that in one generation—based upon linguistic factors and in accordance with state policy—the population of Mexico keeps transforming and evolving mestizo identity at the expense of Indigenous identities.

Indigenous people mostly migrate to urban centers in search of salaried labor. This phenomenon is not new. Migration has been a constant since the Revolution of 1910. Mexican scholars have understood the creation and expansion of the Conchero and Mexicayotl Movements to be a result of the modern history of national mobility (De la Torre 2004, 2007; González Torres 1996, 2005) beginning in the early twentieth century, when peasant communities moved to cities and incorporated Danza and related rituals into urban spaces. However, as I will emphasize later in the dissertation, the growth and urbanization of *pueblos* (groups based on ethnicity, region, language, kinship) into neighborhoods in Mexico City served to catalyze Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations as urban phenomena.

Since the flowering of the Conchero movement in Mexico's largest cities, danzantes have expanded throughout Mexico, Europe, and the U.S. Broadly speaking, scholars of *Mexicanidad*[14] in Mexico have divided danzantes into three types of groups. I draw from the

[14] In Mexico, scholars prefer the term "Mexicanidad," while in the U.S., "Mexicayotl" is employed. In this chapter I exchange these labels for the title "Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations."

work of Renée De la Torre, et al. (2013) and Francisco de la Peña (2002), as well as from my own field observations, confirming the typology: the Conchero Movement, Mexicayotl, Macehuales, and the New Mexicayotl. However, as a result of my field research in Chicago I argue that an additional category has emerged out of the history of the Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations: a transnational Mexico-U.S. category of racio-religious identity.

In this chapter I argue that despite differences between groups in terms of their practices, they are all racio-religious groups seeking to recover what they consider to be "stolen" Indigenous identities. I borrow the terms "racio-religious" and "religio-racial" from Judith Weisenfeld (2016) to better describe the Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations phenomena and to mark an important distinction between them and the Mexicayotl Movement. "Mexicayotl" was adopted as a term by the Nieva family (founders of the significant *Movimiento Confederado Restaurador de Anahuac*), and was used by other subgroups both prior to and after the Nieva family's period of greatest influence. While I see a commonality in the pervading religio-racial identities in these groups, I also acknowledge their differences and historical continuities. I discuss Weisenfeld's movement categories in more detail below, and then revisit important moments in the history and creation of Mexican movements of indigenous revitalization.

In her book *New World A-Coming* (2016), Judith Weisenfeld provides a new categorization for the study of select Black religious groups formed in the U.S. between 1920 and 1940. Her contribution to the study of racial and religious minorities and the power of self-identification in social movements is in her classification model. Like Weisenfeld, I see the Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations as a racio-religious movement in Mexico. Although there are many differences among the groups Weisenfeld studied, the common characteristic

is the determination by Black Americans to reclaim and redefine their racial and religious identities. For Weisenfeld, members of the groups she examined crafted identities at the intersection of religion and race. She also noted points of convergence in the creation of movements and identities that persist into the present day. Some of the similarities between Weisenfeld's groups and the ones under discussion in this dissertation include:

1) The reclamation of an identity that is tied to the land. Whereas Weisenfeld describes how Black groups in the U.S. claimed lineage from African nations as central to their identities, Toltec and Aztec Revitalization groups have a strong commitment to reclaiming their bodies and ancestry directly to Mexico-Tenochtitlan. Unlike the mestizo formulation that traces essential parts of its genealogy to Spain/Europe, Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations reject Mexican state policies of mestizaje, and its ultimate goal to assimilate the Indian. In these groups the process is reversed: the mestizo body is re-Indianized.

2) The rejection or redefining of the term "religion." Some of the groups Weisenfeld explores either reject the notion of religion or they push the concept into different frameworks. For example, Marcus Garvey, founder of UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association), called on people of African descent to reclaim Africa as their spiritual homeland and to be prideful of their identity through the study of history. Similarly, Toltec and Aztec Revitalization Movements reject the modern concept of religion, while adopting the notions, or at least the power of the ideas, of history and science. Here, alternate views of "religion" are intertwined with race in the creation of new, alternative identities. "We cannot begin to understand the racial identities of these women and men without exploring their religious sensibilities" Weisenfeld notes, "and we cannot take full account of how they

understood themselves religiously without engaging their racial self-understandings" (Weisenfeld, Loc. 243).

3) Movements as urban phenomena caused by internal migration. While Weisenfeld approaches the "great migration" of Black people northward and into cities in the early twentieth century as a catalyzer for Black racio-religious movements, scholars of Mexicayotl have acknowledged the importance of post-revolutionary Mexican migration from peasant communities to urban areas. In this regard, I make two arguments: that the deterritorialization of peasant communities into urban areas accounts for how and why a pan-Indigenous movement works so well; and secondly, but importantly, that this mobility is not unidirectional. That is, displacement is not just people moving from rural to urban environments, it is also the cities themselves that are moving, expanding their urban landscapes into what once were rural communities. Later in the chapter I will examine the creation of the first Calpulli (ward, or district) movement, which began in Mexico City.

To gain a full understanding of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations it is necessary to describe the four categories of sub-groups. I will also explore two foundation myths behind the movement's creation and the implications that these myths have in the movement's ideological formation. I follow this up with a historical account of the key individuals who created and consolidated the ideas behind these Revitalizations. This discussion takes into consideration the central figure of Rodolfo Nieva, but also looks at the important actors who came before him and who we know about thanks to the sources and research of Baruch Martinez (2013). Finally, I examine how these Revitalizations have moved, both inside and outside Mexico, leading to new ways of understanding the ideology and corporeal disciplines like Danza. This dissertation explores a case study of mobility inside Toltec and Aztec

Revitalizations and among its practitioners: the Macehuales. I end the chapter by proposing that the Macehual ideal, created by Maestro Akaxe Gomez in Chicago, is the culmination of a long history of Revitalization developments and intentions. However, as Akaxe has noted in his classes and interviews, the Macehual is just a starting point, a humble beginning. I argue that Akaxe and his students are reforming Mexicayotl ideas and practices towards the creation of an identity that is shifting from a collective/group identification into individual identities which are fed by the collective and generated by different groups. Although Akaxe is a Mexican national and his students are mainly of Mexican descent, it is no coincidence that the individualization of collective identities (racio-religious) is being produced in the U.S.

1.2 Notes on Methodology

Unlike the rest of my dissertation chapters, which are based on my ethnographic work in Chicago, in this chapter I combined ethnography in Mexico City with archival work and the study of historical primary and specialized secondary sources.

In January 2019 I traveled to Mexico City for three weeks to gather data and find historical trends relating to something that seemed—in the literature I had reviewed so far—a historical rupture. I went to the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN) and the Hemeroteca Nacional at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM).[15] I wanted to find information about 1) Danza before the Nieva family and the nineteenth century; and 2) the Magazine *Izkalotl* which was published in Mexico City by the Mexicayotl Movement from the 1960s to the 1980s. Neither inquiry met with much success. I put my investigation into

[15] UNAM is a world renowned research university and the largest university in Latin America. It has research centers, archives, libraries, museums, and 15 different colleges offering graduate and undergraduate education to over 400,000 students.

Danza in the nineteenth century on hold to focus on more contemporary issues and to channel my time and energy into locating the magazine. The General Library and the Hemeroteca of the UNAM confirmed that there should be a copy of *Izcalotl* at one of the university libraries, but we never found it, despite the help of countless librarians. “It must have been put back in the wrong place,” one told me; “maybe we don’t have it anymore,” said another.

As a last resort, I decided to call the number listed for the Calpulli Mexicayotl on their website. When someone answered I explained who I was and asked if they knew anything about the magazine *Izcalotl*. “UNAM should have it” said the voice on the phone. After I explained that I had failed to locate it in two different archives, that same voice replied, in a resigned tone, “we have it here, you can come.” We arranged a visit. I noted down the address and instructions for getting there, and the next day I traveled there by subway.

The Calpulli Mexicayotl, also the house of the Nieva family, was itself an archive. Without meaning to, I exchanged my archival investigation for an ethnographic one. Before I was even able to see the magazine, Izkaltekatl Nieva “interviewed” me. Then, after approving of my presence, they allowed me to come back two days more to read the magazine on one of their laptops. Since most issues of the magazine are digitized, they only showed me the first two issues in its printed version.

I was able to go to the Calpulli a third time to attend one of the classes they were offering. We were a small group of six students learning healing methods from Mesoamerica. The teacher, Tematchtiani Temanaztli, told me some of the oral history of the Mexicayotl Movement and he recommended that I read Baruc Martinez’s bachelor’s thesis. Martinez’s work became central to my understanding and historicizing of Toltec and Aztec

Revitalizations. In Mexico, a bachelor's thesis can take years of writing and research. The academic rigor of Martinez's work is attested by his academic committee, professors of the History Department at UNAM.

Besides Calpulli Mexicayotl, I also visited Calpulli Toltecayotl: Maestro Arturo Meza Gutierrez's Calpulli in Mexico City. As Akaxe's main teacher, and one of the most prolific writers in Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations, Maestro Arturo Meza became an important part of this dissertation. I also had a personal connection to Maestro Meza. He was my mother's teacher and friend when I was a child. The contrast between the warm way Maestro Meza welcomed me and the chilly reception I got from the Nieva family was amusing and revealing, demonstrating how ethnographic encounters vary according to research positionality and privileges. In the eyes of the Nieva family I was "la niña ésta" (that girl), while Maestro Meza would refer to me as "mi niña" (my girl) with endearing familiarity.

While the Nieva family belong to the Mexicayotl Movement, Maestro Meza (and, as a consequence, Akaxe) have distanced themselves from it. Maestro Meza positions himself and his teachings through the Toltecayotl while Akaxe does so through Macehualiztli and the Macehual Path (chapters 4 and 5). In order to distinguish the types of affiliations held by those in Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations, I present the various categories into which Danza is divided:

1.3 Toltec and Aztec Revitalization Movements Through Danza: Concheros, Aztecas, New Mexicayotl and Macehuales

The categories I am presenting here are not new, nor are they fixed; they correspond to a sociological attempt to categorize hybrid movements which fluctuate between Indigenous Revitalizations and Mexican New Age forms (De la Torre and Gutierrez Zúñiga

2011). Although classification may help to understand the genealogies of Mexican movements of indigeneity, it is also true that the individuals involved disregard classification, moving between and around categories and even practicing other spiritual and religious traditions outside of them. Despite the fluidity and mobility of individuals between groups there are also "conservative" practitioners who differentiate themselves from other groups.

In their most recent work, Renée De la Torre and Cristina Gutierrez Zúñiga (2017) describe Conchero-Azteca dance as a single movement, although in other projects they have acknowledged the distinctions that I review and present here. Francisco de la Peña (2002) also draws distinctions between them. Even though De la Torre and Gutierrez's approach may be closer to the affinities between groups, I agree with and welcome de la Peña's differentiation of these movements and their practitioners. Although these categories are not new in Mexican scholarship, they are useful. It is necessary, however, to add one more: the Macehual. My argument in brief is that the Macehual, the individual adherent, is a newly evolving form in Mexicayotl (as historically and geographically situated) and in the broader field of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations. While these categories can be traced historically from the oldest organization (Concheros, tracing their movement to the 1500s) to the newest (Macehuales, reclaiming their name in the 2000s), I am not proposing a teleological evolution of the Movements. Rather, all of these groups and their practitioners can be described as actively working towards "improving," perhaps even "purifying," and learning within their own formations.

Presenting these categories is important; partly because some practitioners do in fact care about their group affiliations, and partly because it allows us to take into account socio-

historical contexts and responses to the imposition and resistance of label identities in heterogenous cultures like Mexico and Mexican communities abroad.

A) The Conchero Movement

The Conchero movement and the *danzas de conquista* are the examples first examined by scholars trying to understand the world of "Indigenous" or Aztec dances. It is important to note, however, that although these dance organizations are often conflated with Mexicayotl, they are different in structure, objectives, and practitioners.

The literature describing the Conchero Movement (Gonzalez Torres 2005; Rostas 1991, 1994; Stone 1974) tends to focus on the internal organization, and the military structure of the society of danzantes (e.g. Sergeant, Captain, etc.). Practitioners of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations consider Concheros to be "guardians of the tradition" because they represent the oldest form of indigenous public performance organization. Ironically, the Conchero Movement is also the most "syncretic," as it mixes Indigenous rituals and beliefs with Catholic practices. This syncretism is observable in their dances, which are visibly a fusion of the Spanish *Moros y Cristianos* dance form with *Mexica/Chichimeca* dances. According to Francisco de la Peña (2002), practitioners adopted the name "Conchero" (from the word *concha*, which refers to the mandolin, the European stringed instrument that is central to the dance) in 1922 when the first cooperative was founded. However, the lineage of Indigenous organized Danza can be traced to colonial and pre-conquest Mexico (Sten 1991).

One of the first scholarly studies of the Conchero tradition is in Martha Stone's ethnography *At the Sign of Midnight* (1974) where she describes her relationship with *jefes Concheros* while living in Mexico City. As an outsider to Mexican culture, Stone regarded the Concheros as Indigenous people. However, Mexican scholars do not consider Conchero

dances Indigenous, even though these groups come from rural, peasant communities. The difference in Conchero racialization is a good example of the differences between racial projects in Mexico and the U.S. and the varying scholarly interpretations of race in both countries. British scholar Susana Rostas, writing about the Concheros almost three decades after Stone, described them as having their own ethnic identity created through the dance practice; neither Indigenous nor mestizo, but something in between (Rostas 2002).

In 1965, the *Departamento de Promoción y Difusión del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia* made the documentary *Él es Dios*, directed by Alfonso Muñoz, Víctor Anteo, Bonfil Batalla and Arturo Warmar. In the documentary, the anthropologists repeatedly ask "¿Quienes son estos hombres?" ("Who are these men?") while images of dancing and singing Concheros flow across the screen. The narrative voice of the documentary concludes that these men represent a bridge between the Indigenous, quasi-mystical world and the mestizo/modern world. (Bonfil et al, *Él es dios*).

Both the documentary *Él es Dios* and the Conchero literature mentioned above share elements characterizing the Concheros as distinctly different from Aztec dance/Mexicayotl, New Mexicayotl, and Macehualiztli. These specifically Conchero elements include: hierarchical composition of the groups into *mesas* ("tables"); deploying a military vocabulary; kinship relationships based on the idea of *compadrazgo* (godparent relationships); *compromiso* (commitment) towards Danza and its ceremonies; *dar la palabra* (literally, "give the word": a ritualistic act of letting others speak and have a voice/power); ritual activity around the Roman Catholic calendar of saints; and ceremonies in honor of ancestors (usually deceased danzantes).

The main informant for the documentary, Andrés Segura (*heredero,* or *capitán*)—arguably the most influential Conchero in the United States—is presented as a young actor, choreographer, and *Capitán Conchero*. He invites the anthropologists to join him in the slums of the city to film ritual activities. Another important Conchero leader appears 18 minutes into the film: Faustino Rodriguez, from the mesa de Tepetlixpa, is interviewed about his commitment to Danza.[16] The images of the documentary portray the Concheros as poor, marginalized Mexicans; the viewer only hears their chanting and singing voices. The documentary is narrated by the anthropologists, so the voices of the danzantes and the important *Jefes Conchero* are, unfortunately, lost and we see only the documentarians' perspective on the Concheros.

28 minutes into the documentary, there is an interview with Don Ernesto Ortiz, another jefe. He laments how people are forgetting Danza. Ortiz's family is seen dancing, playing music, and accepting money donations in Mexico City's Zócalo (main plaza). Narrating Ortiz's words, the voiceover quotes him: "Danza para vivir y vive para la danza" ("To dance is to live and to live is to dance") (*Él es Dios* at 31:14). However, unlike the other Conchero leaders seen participating in intimate ceremonies, Ortiz is shown using *Danza* as a public performance for economic needs. It is also through Ortiz that we can recognize the apprehension that Danza is being forgotten because few want to make a commitment to it anymore; this is probably why the Conchero leaders agreed to appear on film, when they would usually prefer not to discuss the tradition openly.

[16] Although Faustino Rodriguez is not as young as Andrés Segura, seeing him in what must be his late 40s or early 50s came as a shock to me. My mother met Don Faustino in his later years and in the few memories I have of him, and in the pictures around the house, he was always a *viejito* (old man).

The three Conchero informants for the *Él es Dios* documentary are largely responsible for the expansion of Danza. Ernesto Ortiz was later one of the main informants for Martha Stone. Andrés Segura is known for training many other dancers and coming to the U.S. to teach Danza at the border (Poveda 1981, Luna 2011). In the 1980s, Don Faustino Rodríguez was in contact with the Reginista Movement (a neo-Mexican nationalistic and spiritual movement that believed in the return of Regina, a fictional character who would save Mexico from its decline) through my mother and he supported the group until his death (Buendia 2014). All of these important Conchero masters participated in the documentary as a form of recruitment, opening Danza to urban mestizos, reproducing dance and ceremony in the face of what they saw as the uncertain future of the Conchero tradition.

The Concheros are in an in-between space that is difficult for some anthropologists to accept and understand. They are visible yet invisible; they are poor, marginal, and brown, but not quite Indigenous; they continue Indigenous traditions which—from within Catholic culture—transport the modern mestizo back to a pre-colonial past, an *imaginaire* of Aztec Mexico that should exist in today's world and that has been presented by groups of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations. At the end of *Él es Dios*, the narrator concludes that the Concheros reside in ambiguity. However, this ambiguity is imposed upon the Concheros and actually belongs to the viewers and scholars who remain unable to place them into a category:

> Cuántos seres, anónimos para nosotros en esta ciudad, en el país entero, en cualquier parte, viven intensamente un mundo que ignoramos. No son mundos secretos, están allí, para el que en verdad quiera comprenderlos. Son girones del pasado que viven hoy por que se vuelven necesarios. Son el refugio de muchos. Aquí anidan el dolor y la esperanza. (There are so many people, unknown to us in this city, in this whole country, everywhere, who live intensely in a world we ignore. These are not secret worlds; they are there for anyone who really wants to understand. They are

> remnants of the past that live today because they have become necessary. They are the refuge of many. Here lies pain and hope.) (*Él es Dios*, min 36:41)

B) Mexicayotl/ Movimiento de la Mexicanidad. Aztec Dance/Danza Azteca

This sub-category of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations is expressed under different names according to each group's emphases on particular practices and whether practitioners are located in Mexico or the U.S. In Mexico, these groups are identified as "*movimiento de la mexicanidad*" and some of their members practice *Danza Mexica* (or *Azteca*), a form of Danza that is "more cultural"[17] than that of the Concheros, which is considered "more religious" because of its Catholic affiliations. In the U.S., these practitioners identify their movement using the Nahuatl term Mexicayotl ("Mexica-ness") adopted from the *Movimiento Confederado Restaurador de Anahuac* (MCRA).

As with the Conchero Movement, Mexicayotl groups are formed by marginalized urban people. They are not recognized by the State as being Indigenous. However, the majority of the participants in these groups are working class, brown mestizos, who are reclaiming an Indigenous identity. Scholars in Mexico have understood Mexicayotl as a Mexican nationalist movement with indigenist overtones (Odena Güemes 1984; De la Peña 2002) that arose after the creation of MCRA (Odena Güemes 1984). However, because I am proposing that Toltec and Aztec Revitalization movements are racio-religious groups, I challenge the narrow definition of what is meant by nationalistic movements. That is, I do not reject the notion that these movements are invested in cultural nationalist ideas, but I do insist that we need to understand such "nationalist" organizations within the specific racial projects of the

[17] Although this type of Danza still follows ritual protocols, people from the Mexicayotl consider it "cultural not religious" because the word "religious" is equated with institutional religions, such as Catholicism. By saying that their Danza is "cultural" they are also differentiating themselves from Conchero Dancers.

Mexican state. As with Judith Weisenfeld's understanding of the Moorish Temple's dual and complementary need to connect to the modern nation (the U.S., in this case) and to the sacred geography of origin (Ethiopia), participants in Mexicayotl organizations also share these commitments. On the one hand, Mexicayotl members are proud citizens of the Mexican nation and its efforts towards progress and development, while on the other hand, their connection to a sacred land and time draws them directly to a neo-Indigenous identity. Thus, while the construction of this identity is "nationalistic," it is also countercultural in its challenge to the ideas and ideals of the *mestizo* nation. That is, as proud modern Mexican citizens, they are also reclaiming an identity that supposedly went extinct after the conquest; a *Mexica* (not "Mexican") identity.

Mexicayotl groups undertake different practices that vary from learning Indigenous languages, the study of pre-colonial history and philosophy, and the use of the body in dances and other revitalized disciplines such as martials arts and the Mesoamerican ball game (*juego de pelota,* or *tlatchtli*). Not all groups practice these forms, and historically some activities become more important than others. Between the 1920s and 1950s, for example, the most important goal of Mexicayotl organizations was linguistic revitalization, where Nahuatl language schools and private institutes were created while also incorporating the cult for Aztec deities like Huitzilopochtli and Tlaloc (De la Peña 2002, Friedlander 1975, Martinez 2010, Odena 1984). In the 1960s there was a cultural shift towards nationalism (De la Torre 2007, De la Peña 2002, Odena Güemes 1984). And between 1980 and 2000 there was a focus on healing as part of the dominant rhetoric (De la Torre and Gutierrez Zúñiga 2017, de la Peña 2002). As such, individual groups create their own specific histories to explain each practice as connected with pre-colonial cultures. While it is historically

verifiable that Mexicayotl ideas and organizations originated in the late 1920s, these groups are reinterpreting and reenacting privileged and selected pre-colonial histories and practices. Mexicayotl movements are, therefore, lived traditions born in the early twentieth century and founded upon an imagined genealogy to pre-colonial Mexico-Tenochtitlan.

Although not every person in Mexicayotl practices Danza, those who do differentiate themselves from their Conchero counterparts by claiming Danza as a cultural, rather than religious, practice. This important distinction is in direct opposition to Conchero Catholic practices such as the veneration of the Virgin and the *compadrazgo* system of relationships. Mexicayotl groups also have distinct structural forms: instead of being socially arranged into *mesas*, they are organized as Calpullis, a family/kin-based arrangement quite different from the military structures of the Concheros. Some of their musical instruments and regalia are also different. While the Concheros are characterized by, and indeed, named after the mandolin (*la concha*), Aztec dancers only perform with "pre-Hispanic" instruments such as *huehuetl* and *teponaztli* drums, and the *tlapitzalli* flute.

There are, nevertheless, moments of convergence between Concheros and Aztec Dancers, and participants sometimes move between groups. In certain cases the distinction is hard to make, but in other instances the dancers may become protective of their practices and the meanings they attach to their dancing as essential parts of their identities.

C) The *Macehuales*

The *Macehual* (in plural, "Macehuales") is a new category that I am adding to the above types of Indigenous Revitalizations. The use of the term *Macehuales*, instead of "Mexica" or "Concheros" derives from the teacher I worked with closely during my fieldwork in Chicago (2018-2019). While I have not met people in Mexico calling

themselves Macehuales, I have no doubt that groups in Mexico will adopt this name at some point because there is a shared vocabulary between revitalization groups in Mexico and the U.S. This new term is a response to, and rejection of, the negative aspects reported in Mexicayotl Danza circles,[18] which include various forms of abuse, as well as alcoholism and misogynist behavior. To date, Macehuales is a U.S.-centered reform movement. The concepts and the new vocabulary that the Macehuales are currently developing differentiate them from the concepts common to Calpullis and those following the Mexicayotl tradition.

Although I am proposing that the group is trying to achieve a change that looks like a reformation, this does not mean that there are "new" items in the Movement. On the contrary, Macehuales reforming Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations have a tendency to claim "older" knowledge, a knowledge that is supposedly closer to a pre-Colombian world without Spanish interference. However, the following description of the forms of Indigenous revitalization and New Age seems to be a new form of Mexicayotl.

D) New Mexicayotl/ La Nueva Mexicanidad

The New Mexicayotl consists of a much more diverse group than the above mentioned groups. The New Mexicayotl is mainly made up of urban, middle class, light-skinned mestizos. Although this generalization does have basis in fact, this demographic is not exclusive to the New Mexicayotl; it is not uncommon to find middle class, light-skinned participants in the Conchero and Mexicayotl groups as well. It is also the case that the New Mexicayotl movement includes participants who are darker-skinned, working class, and Indigenous. The main reason for this demographic fluidity is that participants belonging to

[18] Danza groups are often call "circles" because the dance is practiced in a circle (see Chapter 4) and they are synonymous with belonging and community.

any of these groups move through categories and spaces constructed around ritual activity or spiritual necessity.

This branch of the revitalization movements took form between the 1970s and the 1980s when Mexican spiritual seekers became curious about Indigenous Mexican spiritualities and practices after having been in contact with Asian traditions and New Religious Movements coming from the U.S. Seekers felt that if they were able to connect with foreign spiritualities they should be better able to connect with their "own" Mexican traditions. This generation of seekers was partially motivated by literature published in the late 1960s that narrated stories of non-Indigenous mestizos receiving the teachings of Indigenous healing men. Both Carlos Castañeda's *Las enseñanzas de Don Juan* (*The Teachings of Don Juan)* (1968) and Ayocuan's *La mujer dormida debe dar a luz* (1968) were popular books among seekers of "authentic" spiritual experiences. Such experiences could also be found among the Concheros and within Indigenous communities, although it was harder for seekers to access Indigenous communities.

In the late 1980s, Antonio Velasco Piña published *Regina: Dos de octubre no se olvida,* a novel that revolutionized the Mexican urban spiritual landscape. *Regina* remains in important text for understanding changes in contemporary Mexican religion because it featured women as the central spiritual protagonists. The *Reginista* movement that arose out of the lessons and prophetic message of Velasco Piña's book opened up the possibility for female spiritual seekers to take up positions of power, an impossibility for them in the Conchero Movement at that time. Women in positions of authority do not yet exist in Mexicayotl (Buendia 2014).

As stated above, my focus in this dissertation will be on the Macehuales. It is, however, necessary to describe the history and types of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations in order to

understand how and why the Macehual form came about. Also, I have argued that "Mexicayotl" should only be employed as a term when referring to a portion of groups and not every group will accept this category. Therefore, I propose Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations as a useful umbrella term, capable of embracing differences while preserving similarities. As will be seen in my exploration of the Macehual organization, Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations accurately describes this U.S. group, as well as potential new groups arising on both sides of the border.

1.4 Foundational Myths. Conchero Return and the Message of Cuauhtémoc

Both the Conchero Movement and Mexicayotl claim foundational myths connecting their histories to prophecies of a future where Indigenous peoples return and regain power over Mexican territory. I argue that these myths are the first hints of decolonization impulses present in today's Revitalization movements (see chapters 4 and 5). These myths are important because they position contemporary movements as the continuation of pre-colonial practices. Thus, foundational myths create a lineage of teachers that can be traced through oral history and situated in central Mexico, more specifically on the outskirts of Mexico City, in the State of Mexico, and Querétaro. These myths also point to a promised and attainable future free of European colonialism. However, neither of these foundational stories can be traced historically through sources normally accepted by scholars. In addition, neither of these narratives can be authenticated by material culture to prove their veracity. Nevertheless, they are stories that are passed from generation to generation to keep Danza and ceremony alive and connected to the past.

The Concheros trace the moment they become Concheros (instead of remaining members of barbaric Chichimec tribes) back to the time of the Spanish conquest of Mexico. The Concheros' origin story—believed to have been passed down through oral tradition—ties their foundation to an exact time and place. During a battle between the Spanish and their native allies against the Chichimecs at the Cerro del Sangremal, St. James the Apostle (*Apostol Santiago*) appeared in the sky on a white horse, causing the Chichimecs to surrender and convert to Catholicism. For some Concheros this miraculous sign symbolizes their commitment to Catholicism (De la Peña 2002), for others it is a sign of passive resistance that will culminate with regaining power from the Spaniards (personal communication with David Cáceres 2015).[19] In both cases it is at this moment of witnessing the miraculous apparition of the apostle that Concheros committed themselves to Danza: either as an activity of passive resistance or as part of their Catholic obligations .

Although not related to dance, Mexicayotl also has an orally-based foundational myth. Most people in Mexicayotl are familiar with the "Message of Cuauhtémoc" but not many know where it originated. According to Baruc Martinez, Cuauhtémoc's message came from Estanislao Ramírez Ruiz's oral tradition. The Message reads:

> Nuestra sagrada energía ya tuvo a bien ocultarse, nuestro venerable sol ya dignamente desapareció su rostro, y en total obscuridad se dignó dejarnos.
>
> **(Our sacred energy had been hidden, our venerable sun honorably obscured its face, and found it worthy to leave us in total darkness)**.
>
> Ciertamente sabemos [que] otra vez se dignará volver, que otra vez tendrá a bien salir y nuevamente vendrá dignamente a alumbrarnos.
>
> **(Certainly we know that it will deign to return, that it will see fit to rise again, and once again come with dignity to illuminate us).**
>
> En tanto que allá entre los muertos tenga a bien permanecer.

[19] David Cáceres Rosas is a Conchero dancer and practitioner of *Espiritualismo* in Mexico City. In 2014 he published his independent research in *Tepetl Teotl. Un breve encuentro con nuestros cerros sagrados de nuestro México*.

(Yet while there, among the dead, to stay).

Muy rápido reunámonos, congreguémonos y en medio de nuestro corazón escondamos todo el nuestro corazón se honra amando y sabemos nuestra riqueza en nosotros como gran esmeralda.

(Let us quickly come together, congregate, and within our heart let us hide everything, our heart is honored by loving, and we know our wealth within us is like a great emerald).

Hagamos desaparecer los nuestros lugares sagrados, los nuestros Calmécac los nuestros juegos de pelota, los nuestros Telpochcalli, las nuestras casas de canto; que solos se queden los nuestros caminos y nuestros hogares que nos preserven.

(Let us make our sacred places disappear, our Calmécac, our ball games and Telpochcalli, our houses of song; so that all that remains are our paths and our homes that preserve us).

Hasta cuando se digne salir el nuevo nuestro sol, los venerados padres y las veneradas madres que nunca se olviden de decirles a los sus jóvenes y que les enseñen (a) sus hijos mientras se dignen vivir, precisamente cuán buena ha sido hasta ahora nuestra amada ANÁHUAC donde nos cuidan nuestros venerados difuntos, su voluntad y sus deseo, y solo también por causa de nuestro respeto por ellos y nuestra humildad ante ellos que recibieron nuestros venerados antecesores y que los nuestros venerados padres, a un lado y otro en las venas de nuestro corazón, los hicieron conocer en nuestro ser.

(Even when the new sun deigns to rise, our venerable fathers and our venerable mothers should never forget to tell our youth and teach our children, as long as they should live, exactly how good our beloved ANAHUAC has been, where our venerable ancestors watch over us, by will and desire, and that it is only due to our respect for them and our humility before them that they received our venerated predecessors, and that our honored fathers, on both sides of our heart, let us know them in our being).

Ahora nosotros entregamos la tarea (a) los nuestros hijos ¡Que no olviden, que les informen (a) sus hijos intensamente como será la su elevación, como nuevamente se levantará el nuestro venerable sol y precisamente como mostrará dignamente su fuerza precisamente como tendrá a bien completar grandiosamente su digna promesa esta nuestra venerada y amada tierra madre ANÁHUAC!

(Now we pass the task on to our children. That they should not forget, that they should earnestly inform their own children of how their elevation will come about, of how our venerable sun will arise again, and how it will show strength with dignity, precisely how it will be pleased to fulfill its worthy promise in this, our venerated and beloved motherland, ANAHUAC!)

CUAUHTÉMOC

Anahuac Huei Tlahtohuani. Tenochtitlán-México

> mahtlactlihuan yei cuetzpalin, tlaxochimaco, yei calli (trece lagartija, se ofrendan flores, tres casa) (Lunes 12 de agosto de 1521 del calendario europeo juliano) (jueves 22 de agosto de 1521 del calendario europeo gregoriano).
>
> **CUAUHTÉMOC**
> **Emperor (lit. "Great Speaker") of Anahuac. Tenochtitlán-México**
> **13 Cuetzpalin, flowers offered, 3 Calli**
> **(Monday, August 12, 1521 of the European Julian calendar)**
> **(Thursday, August 22, 1521 of the European Gregorian calendar).**
>
> (http://depa.fquim.unam.mx/amyd/archivero/Historia-ULTIMO_MENSAJE_DE_CUAHTEMOC_O_CONSIGNA_DE_ANAHUAC_12agosto1521_24510.pdf, consulted March 24, 2021).

This declaration attributed to Cuauhtémoc, who is regarded widely as the last Aztec emperor, functions similarly to the Conchero foundation myth. There is an implicit (in the declaration) or explicit (in the Conchero Movement) acknowledgement of colonization and its destructive impact on Indigenous cultures. While the Concheros' myth is particular to themselves, Cuauhtémoc's message expands to include several groups reclaiming Toltec and Aztec Revitalization beliefs and practices. It is no coincidence that the figure of Cuauhtémoc holds a messianic role. Cuauhtémoc is known in the Mexican school system as the "last Tlatoani" (SEP) even though there were subsequent Tlatoanis after Cuauhtémoc was murdered by the Spanish. One of these was Don Diego de Alvarado Huanitzin (grandson of the sixth emperor Axayacatl and Montezuma II's nephew) who served as the last Tlatoani (as understood by the Aztecs), under Spanish control, and who was later chosen as the first governor of Tenochtitlan (Restall 2018). But it is Cuauhtémoc that history remembers, both as a martyr and as a symbol of the Aztec Empire's final resistance. Cuauhtémoc symbolizes the twilight of Aztec civilization and its transformation into a colonial world. Thus, it is significant that Cuauhtémoc gains such central importance for Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations. His centrality rests not only on his words and the message presented here, but also on the discovery of his remains by Mexican anthropologist Eulalia Guzmán in 1949.

The startling and controversial discovery of Cuauhtémoc's bones in Ixcateopan, Guerrero served to remind Mexicans—especially those interested in revitalizing pre-Columbian practices—that Aztec and Toltec cultures were still alive and in the process of awakening.

In 1979, further archeological research revealed that the bones actually belonged to several individuals and could not have been from the 1500s. Nonetheless, people from Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations continued to attach meaning to the bones, which had provided them with a new location for ceremonies outside of Mexico City. At the same time, the discovery and subsequent investigation reinforced tensions between practitioners and the academic community of Mexican historians and anthropologists who disqualified and minimized Revitalization efforts to reaffirm Indigenous identities.

The structure of the Conchero and Mexicayotl founding myths are similar and symbolic. There is a moment of reflection or revelation in each that culminates in a call to pause, hide, preserve, and resist passively and silently. Both culminate with an assertion of the future. A future that will once again be Indigenous. For Bruce Lincoln a myth is an "ancestral invocation" (Lincoln 21), a discourse employed by groups to connect with the idea of ancestry and collective memory. The idea of the ancestor according to Lincoln can be remote, allowing societies to create affinities and affiliations through ancestors. In the case of Aztec and Toltec Revitalizations there is the promotion of a collective ancestor marked by racial categories imposed after the conquest. These categories, which were at the beginning (literally) formulated as a caste system, later became the "norm" against the "other." By the turn of the twentieth century, the mestizo construction as a category that worked efficiently and productively in cultural and ethnic terms helped create an illusion of a homogenous and equitable society. The mestizo—light brown, brown, Black, or light-skinned, and with Asian

features—became (and still is) the platform of privilege in Mexican society. Thus people from the Conchero and Mexicayotl movements draw a connection to a collective Indigenous ancestor through these myths.

Both myths provide adherents to revitalization movements with a reason for why they are no longer Indigenous. The narratives also provide them with a future that returns them to indigeneity and centers them in opposition to the dominant ideal of mestizaje. While mestizaje acknowledges the racial mixture of people in Mexico, it carries privilege connected to Europe by promoting assimilationist practices. Revitalization movements thus separate themselves, creating an imaginary border that provides them with elements of difference to retrace an Indigenous identity. While not quite pan-Indigenous, Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations expand their lineages for participants and seekers who have difficulty proving and tracing the specific biological and ethnic origins of their families. The Conchero and Mexicayotl founding myths thus connect indigenous revitalizations to the past and future, securing Indigenous Futurity (Harjo 2019) in the various organizations through resistance and renovation, while also holding in the tension of mestizaje and indigeneity as fluid racial projects. In the following section an examination of Mexicayotl origins demonstrates how the pull towards indigeneity as a theme in Mexican history and culture interacted with the ideology of mestizaje and the legacies of colonialism. This discussion also introduces my fieldwork and issues that were raised when interacting with informants as measured against existing scholarship.

1.5 Aztekah Restoration Movements (1920-1940)

Most historians of the Mexicayotl Movement have interpreted it as a post-Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) impulse that gained prominence in the 1950s and 1960s through the

efforts of Rodolfo Nieva Lopez. However, there are indications that indigenist movements existed before the Nieva family, beginning in the 1920s on the outskirts of Mexico City (in *pueblos* that did not form part of Mexico City itself at the time, but that are now incorporated into the urban area of the city). This distinction is important because it decentralizes the movement away from the capital city and revises the view that the Nieva family created Mexicayotl.

Unlike Odena Güemes (1984), and other early scholars who argued for the origins of the Mexicayotl Movement, I follow Baruc Martinez's bachelor's thesis which interrupts the existing scholarship by uncovering the earliest "almost unknown stage" (2010: 10) of Mexicayotl's origins. I agree with Martinez and consider the figures of Juan Luna Cárdenas and Estanislao Ramírez Ruiz as being responsible for laying the foundations of the Mexicayotl Movement. The history of these earlier individuals and movements decentralize the Nieva family's role, while reassigning indigenist efforts as counter-cultural movements to re-Indianize Mexico.

After the revolution of 1910, Mexico was in disarray. The poor became worse off, and it would be many decades—some would say a century—until democratic ideals were reestablished in the country. Amidst this turmoil, much of which was in response to extensive land expropriation (Warmar 1976), a surge of religious pluralism occurred. Since its independence from Spain in 1810, the Mexican state has had an ambivalent—at times openly hostile—relationship with the Roman Catholic Church. Either jealous of the Church's power and wealth, or regarding it as an institution standing in the way of modernizing policies, numerous Mexican regimes have enacted anti-clerical laws to hold the Church in check. Accompanying state suppression of the nation's oldest established religious institution is a

tradition of social revolt. Most of this, again, has been a reaction to the dispossession of peasants from the land, although some unrest has also been religious in impulse. Historian Friedrich Katz (1991) marked two of these movements as especially significant in the second half of the nineteenth century: the religious movement and peasant revolt led by Agustina Gomez Chechep in the Yucatan "Caste Wars," who claimed God spoke to her through stones, and the socialist Christian Plotino Rhodakanaty, who instigated peasant insurrections in Central Mexico (Texcoco, Chalco, Hidalgo) in the 1870s. Thus the connection between religion and social change in Mexican social movements was not new at the turn of the twentieth century. More widely acknowledged examples of religion's influence on political movements include Mexico's 37th president, Francisco I. Madero (1911-1913), whose Spiritualist influences lead him to claim that his revolutionary ideas came from spiritual communication with his dead brother, Raúl (Mayo 2013; Solares 2007); and Teresa Urrea—"the Saint of Cabora"—a visionary miracle healer (Irwin 2015) who inspired revolt in Northern Mexico and contributed to peasant participation in the Mexican Revolution. Urrea's activity along the U.S.-Mexico borderlands makes her one of a number of transnational "saints" and healers (Hendrickson 2014) who inspired peasants and working-class Mexicans and Mexican Americans during the twentieth century. Thus, while religious change and spiritual and land revolts seemed surprising, they were actually signs of the age.

As well as state policies against the Roman Catholic Church, there were also restrictions and impositions on indigenous traditions that were intended to move the country in a more progressive, modern direction.[20] After the revolution, the government ordered a series of

[20] These prohibitions began during the Porfiriato. In 1888, for example, men were prohibited from wearing the traditional Indigenous "calzón de manta," seen as a symbol of backwardness and immorality, and compelled to wear pants instead.

prohibitions. They banned *pulque*—the traditional alcoholic beverage favored by the working classes—in a 1913 law that also mandated closure of all *pulquerías* (pulque bars).[21] In 1919, the government also outlawed all types of public dancing (Odena Güemes, 82). However, this ban was contradicted by the government's appropriation of *danzas folkloricas* for the purposes of creating a national cultural identity. Meanwhile, the Mexican government continued its attempt to limit the Catholic Church's power. The Constitution of 1917 contained sweeping prohibitions, including secularizing public education, restrictions on the public life of clerics, and other policies designed to curb the Church's power and influence. The public rejection of these measures, especially among rural peasants, resulted in outright warfare in 1926. This "Guerra Cristera," or Cristero Rebellion, lasted three years. The conflict is usually interpreted as a battle between religion and secularism, although agrarian issues were also a driving motivation for the "Cristero" rebels. The Constitution of 1917 included an article declaring freedom of religious choice; while this may have been intended as another restriction on the power of Catholicism, one of the unintended consequences was an increase in the practice of other religions (García Ugarte 1995). At the same time, popular Catholic practice in Indigenous communities changed little, with their compadrazgo system and adherence to the saints remaining in place (Bantjes 2006).

What I refer to as Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations can be situated in this early twentieth century context, with roots that go back even before the revolution. As noted before, the *danzas de conquista* or *danzas chichimecas* (renamed *danzas concheras* after 1922) did not

[21] Pulque was a sacred/ceremonial drink for Aztecs. During the colonial period it was stigmatized due to the drink's proximity to Indigenous ways. By the turn of nineteenth century, pulque and pulquerías were considered "immoral." The drink was attached to both racial and class stigmatizations and finally prohibited in 1913 (Gaytán 2014).

end with colonization. In addition to the danzas, there were ideological pro-Indigenous movements that revitalized Indigenous languages and cultures. According to Baruc Martines, the earliest recorded organization in Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations was *Ueyi Tlatekpanaliztli Ikniuhtik Aztekatl*, founded in 1920, which claimed to be a continuity of a pre-Hispanic society. This is not to dismiss Indigenous resistance and revitalization efforts that have been present across various fronts since the early colonial period—from Martin Ocelotl (Klor de Alva 1981) to contemporary Indigenous expressions and resistance from writers and activists like Macedonio Carballo and Yasnaya Elena Aguilar Gil (Aguilar Gil 2020). *Ueyi Tlatekpanaliztli Ikniuhtik Aztekatl* is, however, the first organization that appears in public records with an explicit intention to revitalize "Aztec culture."

Two figures that have been a part of twentieth century Mexicayotl historiography are Juan Luna Cárdenas and Estanislao Ramírez Ruiz, both of whom shared moments of contact that pushed them into prominence in Indigenous revitalization movements during the Cardenist regime (1934-1940).[22]

From details provided by Baruc Martinez (2010) and Judith Friedlander (1975) we can draw some commonalities between Luna Cárdenas and Ramírez Ruiz. For the purposes of this dissertation, the most important commonality is that both Ramírez Ruiz and Luna Cárdenas intersected with Rodolfo Nieva and formed, at times, part of the Mexicayotl Movement. Both men considered themselves descendants of the Americas (therefore Indigenous) and claimed lineage from royal Indigenous ancestors. They both held, and expressed, anti-European sentiment, which passed into the Mexicayotl Movement and

[22] From 1934-1940, Mexican president Lázaro Cárdenas initiated projects to enforce national identity and economic sovereignty. One of his initiatives was to seize the oil industry from private and foreign ownership for the national good. In Mexican historiography, his presidency and policies are referred to as *cardenismo*.

current Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations. Finally, they both achieved higher education and contributed to the Cardenista regime's "modernizing" project from within government agencies, helping to bring about the creation of a national identity. Luna Cárdenas was part of the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) in Asuntos Indígenas ("Indigenous Affairs"), working to create bilingual programs and a language program to "purify" the Nahua language from its Spanish "contamination" (Friedlander 1975). Ramírez Ruiz was one of the founding fathers of the Instituto Politécnico Nacional (the first and largest polytechnic university in Mexico).

Luna Cárdenas and Ramírez Ruiz did not employ the term "Mexicayotl." Instead, they used "Aztekah" to refer to both the Nahua language and the revival of classical Aztec culture. The revival of Aztec culture, and the recurrent implications of claiming Indigenous lineage as part of their "authentication," fall under Weisenfeld's theorizing of racio-religious movements, where cultural and spiritual ideologies are intertwined with racialized identity.

Between these two early founding figures there were, however, differences that can be detected as distinct threads running through Toltec and Aztec Revitalization organizations.

Luna Cárdenas was raised in the city, claiming an Indigenous background. Later in his career he was involved in a scandal, accused of abusing his power and sexually deceiving a young woman in the town of Hueyapan (Martinez 2010, Friedlander 1975). According to Baruc Martinez, Luna Cárdenas learned Nahuatl later in life by reading historical sources and consulting with Nahua speakers. Luna Cárdenas's entry into his indigeneity served as an model for many teachers in the Toltec and Aztec Revitalization Movement; that is, asserting an Indigenous ancestry that is either difficult to authenticate or completely invented. However, Luna Cárdenas was not satisfied with merely claiming an Indigenous bloodline: he

boldly announced descent from royalty through a line of *Tlatoanis.*[23] Luna Cárdenas and the leaders that followed him unfortunately often wielded their positions of power to justify predatory abuses, mainly towards women in their organizations.

In contrast, it is worth noting that Ramírez Ruiz came from the small town of Tlahuac on the outskirts of Mexico City and was a native Nahuatl speaker. He studied engineering abroad through his affiliation with the military, and later became part of the cohort of men who founded the Politécnico Nacional. Unlike Luna Cárdenas, Ramírez Ruiz and many participants in revitalization organizations come from marginalized sectors of Mexican society and maintain close relationships to their family's Indigenous roots. They have also managed to achieve high levels of education and enter the professional sector in Mexico. Of course, some practitioners are a mix of these two types of entry and participation.

Although there were other male leaders of small groups around Mexico City and its outskirts promoting revitalization of Aztec culture, Luna Cárdenas and Ramírez Ruiz remain the most important for this narrative because of their connections to Mexicayotl and how their work helped the movement develop and expand into what we see today.[24]

It is important to highlight that these first revitalization groups used the terms "Aztec culture" and "Aztekah" (the language) as opposed to "Nahuatl." Even though Ramírez Ruiz spoke Nahuatl as his first language and Luna Cárdenas grew up in close proximity to the language as well, insisting on the difference between the language spoken by Indigenous people (Nahuatl) and the revitalized Aztec form (Aztekah) marks a disruption to colonization

[23] A *Tlatoani* was the figure of highest authority in Aztec society: a ruler or a king. The term translates as "Speaker."

[24] Another important figure worth mentioning was David Esparza Hidalgo who, like Ramírez Ruiz, was an engineer. He created the *Nepolhuatzintzin*, a mathematical system, supposedly based on Aztec mathematics.

as a finished project which—while it did not eradicate Indigenous populations—did, it is believed, eradicate Aztec civilization and culture.

These early groups challenged and disrupted the idea of colonialism as a finished project, one in which, after 1521, the Aztec Empire died and a "new world," a *mestizo* world, emerged through the encounter of Indigenous and European civilizations. In this finished colonial narrative, traditionally perpetuated in Mexican schools, "Aztecs" no longer exist. And, ever since then, Indigenous people have been relegated to rural areas. However, this normative narrative does not take into account Indigenous groups, including survivors of the fall of the Aztec Empire who remained within and near the urban centers and put up continual resistance throughout Mexican history. The ongoing life and cultures of Indigenous Mexico are a direct disruption of what has been widely accepted as historically true. Therefore, Revitalization Movements in the early twentieth century repositioned the Indigenous body within a historical continuity—not rupture—of Aztecs as Indigenous people, both before and after the conquest. This was in contraposition to the linguistic umbrella that gathered people from regions of 16 different states of Mexico into one ethnicity.

Unlike Luna Cárdenas and Ramírez Ruiz, whose early forms of Aztec revitalization focused narrowly on cultural revival, the Mexicayotl Movement led by the Nieva family incorporated strong nationalist ideas, leading Toltec and Aztec Revitalization movements to insist on an Indigenous component that fitted with the ideals of Mexican nationalism. This significant organization—the Movimiento Confederado Restaurador de la Cultura del Anáhuac, (Confederated Cultural Restoration Movement of Anáhuac)—marks a turning point in the development of Mexicayotl.

1.6 The MCRA and the Nieva Family (1940s-1980s)

I walk into the living room of the Nieva's home. The red velvet couch reminds me of how *rasquachismo* in Mexico is intimate and natural.[25] Some of the walls are off-white, others are yellow, there is no pattern. It is an unfinished paint job, but it does not look out of place. The whole environment is familiar and cozy. I sit on the couch and look around, taking in the pictures displayed around the room. *Licenciado* Rodolfo Nieva is everywhere: his school diplomas, portraits, and advertising posters of the magazine *Izkalotl*. But what captures my attention is a family portrait: a mother, father and three children. It is a studio shot, in black and white; everyone is well-dressed, properly posed and arranged. In the U.S. the parents might be described as "racially ambiguous." To my eyes they appear to be mestizo: not European, but not quite Indian either. It is hard to tell. But I do not ask about their racial backgrounds because in Mexico it is rude to do so. We Mexicans[26] are raised thinking we are all equal and our national identity is interweaved with an unspoken idea of racial mixture: mestizaje. There is little to no reflection on one's ethnic and racial identity however.

Izkaltekatl comes up the stairs a few minutes after my arrival. I had spoken to him on the phone to arrange this visit. He and his wife are friendly but guarded. I notice some suspicious glances. I explain my research, and mention that I have been looking for copies of *Izkalotl*—the representative magazine of Mexicayotl—in libraries without success. Izkaltekatl's wife,

[25] *Rasquachismo* is a Chicanx aesthetic theory that celebrates Mexican baroque and saturated aesthetics. It stands out in the U.S because it is compared to an almost mono-chromatic American aesthetic, but in Mexico it is natural and authentic. People in Mexico may not even know the Chicanx meaning of rasquachismo. *Rasquache*, on the other hand is a Mexican adjective to describe things that are half-made, or poorly made, but it is offensive to call something rasquache (Mesa-Bains 1999).

[26] Federico Navarrete (2016) attests something similar by contesting the assumption of mestizaje in the history books and national education.

Angélica, tells me that there is a copy in the UNAM archives. I tell her I have been there but that their copy seems to be missing. That is why, I explain, I have now come to their home to see if I can view copies of the magazine. They are doing me a favor by allowing me into their home and I am grateful. Izkaltekatl is Rodolfo Nieva's nephew. He is the son of Jorge Nieva, the brother who, while less involved in Mexicayotl, provided—according to Izkaltekatl—the financial means for the Movement. Rodolfo Nieva became the face of the movement until his death in 1969 after which his sister, Maestra Izkalotzin (Maria del Carmen Nieva), continued Mexicayotl's legacy.

The Nieva house is an archive in itself. Not only does it hold all the volumes of *Izkalotl*, (published from 1960 to 1984 in Mexico City), it also displays photographs, posters of the Movement, and the books they have published throughout the years. In front of a living room, there is a salon where classes are taught, covering such topics as the *Tonalpohualli* (the Aztec divinatory calendar), ancestral mathematics, and healing/ancestral medicine. I asked about Danza classes and they informed me it was taught at a different location, by "very good teachers." Although it is a family home, still inhabited by the Nievas, the building is also considered a Calpulli, a space for teaching and learning Mexicayotl. My discomfort here is multiple. Not only am I light-skinned, but as soon as I reveal that I am studying at a U.S. university, they consider me a *gringa*. I offer several clarifying remarks, but they have made up their minds, and from that moment forward I become "*la niña esa*" ("that girl," a pejorative signaling using a term to denote a female child).

In addition, my presence is challenged a couple of times because of my positionality as a researcher and owing to the vulnerabilities and anxieties that they feel around scholars who come to gather and reinterpret data. In 1984, Mexican anthropologist Lina Odena Güemes

published her study on the Mexicayotl Movement, *Movimiento Confederado Restaurador de la Cultura de Anáhuac*. The Movement subsequently gained visibility among academic elites in large measure thanks to her book. However, some of her interpretations of the movement made the Nievas uncomfortable.[27]

Angélica Nieva told me that Güemes had taken liberties with the information provided to her, had not asked for clarifications, and had not respected the memory of Rodolfo Nieva: "Güemes hizo lo que quiso" ("Güemes did whatever she wanted"). Angélica and Izkaltekatl were upset with the anthropologist's interpretation of Mexicayotl as a "nationalistic/dangerous movement." The Nievas see their movement as merely assisting in creating a sense of "Mexican" identity. Güemes "came, took what she wanted and never asked again… all of a sudden we were reading what she published," Angélica told me in an informal conversation as I was waiting for her husband. Although the authority and legacy of the family name—Nieva—was passed on directly to Izkaltekatl, I consider Angélica an equally important figure in the movement.. She pushes the family to maintain the centrality of the house's importance, an archive, and she has an ongoing project to digitalize all issues of *Izkalotl*.

Conversations with Angélica Nieva raised questions about the work of the ethnographer and the results obtained. How can we, as ethnographers, disagree with informants while respectfully portraying what we observe in the field? How does the investigator negotiate uncomfortable feelings in the field while also writing ethically? And what happens if the

[27] We did not explicitly discuss what it is in Güemes book that causes them discomfort, so I can only surmise. Odena Güemes portrays Rodolfo Nieva and the Movement as a nationalistic movement with the potential to be transformed into a National Socialist (fascist) organization. Odena Güemes also took care to ignore the question surrounding the Indigenous ancestry of Mexicayotl practitioners, despite the fact that her first chapter contains life stories of practitioners who share their connection with Indigenous heritage.

alliances with the people we work with are broken? These methodological questions were present not only during my visit to the Nieva's home and the Calpulli Toltecayotl (Maestro Arturo Meza's study group) in Mexico, but also in Chicago during my participant observation work and while writing this dissertation.

But beyond the disagreement in interpretation between the Nieva family and Güemes regarding the character of their organization, I saw two different ways of interpreting reality, with both sides missing something essential about the other. The Mexicayotl Movement and the Aztec and Toltec Revitalizations are not merely nationalistic movements, as Güemes argued, but movements for constructing a religio-racial identity for many disenfranchised mestizos in Mexico and the U.S. This position does not negate the fact that Mexicayotl forms are responding to a national project, but it opens up a dialogue toward understanding these social movements in terms of racialization in Mexico and the rapid assimilation practices entailed by mestizaje. Nevertheless, Güemes's book remains the best historical account of Mexicayotl; her ethnographic observation and historical excavation of data are invaluable. What I propose is to incorporate new frameworks of religious identity which, along with nationalism, situate Aztec and Toltec Revitalization Movements as complex ideologies that are entangled with Mexican racialization projects and religious needs and practices.

According to Güemes, the history of the Mexicayotl Movement is as follows: the *Movimiento Confederado Restaurador de Anahuac* (MCRA) was founded by Rodolfo Nieva and later passed on to Maria del Carmen Nieva (aka Izkalotzin) in the late 1940s. Rodolfo was educated, belonging to the cohort of the 1920-24 elite class of the "Escuela Nacional

Preparatoria" (ENP) in Mexico.[28] Many of this generation of graduates from the ENP became major public figures in Mexico, including presidents Miguel Alemán Valdés (1946-1952), Rodolfo Ruiz Cortínez (1952-1958), and the artist Frida Kahlo (Martinez 2010; Muñoz Cota 1982).

The MCRA originated as an ideological movement to transform "patriotic" Mexico into a "real nation, a *Nahua* nation" (Nieva 1969). In his book *Izkalotl. El Resurgimiento de Anahuac* (1959), Rodolfo Nieva argues for cultural liberation from Spain's overwhelming influence and the restoration of the Anahuac continent, the land, to its original people—the "raza Aztekah"—as the "alma y núcleo del país" (the Aztec race as the soul and nucleus of the nation") (Nieva 1959, 12). Thus the founding of the Mexicayotl Movement centered on a political history that regarded Indigenous Mexicans as originating on the continent, rejecting the Bering Strait migration theory and reimagining pre-colonial civilizations as socialist utopians: perfect, progressive, and unique. The MCRA proposed that this pure form of socialism preceded modernity, and that China and Russia had "copied" Aztec civilization (Odena Güemes 1984; de la Peña 2012).[29]

Lina Odena Güemes records a shift in the Movement in 1960 when practitioners incorporated what I call "civic ceremonies."[30] These early ceremonies honored important classical Aztec figures, such as Cuauhtémoc and Moctezuma, combining modern Mexican civil religious expressions with indigenous ceremonies: for example, singing the national

[28] The Escuela Preparatoria Nacional (EPN, today known as Escuela Preparatoria 1) is the oldest high school in Mexico and is incorporated into the UNAM. In the early twentieth century it was one of the few high schools in the country. The school had the mission of preparing future university students. A number of major historical figures studied there.

[29] Rodolfo Nieva is one of several revisionists of Aztec history. Another Revitalization proponent is Ignacio Romero Vargas Yturbide, who published *El Calpulli del Anáhuac. Base de nuestra organización política* (1959) among other books. His work also positions the Aztec Empire as the first socialist civilization.

[30] These ceremonies are similar to what Robert Bellah describes as expressions of "civil religion" (Bellah 1969).

anthem in Nahuatl while saluting the four corners of the universe by blowing a conch shell (this latter element also occurs at the start of a Danza circle). Over time, these ceremonies incorporated other indigenous elements, such as Danza, to publicly reproduce the ideals of Mexicayotl and "awaken" the nation.

For Odena Güemes, Rodolfo Nieva's story is constructed to portray a "Mexican in search of his identity" (90). And so, like Nieva, practitioners of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations are in search of an identity. Followers typically come from mixed-race backgrounds, having heard stories of their grandparents' Indigenous lineages. Some practitioners have been victims of racism due to their darker skin. Others have an "inclination" towards Indigenous cultures and want to be part of the Movement.

One of the most useful aspects of Odena Güemes's work on the MCRA is that she documents Rodolfo Nieva's transition from "hispanista" (a defender of Hispanic mestizaje) to "indianista" (a defender of Indigenous people, claiming to be Indigenous himself). This personal transition can be interpreted in different ways. On one hand, his transformation could be viewed as a move to "play Indian," a performance meant to allay anxieties around an incomplete national identity (Deloria 1998). On the other hand, Nieva's adoption of Indigenous identity can be interpreted as a "decolonizing move," towards liberation from European culture and White racist logics. While it would be convenient to settle on one of the two interpretations, the reality is that both impulses occur together. As Güemes summarizes: "A los restauradores les irritaba ser mestizos y a la sociedad global la irritaba su procedencia india. Los primeros querían ser indios; la segunda negaba este origen." ("For the restorationists it was irritating that they were mestizos, and for society around them, it was

irritating that they were Indians. The first wanted to be Indians; the second rejected these origins") (Odena Güemes 134).

This push-pull tension between those reclaiming an Indigenous identity and the "irritation" expressed by society originates in the privilege gained through mestizo citizenship and the effectiveness of colonialism. Unlike the U.S., built on ideals of Americanness and Whiteness, Mexican society structured its post-revolutionary national identity on the founding discourses of mestizaje. In opposition to other Latin America nations, such as Argentina and Chile, which explicitly promoted projects of "blanqueamiento" (whitening), Mexican society incorporated mestizaje as a complex and ambiguous racial and cultural system intertwined with the national project. Monica Moreno Figueroa proposes that mestizaje operates "simultaneously as a hegemonic political ideology, a social and racial promise of equality, and a racialized export, or racist logic that distributes privilege and exclusion within everyday life… mestizaje is not only a site of privilege that is continuously normalized, but also deeply ambiguous, that is, it is characterized by being limited, contradictory and conditional" (Moreno Figueroa 388). Recent critics of mestizaje (Olguin 2018; Urrieta and Calderón 2019) acknowledge the violence that mestizos have produced against Indigenous and Black populations in Mexico and the U.S., noting that the mestizo responds to an aspiration of being closer to the European (non-Indigenous) culture (Navarrete 2015).

Like the Nieva family, many Mexicans who practice forms of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations are part of this in-betweenness: they are mestizos reclaiming an indigenous identity. Mexicayotl and the Nieva family contributed to broader movements of revitalization by giving mestizos who could not officially claim Indigenous identity—due to Mexican state

policies narrowly defining who was Indigenous—the opportunity to reclaim a "lost" identity. This would, in turn, contribute to the acculturation of all Mexicans to a new national culture over time.[31]

Although the Nievas were not the first to revive Aztec culture, it was their work and organization that led to the creation of an "imagined community" (Anderson 1983) through shared language and accessible print publications. These portals to Aztec revival allowed the Movement to travel and expand outside Central Mexico. Likewise, the originally oral tradition coming from the Conchero Movement and marginalized urban Indians like Ramírez Ruiz spread through books and magazines.[32] Although publications from these organizations are now difficult to find (which was my primary reason for visiting Nieva family), new forms of communication are emerging in groups on both sides of the border through social media, such as Facebook and Instagram.

1.7 Moving the Movement. Opening Calmecacs, Settling *Conocimiento*, Dancing for Being

The Nieva home became one of the first Calpullis in Mexico, although Calpulli de Tlahuac, founded by Estanislao Ramírez Ruiz's father, was apparently the first (Martinez 2010). Calpullis have increased in number, expanding across national borders and languages, so the Nieva Calpulli is now just one of many, and not the most important.

[31] Although the debate on cultural appropriation is complicated in colonized and mixed societies like Mexico, one could argue that these groups are appropriating Indigenous cultures. However, Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations do not claim a specific Indigenous identity, but rather a *pan*-Indigenous identity that draws from the Mesoamerican past rather than the current and diverse Indigenous presence in Mexico.

[32] The most important magazine published by MCRA was *Izcalotl*. Rodolfo Nieva also published a book titled *Izcalotl. El resurgimiento de Anahuac* (1959). Maria del Carmen Nieva later published *Mexicayotl. Filosofía nahuatl* (1969), in addition to the above-mentioned literature by Romero Vargas de Yturbide. Since then, the literature of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations has been prolific; there are numerous authors and publications, and several small publishing houses financed by people inside the movement.

One of the first moments of expansion occurred when the Nieva family came into contact with the "*restauradores,*" Luna Cárdenas and Ramírez Ruiz, as well as others who were founding cultural centers for teaching Aztec language and culture. After Rodolfo Nieva's death in the late 1960s, his sister, Maria del Carmen, took over leadership. One of her decisions that helped the Movement expand was to create an alliance with the cultural organization Zemanauac Tlamachtiloyan (ZT), which focused on the study and reinterpretation of Mesoamerican history, and the creation of public ceremonies. According to Angélica Nieva, *la maestra* (Maria del Carmen Nieva) began frequenting Danza groups which practiced at the Journalists Club in Mexico City.[33] Some Conchero groups, including the ZT at this time, were moving away from portraying their dancing and related practices as being primarily religious, towards viewing them as "cultural." They began to purge syncretic/Catholic aspects of their organization as they adopted Mexicayotl ideology. The ZT, much like the MCRA, served as an incubator for many teachers who are still promoting Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations today. These teachers included Luna Cárdenas (Martinez 2010), David Esparza Hidalgo, Ocelocoalt Martinez (Colin 2014), Totocani, and, as this dissertation explores, Akaxe Gomez, the Danza teacher in Chicago and founder of Matinauhkalli (chapters 2 and 3).

Although the broader history of Aztec revitalization appears teleological in the way that individual organizations developed in the public eye (Concheros 1922, Restoration Movement 1920s-1940s, MCRA 1960s-1980s, ZT 1970s-1980s), they are all still active and are constantly being re-invented. When referring to the "Movement moving," and, in the following chapters, to the movement of specific teachers coming to the U.S., it is more

[33] Club de periodistas de México, A.C.

accurate to take into account the mobility between groups and nations as reciprocal exchange. And, although some organizations jealously guard and promote their lineage and history as "pure" or singular, my broader study of Toltec and Aztec Revitalization Movements suggests otherwise.

The mobility of teachers is a phenomenon tied to the history of migration, labor, and cultural exchange between the U.S. and Mexico. If it is true that most of the practitioners of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations in the U.S. come from an immigrant background (Colin 2014, Luna 2011), it is also true that most of these Danza teachers have crossed the border multiple times, which may indicate a legal privilege that many immigrants do not have. These teachers come from Mexico and travel back and forth between Mexico and the U.S. to teach Danza, calendrics, and other disciplines to Mexican and Mexican-American communities.

Among the first teachers who came to the U.S. to teach Danza were Florencio Yescas (Colin 2014) and Andrés Segura (Colin 2014, Poveda 1981). The latter is the very same Andrés Segura who, as we have noted, participated as a primary informant in the documentary *Él es Dios*. After these first, significant teachers, others have come across the border to provide "services" as instructors and to "perform" their Mexica identity. Another important teacher in the U.S. is Ocelocoatl Martinez, who comes from some of the same Mexico City Danza circles as Akaxe Gomez. By the time I attended Akaxe's school, however, the two were no longer on good terms, although Ocelocoatl frequently travelled to Chicago (Fieldnotes September 2018) and other cities, as attested by Ernesto Colin in his fieldwork in San José, California (Colin 2014).

The arrival of the first Danza teachers to the U.S. to form Danza circles coincides with the Chicano Movement which, according to Jennie Luna (2011), used Danza as a romanticized way of reclaiming Indigenous roots. Chicanos and Chicanas incorporated Danza Azteca as a spiritual and cultural tool to reconnect not just with Mexico, but with Indigenous Mexico. In some cases, as detailed by Ernesto Colin (2014) and Jennie Luna, Danza has become "Chicanicized," adding a layer of political activism to the spiritual and cultural components. However, not every Danza group in the U.S. responds to the Chicanx framework; some reject the Chicanx appropriation of Danza as a political tool because it is disrespectful to the sacred[34] character of Danza (Fieldnotes July 2018).

The organization I was involved with in Chicago is separate from the Chicanx Movement in that it maintains clear and direct connections to Mexico and its network of teachers. With Akaxe's arrival in Chicago, Maestro Arturo Meza (from Malinalco and Mexico City) became the crucial link, guaranteeing an "authentic" connection between what is taught and practiced in Chicago and what is rooted in Mexican communities.

In general, these circuits respond to immigrants and/or second generation Mexican-Americans seeking to connect with their "roots" or ancestral lineage. Both Danza and classes in Mesoamerican history and Aztec calendrics provide seekers with a version of their culture that is not available elsewhere, and this results in ethnic pride. Scholars like Renée De la Torre and Cristina Gutiérrez Zúñiga have studied immigrant circuits in the U.S. and Europe, producing a three-layer analysis of how the transnationalization of Danza occurs: 1) immigrant relationships; 2) the creation and transmission of cultural artifacts by

[34] Although "sacred" is a word usually attached to religion in our everyday vocabulary, for Akaxe and some in Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations, "sacredness" has a connotation that can be separated from institutionalized religion and applied to everyday practices of appreciation, respect and ceremonial activity (see Chapter 5).

organizations or individuals; and 3) the circulation of Danza as a commodity in the therapeutic market—that is, Danza as a therapeutic mode of healing (De la Torre and Zúñiga 2017, 48). The case study at the heart of this dissertation explores each of these three approaches through the life story of Akaxe, the creation of his institute, Matinauhkalli, and the relations built among student-practitioners in Chicago.

Toltec and Aztec Revitalization Movements have expanded beyond Mexico and the U.S. to encompass geographies such as Chile, Spain, France, Eastern Europe, and Japan. These circuits depend on the willingness of students to pay for the teacher's travel and accommodation, and on the ability of teachers to procure the travel technologies and capital (passports, visas, air tickets, accommodation) necessary to cross geopolitical borders (see Chapter 2).

1.8 Macehualiztli Reformation

The Chicago-based organization that is the focus of this dissertation is situated at a conjuncture between "traditional" Mexican Mexicayotl organizations and the U.S. developments that I refer to as a reformation. This reformation of contemporary Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations is a trend toward the "decolonization" and "authentication" of Toltec practices. This reformation also brings with it a new designation, "Macehual," that incorporates the racio-religious identity and history of the Movement. People in these groups identify themselves as "Macehuales," rather than Indigenous or "Mexica" (as some Chicano Dancers would identify themselves). The term "Macehual" had a double meaning in the Aztec Empire. Firstly, it referred to the ceremonial dancer (whose dances were called Macehualiztli), and secondly it referred to the commoner. All citizens in the Aztec Empire were born as Macehuales, but could then advance to other positions of power and respect

according to lineage and abilities. This means that the Macehual has also been seen as one who is working on receiving with humility.[35]

Ernesto Colin's research (2014) on a Danza group in San Jose, California, borrows the term Macehualiztli (ritual dance) to explain how a contemporary danzante understands their identity in relation to Danza: "[Macehualiztli is] the art of deserving and generally speaks to a worldview embedded in Danza [in ancient times and now]. Macehualiztli is about more than bodies in motion; there is a focus on fostering humility through dance" (144).

It is no coincidence that Macehualiztli is used as a term to specifically describe the meaning of Danza in both San Jose and Chicago. Ocelocoatl, the Mexican teacher who visits the Danza circles; and Akaxe, the Danza teacher who settled in Chicago, both trained with the ZT in Mexico City in the 1990s. As noted above, the ZT was connected to the MCRA and the Restorationist Movements of the 1920s.

At the end of my visit with the Nievas, Angélica whispered a secret to me: "you know what the real problem is with the Mexicayotl? They all want to be innovators." *Todos quieren ser inovadores*. Her words resonate today as a sign of a cyclical process. A reminder that what seems new is actually repetition and invention, and that what seems new may also be problematic. She was critical of the teachers, not the practitioners, who had approached the Movement with faith and in search of an identity. For, despite all the criticism that can be levelled at the Revitalizations, and the wider debate around who has the right to reclaim an Indigenous identity, the fact is that most who are drawn to these movements have suffered from discrimination and racism due to their social position and skin color.

[35] There is more on the idea of Macehuales and *merecimiento* in chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 2: A Life on the Move. Akaxe Yotzin Gomez on Becoming a Maestro

Introduction

In February 2017, I received an email from Anita Campion, the woman with whom I was collaborating on my initial research project. The subject of the email was "C.A.P. (Conservation of American Pyramids—Anita's non-profit organization) GOES TO CHICAGO." And it continued: "In March, we plan to continue our journey by training our volunteers in a 5-day cultural awakening academy by Maestro Akaxe in Chicago, Ill (…). With your donations, we could help the future generation to get in touch with their roots and culture to empower each and every human on Earth to walk with pride and dignity."[36]

Three months later I was flying to Chicago with Anita and five student-practitioners from the Santa Barbara area. I was eager to see who this Maestro Akaxe was. I knew that he was a student of the famous Tonalpohualli (Aztec Calendar) teacher, Arturo Meza, and that he was building an institute dedicated exclusively to the study of Toltec practices. Never in my academic or personal life had I encountered an institute of this nature. I was deeply curious and eager to see it with my own eyes.

This small group of student-practitioners and Anita, their elder, went to great lengths to travel to Chicago. They were all young, working class, and of Mexican descent. They held

[36] C.A.P. (Culture and Arts for the people, formerly known as Conservation of American Pyramids) is Anita Champion's non-profit organization. From 2012 to 2017, C.A.P. was an active organization that connected people of Mexican descent in the Santa Barbara area with Toltec knowledge and spiritualities. Some of the activities that C.A.P organized included taking high school students on annual summer trips to archeological and cultural sites in Mexico. They also brought Mexican maestros of Toltec knowledge, like Arturo Meza Gutierrez and Guillermo Marin, to the US; and held weekly workshops on cultural identity and spirituality. Their original email, and most of their communication, was in English.

fundraisers for months, as well as paying with their own money, to finance the trip. Although their elder was beloved and a source of *wisdom*, they needed something more: they needed physical movement. On this trip they all became mobile entities (travelers) who learned to move to the sound of the *huehuetl*.[37] The main goal of their trip was to learn Danza. They already had some experience of this practice but they needed guidance and refinement. Akaxe offered them the possibility to keep learning.

It was on this trip that I began performing my own mobile practices. I went on one more trip with the group from Santa Barbara and then started going to Chicago by myself to do fieldwork research and seek other types of knowledge. As an ethnographer in training I asked Maestro Akaxe if I could join Danza classes and carry out my research in his institute. "No," he said. "If you want to know what this is really about you have to engage with all the disciplines, you have to experience how it feels to learn these disciplines." He challenged me from day one and I became a full-time student at his institute, Matinauhkalli, while simultaneously interviewing him about his life and how he came to be a maestro.

Maestro Akaxe was a mobile subject, like me and the other student-practitioners. While the Santa Barbara students were moved by the impetus of seeking "the knowledge", Akaxe had stopped seeking the knowledge and sought students instead. People with time, commitment, and a sense of responsibility helped him become the maestro he wanted to be.

In this chapter I will narrate Akaxe's life story through the lenses of mobility. His life is a good example of how to become a *Temachtiani*, or maestro of Toltec knowledge; but it is also an example of a life lived on the move. In the mobility turn,[38] two common trends of

[37] The huehuetl is the main drum used in Aztec dance practice.

[38] According to Tim Cresswell (2006), the mobility turn has been an interdisciplinary agenda since 1996 for the study of human mobility as an empirical reality. This reality is linked to social justice ideas; who can "displace"

mobility are tourism and migration (Adey 2010; Cresswell 2006; Larsen et all 2006). While Akaxe's life story can be seen through the study of migration, it can also add to the study of religion and mobility (Hancock 2014, Srinivas 2018). How and why do spiritual seekers find their own "path"? What are the mobile practices that come with a life journey in pursuit of becoming a spiritual teacher? Although the answer is always personal, there is a repeating pattern of emotions, movements, and decisions that may help us understand the lives of people like Akaxe. It is sometimes in the unusual and the singular that we can find the most fascinating points of comparison and cases of social and historical repetition (Flueckiger 2006).

I argue that a life story like Akaxe's not only helps narrate the history of Toltec and Aztec revitalizations, but also provides a glimpse of a new generation of practitioners born in the Movement and creating their own groups outside of Mexico. To understand Akaxe's process of becoming we need to know the history of the Mexicayotl and Revitalization Movements before and after Mexicayotl (see Chapter 1). Akaxe explicitly rejects ideas and practices from Mexicayotl, while positioning himself and the practices he teachers as purer and more connected to Indigenous thought. Akaxe's positionality can be interpreted as a will to reform the Mexicayotl Movement. However, as noted in Chapter 1, this longing for a real connection to the past may be one of the distinguishing elements of the Mexicayotl itself.

Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations are responding to an idea of "purity", where racial, cultural, and geographical authenticities are in play to construct new narratives of what it means to be Indigenous in a colonized society. Mobile practices from rural to urban Mexico

or move, and how a person is displaced, are both essential questions in this mobility turn (Cresswell 2006; Sheller 2017). Tourism and migration are two common topics in mobility studies, but they are not the only ones.

have put in question Indigeneity and push for mestizo assimilation since the colonial period. Ironically, transnational mobile practices can act as restoration of Indigeneity when the urban, mestizo body is seen and interpret as a first and foremost colonial subject.

When exploring notions of transnational mobility I have not incorporated topics of immigration. Although we do not see borders, laws, and bureaucracies in this chapter, they have played a part in Akaxe's life[39]. He has moved from place to place—both bodily and in his thinking—first as a student, then as a teacher of Toltec knowledge. His body is constantly moving through the different disciplines (*mitotiliztli*[40] and *yaotiliztli*[41]), while teaching others to move and discipline their bodies like he does. Thus his individual experience of mobility is what sustains the argument of this chapter and what allows to connect his life with historical events that directly affect Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations.

To narrate a life that moves between Mexico and the United States is also to think about the different types of migration processes that exist between these two countries. Beyond the idea of the border crossing, Mexican nationals and dual citizens have had to move between the two countries since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Akaxe's story can also present a different type of migration: one that goes beyond the Mexican stereotype of crossing the desert. The mobile practices I explore throughout this chapter carry with them a level of privilege. Although Akaxe remains working class, the path his life has taken—one of informal education and spiritual teachings—has given him access to travel documentation

[39] The structural issues of immigration are extremely important. However there is not enough space to asses those in this dissertation, My argument is better sustained when seeing Akaxe's personal journey and travels as mobile experiences that helped him built himself as a teacher, rather than an immigrant.
[40] Mitotiliztli is the name used by Matinauhkalli for the dance classes. Studies of dance in the Aztec Empire have identified two types: *macehualiztli* (or *mitoniani*) was the ritual dance, while *netotiliztli* was the name given to the simple act of dancing (Sten 1990).
[41] Yaoliliztli is the name of the type of warrior discipline (similar to martial arts) that student-practitioners in Matinauhkalli practiced.

(passports, visas, etc.) and a degree of social mobility. Like other spiritual and religious teachers, Akaxe is an example of how cultural capital gives global accessibility.

Doreen Massey (1994) writes about how different mobile practices respond to and reinforce structures of power. While Akaxe's mobilities through planes and airports indicate a level of privilege unavailable to the majority of Mexican immigrants (and some student-practitioners in Matinauhkalli) in the U.S., his struggles to find a path to legality should not be diminished. There is specialized literature on this subject and a number of scholars who work on topics around immigration, the border, and undocumented communities. Although my aim here is to explore a different type of mobility, with other privileges and structures, I do not wish to dismiss the struggles and trauma of Mexican and Central American immigrants or diminish the significance that those stories should have in academia. An opposite example of undocumented mobilities is available in Jason de León, *The Land of Open Graves* (2015), where he follows the *camino* (path) of those who cross the border by different means and technologies (e.g. the *coyote*[42] industry).

2.2 Notes on Methodology

I started my interviews with Akaxe in September 2018, while I was a student in his institute: Matinauhkalli. He had recently had his first daughter with his wife, Clarissa, who was, at that time, a full-time employee in a number of institutions outside Matinauhkalli. Because Akaxe was the caretaker of his child from Monday to Friday, he asked me to come an hour before class. We squeezed in interviews of 40 to 60 minutes before classes, except for a few times when I stayed after class.

[42] Coyote is the person who smuggles people into the U.S. or into other territories on the way to the U.S. Over the past few decades the occupation has grown into an industry that charges immigrant families and individual travelers thousands of dollars to cross the border.

We conducted the interviews in the basement of Matinauhkalli, which served as Akaxe's study at the time. He had about seven boxes full of retro video games[43] that he was trying to sell. Sometimes Izayotl, one of the student-practitioners, would be there helping him sell the video games online. The interviews were conducted in Spanish. Akaxe speaks to students primarily in Spanish, with occasional English interventions. It felt more natural for us to converse in Spanish since, as we are both from Mexico City, it is our native tongue. When using quotes from the interviews, I offer the original Spanish followed by its translation in English. When I only use English in other interviews or communication throughout the dissertation it is because the exchange happened in English.

Besides the boxes with video games, the basement contained *huehuetls*,[44] some paintings that he and his students had done throughout the years, a big computer screen, his personal laptop, and a standing desk with his iPad and an electronic pencil. He was almost always painting during the interviews. He told me that painting helped him relax and organized his thinking. The way he said it was almost like an apology: he didn't want to make me feel like he was not paying attention to my questions. Every so often Clarissa would come down and asked him questions about student-practitioners or their calendars; and a few times, when it was getting late, she came to ask if we wanted to have dinner. I tried not to intrude on their space, time, or routines, but they always made me feel welcome, offering food, water, and tea. Interviewing Akaxe, and later Clarissa, gave me a more intimate idea of who they were.

[43] Video games have played an interesting role in Akaxe's life. Not just because he is a gamer himself, but because the idea of having a maestro who plays video games helps breaks down the barrier between Akaxe and his students, humanizing Akaxe and bringing him closer to his students. In a couple of classes he has even used some of his VR to teach skills to the students. For example, one time, during Millaniztli (archery), instead of shooting as usual, we used VR to practice patience and stillness in shooting while under attack from zombies. On another occasion, in Tonalpohualli, we took turns to have a VR experience of something scary. Most students played a game in which spiders were coming after them.

[44] Tall drums used in Aztec dance (Mitotiliztli).

It would be too much to say they are now my friends, but our relationship certainly developed and grew throughout the interview process and during the in-between moments, like having tea or food in the kitchen, waiting for other students to arrive, and so on. I also enjoyed insider/outsider privilege. This was partly because I had been introduced to Akaxe by Anita Campion, the Santa Barbara elder who trusted me; but it was also because my mother knew Maestro Arturo Meza and Anita from when she practiced Danza Conchera in Mexico City. Although I did not grow up in the Mexicayotl or Conchero Movements, I had grown up hearing my mother's stories of that time.

Akaxe's life is connected to the Mexicayotl groups and their history. During the interviews, Akaxe told me about stories of old relationships: teachers, friends, students, employers and employees. I decided to change some names in Akaxe's story. This was partly to protect people's privacy and identity, and partly because Akaxe's narrative comes from his memory, and—although I do not question his account—I would be careful not to assume that his is the only (true) version of the story. Aside from Maestro Arturo Meza, Ocelocoatl,[45] and the student-practitioners from Chicago, the rest of the names in this account are my own invention.

2.3 Heritage and Formation

On May 20, 2019, the Facebook page of Matinauhkalli, "Machtia Toltekatl," announced a new class: the study of "daily and ceremonial" Nahuatl. Here is the teacher's description:

> //About the teacher:
> Akaxe Yotzin comes from a long line of Nahuatlacas. He first learned Nahuatl from his grandmother and continued his study with various teachers in Mexico. He has dedicated his life path to preserving, applying and sharing the

[45] I decided to include the name Ocelocoatl because there are other ethnographies that mention him and he is an important figure in the history of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations.

> Toltekatl knowledge, physical disciplines, arts and philosophies (Facebook: Machtia Toltekatl, retrieved on June 13, 2019).

This is a common description of Akaxe Yotzin Gomez, a reduced biography to give a quick introduction. "A long line of Nahuatlacas" means that his family comes from a lineage of Nahua-speaking people. His grandmother was the one in charge of teaching the language, probably because Akaxe's parents were both monolingual Spanish speakers. In the world of indigenous revivals (Mexicayotl, Toltecayotl, Aztecayotl, etc.) it is common to see teachers drawing an individual genealogy that legitimizes their positions of power. Usually these genealogies emphasize indigenous "authenticity," and therefore linguistic competence.[46]

In September 2018, when I conducted my interviews with Akaxe, my first question was about his family context. In order to understand his origins, I wanted to know about his parents. His father, he said, was from a little town in Jalisco called San Sebastianico, but grew up in the city of Guadalajara. Although there was little known about the genealogy of his father's side of the family, Akaxe's father went back to the *pueblito* to find out more about the family's history. He could confirm that they used to speak Nahuatl, although he himself only knew Spanish. Akaxe's mother's grandmother was from Ayuquila, a town in the State of Oaxaca, close to the borders of the State of Puebla. The fact that she grew up in the borderland between two states explains why Akaxe's grandmother had mixed Nahua and Mixtec traditions:

> De la parte de mi mamá es un poco más difícil por que había mucha mezcla, por que como Oaxaca es tan grande había una mezcla entre Mixtecas y Nahuas; entonces, no sabemos verdaderamente de donde exactamente viene la familia de mi mamá, pero mi abuelita sabía muchas cosas en náhuatl, entonces pienso yo que por ahí viene algo nahua. Sin embargo, también tenemos tradiciones que van más con la mixteca" (Akaxe Gomez, interviewed September 20, 2018). (On my

[46] As noted in Chapter 1, indigenous ascription in Mexico is usually validated by government institutions, mainly by language proficiency of indigenous languages.

> mom's side it's harder [to know] because there was a lot of mixture. Oaxaca is such a big state that it contains a mixture of Nahua and Mixtec cultures; so we don't really know where the family comes from. But my grandma knew how to say things in Nahuatl, and that's why I think she has some Nahua blood. But we also have traditions that are more Mixtec).

From Akaxe's account, it seems clear that his family has some Indigenous heritage, marked by a fluency with language and with the rituals, or traditions, of everyday life. It is not obvious from the interview, but it is probable, that his family—like many in Mexico—did not identify as Indigenous due to a fear of discrimination against Indigenous communities and individuals. At one point he describes his father's side of the family as being "colonized" and feeling shame at their own *raíces* (Indigenous roots) (Akaxe Gomez, interviewed September 21, 2018). Despite the distance of ethnic affiliation, both of Akaxe's parents can be described as brown mestizos with an Indigenous phenotype, belonging to a lower economic status of working-class people.

Akaxe's parents met in Mexico City after migrating there in the late 1960's.[47] His mother arrived at the age of six, along with her mother and four siblings. They had fled their rural home as a result of domestic violence. Akaxe's maternal grandmother had a precarious life. She lived hand to mouth, sustaining her family by grinding corn and doing people's laundry by hand. Akaxe's father was more privileged: he migrated to the big city to study singing and acting at the *Bellas Artes*.[48] Although Akaxe did not mention if his father ever worked in these professions, we know that he did not finish his studies, and that he married Akaxe's mother soon after arriving in Mexico City. It is also interesting that although he had these

[47] This is a rough estimate because Akaxe did not recall a specific date, but it is interesting to note that the 1960s—especially after 1965—was a time of great political and social upheaval, with Mexico City being rocked by student protests.

[48] Bellas Artes, currently known as the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, is a public institution that gives classical training in music, theater, literature, dance, etc.

performative inclinations, his participation in Mexicayotl was ideological, and he was not part of any Danza group.

The stories of the mobility of Akaxe's parents are common in Mexico. First, they highlight the fact that migration patterns are also gender divided. It is commonplace in Mexico for women from the lower classes to have to escape male violence, either from their family or from their partners; meanwhile, men have historically enjoyed more privilege in having their family's (financial and/or moral) support to study or work in a "better place": the big city.[49] Moving to a bigger city, entering the labor force, and being monolingual Spanish are some of the characteristics of groups and people who have lost their Indigenous identity (see Chapter 1). Although this process happens slowly, we can see how Akaxe's mother—as a second-generation migrant—assimilated to *mestizo* culture.

Although neither Akaxe's parents nor grandparents identify as Indigenous (as far as we know), his biography still emphasizes his coming from a Nahua family. With the different Indigenous Revitalizations, when a person does not have a lineage within the tradition (whether Toltec, Mexicayotl, or Mayan), tracing an Indigenous heritage through blood and language validates the positioning of people inside and outside the groups, especially with prospective students and followers. This is not new. When Lina Odena Güemes (1984) recounted the four biographies of the MCRA practitioners, each of them traced their Indigenous identities through language and ritual practices. For example, in Irineo Castillo's life story he stated that his father spoke "el (idioma) mexicano," the Mexican language, referring not to Spanish but to Nahuatl, while from his mother's side he traced *curanderas*

[49] A similar story was told to me by a couple of the student/practitioners in Matinauhkalli. I have also heard a comparable story from my father's family.

[traditional healers], saying that his great-great grandmother "healed all type of diseases" (Odena Güemes 42). Similarly, Eladio Castillo's life story states that his family spoke "Mexica" and that they only learned Spanish later (51). In addition, Mauro Pablo Martinez Martinez recalled her mother as multi-lingual, speaking "Chichimecas," Zapotec and Nahuatl perfectly (61). Each of these subjects began their stories by building a foundation of "authenticity" and linking themselves to a family member who still spoke Indigenous languages. They also each spoke about the type of labor their parents and grandparents used to do, most being peasants who worked in the *chinampas*[50] in Xochimilco and around Mexico City.

Whereas Akaxe's mother's side of the family provided him with a blood lineage, Akaxe's father bequeathed him an intellectual one. Akaxe's remembers how his father had been interested in "este tipo de historia" (this type of history) (Akaxe, September 20, 2018) since childhood. Akaxe recalls his father telling him how much he loved looking at pictures of Cuauhtémoc and Cuitlahuac in the textbooks: "todo eso le llamaba la atención" (all this caught his attention) (Akaxe, September 20, 2018). So, when he migrated to Mexico City he connected with cultural groups in the neighborhood.

Akaxe grew up amongst these cultural groups in a low-income family. Several times during the interviews, he would remember his childhood and teen years as "muy, muy pobres" (very, very poor). It is common to see Mexicayotl groups and Indigenous Revitalization Movements containing a majority of members who, while not recognized as

[50] The chinampa is a traditional agricultural technique used around the lakes of Mexico City before and after colonization.

Indigenous, come from a marginal sector of Mexican society. Akaxe and his family exemplify this recurring phenomenon.

Although Akaxe does not identify as Mexicayotl, the group his father was a member of (a few years before Akaxe was born) is part of what we now understand as Mexicayotl. In the 1980s, Mexicayotl groups, Conchero dancers, and Calpullis were flourishing all over Mexico. I asked Akaxe about his father's role and the type of activities he and his group engaged with. His father was an "organizer" for the Zemanauac Tlamachtiloyan (ZT).[51] In this group, his father and other men organized ceremonies, meetings, and protests. From this description, ZT was not so very different from other Mexicayotl groups that had been operating in Mexico City since the 1960s. For Akaxe, ZT was a cultural organization. He recalled two of the most important events that the ZT organized, together with another group called Cem Anahuac:

> (…) organizaron varios eventos entre ellos, las primeras carreras de relevos a Ixcateopan, entonces eso fue en 1984, yo estaba chiquititito. Y también organizaron, juntos, una de las primeras celebraciones de Toxcatl en 1983 (Akaxe Gomez, interviewed September 20, 2018). (… they [ZT] organized one of the first relay races to Ixcateopan, that was in 1984, when I was a young kid. And they also jointly organized one of the first Toxcatl celebrations, in 1983).

The Toxcal ceremony is very important. Not only is it one of the *veintena* festivals in the Aztec calendar, it is also a symbolic moment in history because it marks the defeat of the Tenochca by the Spanish. It was during the Toxcatl ceremony when the Spanish closed all the entrances to the Templo Mayor precinct and massacred the priests and ceremonial participants. Akaxe told me that following the Spanish conquest, people didn't celebrate the Toxcatl ceremony again until 1983.

[51] When Akaxe was born in 1980, his dad was already an active participant in the ZT. Akaxe was born into the Movement. See Chapter 1 for more references about this Mexico City-based group.

This was the first time since the massacre that the celebration had been re-enacted.[52] This ceremony and the Ixcateopan relay race have become two of the biggest ceremonies for Mexicayotl groups. Every year, the town of Ixcateopan, Guerrero holds a celebration to commemorate Cuauhtémoc's birthday.[53]

The use of ceremonies or "*homenajes*" is a key aspect of Mexicayotl in which the act of remembrance and past re-enactment is similar to what Robert Bellah (1967) describes as civil religion. In these tributes to historical figures (Cuauhtémoc, Moctezuma, etc.), a futuristic past is re-enacted; a moment that occurred is imbued with a collective hope for repetition. Groups that practice Aztec and Toltec revitalizations are both connected with an ideal/utopian Mesoamerican past that becomes the bridge for the production of identities that will eventually change society. Past and future are linked by ideas of identity construction, decolonization, and the forging of a better society.

Groups like ZT were also political. Their main goal was to eliminate any "foreign" ideology from Mexico (similar to the MCRA that wanted to eliminate Spanish influences). One example of this, provided by Akaxe, was when ZT held a protest outside the Summer Institute of Languages. This institute served to teach English and "slowly assimilate Mexicans into Anglo culture." Akaxe's father and his group were against assimilationist

[52] The feast of Toxcatl was consequential for the Spanish conquistadors (De Sahagún 2016, 78). The famous "Noche Triste" (Night of Sorrows) was the event that marked the last Toxcatl feast in Tenochtitlan, today's Mexico City. In the official history text books for elementary schools (Secretaría de Educación Pública), this event is referred to as the "Noche Triste" because the Spaniards lost the battle and had to regroup outside the city, across the lake from Tenochtitlan.

[53] Up to the present day, the Ixcateopan relay race still unites groups of Mexicayotl who come to celebrate and honor Cuauhtémoc, the last Aztec Emperor. An example of this can be found in the article by Raymundo Ruiz Avilés describing the Ixcateopan festival of 2019. Retrieved from *La Jornada* March 18, 2019. https://www.lajornadaguerrero.com.mx/index.php/entretenimiento/cultura/item/6205-rinden-tributo-concheros-y-calpullis-al-emperador-cuauhtemoc-en-ixcateopan

practices and used to protest using Mesoamerican symbols and invited Danza groups to fight Western assimilation:

> Y de ahí se empezó a hacer famoso eso de llevar a los danzantes a protestas. Como luego dicen: no hay nada nuevo bajo el sol. Y de ahí empezó esa forma de militancia, aunque realmente no es lo correcto (Akaxe Gomez, interviewed on September 20, 2018). (After that, the idea of bringing dancers to protests took off. There's nothing new under the sun, as the saying goes. And, after that, a new form of militancy started, although it's not right).

The type of political engagement that Akaxe observed in his father is the type of militancy that Chicanos in the U.S. practice today. When Akaxe says "It's not right" it is because he believes that Danza and the disciplines he practices and teaches should not be used as political weapons in the public sphere. These are intimate, physical practices and—for him—using them for purposes other than personal growth demonstrates a lack of respect for the knowledge itself.

Despite all the different ways in which Akaxe's father committed himself to—and engaged with—cultural groups, he did not practice any physical disciplines like Danza or *yaotiliztli* (warrior discipline). This was true of most Mexicayotl members before the late 1980s. So Akaxe, at the age of seven, was the first in his family to start dancing.

His first Danza group was the one his father had connections to: the ZT. According to Akaxe, this was one of the first Danza groups, not affiliated to Concheros. It was situated in the Zócalo, downtown Mexico City, in the building that used to hold the *Escuela Nacional de Periodistas* (National Journalists School).

At the time, the group was led by Miguel Angel Mendoza, but the main Danza teacher was Totocani, who had been trained by *General* Conchero Felipe Aranda. It was in this group, thanks to a *jefe* Conchero and the MCRA people, that, for the first time in history of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations, ideology and Danza (from the Conchero Movement) came

together to create what we see today. Before this event, the Movement was divided between danzantes (exclusively Concheros who still hold Catholic traditions) and ideological reformers like Akaxe's father, Miguel Angel Mendoza, and Maestro Arturo Meza, who participated in the meetings and studied Mesoamerican sacred history, calendar and ceremonies, but did not engage in Danza. It was through the union and collaboration of MCRA, ZT, and the Concheros that a new generation was being taught to dance and think in terms of revitalization. Akaxe was one of these young people in training.

The ZT was one of these groups with "cultural activities" and they asked the Concheros if they could send someone to teach them Danza. Akaxe started his first Danza classes in 1986, at the age of six:

> Y le pidieron al General Felipe Aranda que si podía mandar a alguien que supiera y que enseñara la danza y él mandó a un muchachito de 16 años, que era buenísimo, buenísimo, danzante, Totocani. Él era hijo de la mano derecha del General, que era una sahumadora, que ella ahora ya es Generala pero en ese entonces no era Generala y se llama Mikixtli, la señora." (Akaxe Gomez, interviewed September 20, 2018). (And they asked General Felipe Aranda if he could send someone that knew how to teach Danza, and he sent a 16-year old boy who was very, very good at Danza. His name was Totocani. And he was the son of the general's right hand, a woman fire keeper who is now a general, named Mikixtli).

Totocani was Akaxe's first teacher. Akaxe and Totocani's younger brother were the only children in the group. Totocani, who was himself just 16, "had the responsibility of teaching," but he was also backed up by tradition.[54] Totocani's mother belonged to one of the most famous groups of Danza Conchera in Mexico City, led by General Aranda, and she herself was a *sahumadora*. In Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations, the sahumadora, or firekeeper, is the person in charge of lighting the incense and keeping it burning throughout

[54] When talking about the Concheros, people usually refer to it as a "tradition."

ceremonies and dances, using the smoke to cleanse the ceremony participants' *tonal* (the living force within people and other beings inhabiting this realm of consciousness known as *Tlaltikpak*).

In the Conchero Movement it was common in the early 1990s for responsibilities to be divided by gender. Even today it is common to see Danza taught by men while fire is kept by women. However, not every woman can be a sahumadora, which is a position of power and respect. Therefore, both Totocani and his mother, Mikixtli, held positions of power when they came to the Cem Anahuac group; and they also possessed a lineage through Felipe Aranda.

Akaxe remembers this period with fondness. It was an innocent time, according to him, not just because he was a child, but because everyone in that small Danza group was "innocent." There was no greed, no discord around the question of who should be the next teacher, and no thirst for power. Akaxe's childhood was tied to the process of Danza. According to Akaxe, if you wanted to dance at this time you had to learn from the Concheros: other types of groups did not exist yet. As well as learning the steps, young Akaxe studied the tradition, the rituals combined with Catholicism, and the songs in Spanish praising the saints. He also used to wear fancy, sparkling clothes because that was the Conchero way.

For Akaxe, the transition from a Conchero group, which he classifies as "religious," to a more "cultural" one did not happen overnight—it was a slow transition. The dances gradually came to have less ingrained Catholicism, making the indigenous symbolism more obvious and relevant. I believe that the process of change in Danza that Akaxe witnessed as a young teenager is an event that—despite not being discussed in the history of Mexicayotl—transformed the way we see, understand, and experience Danza Mexica/Azteca in Mexico

and the U.S. This process of change caused Danza and ideology to be combined. It was in this group that Akaxe learned to dance as a Conchero in the *Escuela de Periodistas* in downtown Mexico City where Maestra Izkalotzin (a.k.a. María del Camen Nieva Lopez), Rodolfo Nieva's sister, and successor of the Mexicayotl Movement,[55] came to teach the Movement's ideology.

When I conducted an informal interview with Angelina Nieva[56] (Mexico City, January 22, 2019), she told me that Maestra Izkalotzin (Rodolfo's Nieva sister) went to ZT and later sent someone who could teach the Concheros about the "culture and traditions" of Mexicayotl. Although this information is not in the historical record, we can infer from the oral traditions of both Akaxe and Angelina Nieva, that before the MCRA[57] was created by the Nieva family, the tradition of Danza (including Danza Conchera) contained elements of both indigenous and Spanish-Catholic traditions. And it was not until the active exercise of cultural change that Mexicayotl groups and Danza groups started to practice Danza and Toltec/Aztec philosophy together. That is to say, it was at that moment—in 1993—that Danza and ideology merged to create what we know today as Danza Mexica and Mexicayotl. It seems almost impossible to believe that before this instance ideological/philosophical and religious/physical practices were divided. It is also important to note that it is through this shift that Danza groups acquire the type of political engagement[58] that we can now observe in

[56] In January 2019, I met with the Nieva family as part of my archival research. Angelina Nieva's husband is Izkalot Nieva: nephew of Rodolfo and Izkalotzon Nieva, and son of Jorge Nieva. Angelina is also the archive keeper in the Nieva house, where she and Izkalot live with their son.
[57] Movimiento Confederado Restaurador de Anahuac.
[58] In the U.S. it is common to see Danza groups participate in public activities, political riots and marches, and to support and defend social justice agendas—usually linked to Chicanxs and Latinxs activists. Danzantes can be seen in these spaces, opening events with short ceremonies and Danza offerings. Jennie Luna's research (2012) engages with Danza and social activism in the U.S.

public life. Something that seems as old as the pyramids of Teotihuacán is actually the result of the merging of two processes and Movements during the late twentieth century.

Although these changes aligned more with what Akaxe was looking for, he also noticed incongruities inside the group. One of the big changes that Akaxe did not feel comfortable with occurred when Totocani was sent to another group to teach and ZT fell under the guidance of his youngest brother, who was the same age as Akaxe. Akaxe felt he could not learn anything else in that group. He felt stuck, and this compelled him to leave and search for another teacher.

The changing of the culture in the ZT coincided with the arrival of the new teacher. Although Akaxe was not cognizant of the historical importance of this transition (Danza becoming more cultural and less religious), he felt that some things were no longer the same. It was this combination of factors—the structural changes that were occurring and the fact that he now had a teacher his own age—that impelled Akaxe to move on in search of new knowledge:

> Qué le iba yo a aprender a él. Pero nunca me desconecté. Yo danzaba solito, conmigo mismo. En ese punto yo iba con el maestro Meza, al Calpulli Toltecayotl, y él me conectó con comunidades de Puebla. Así conocí a mis maestros (Akaxe Gomez, interviewed September 20, 2018). (What was I going to learn from him [Totocani's youngest brother]? But I never got disconnected. I danced alone, by myself. At this point in my life I used to go with Maestro Meza to Calpulli Toltecayotl, and he was the one connecting me with the indigenous communities of Puebla. That's how I met my teachers).

After this, Danza became more intimate for Akaxe. Danza is usually a collective movement, but from that point onwards, Akaxe did not connect with a group. Instead, Danza became for him a *solo*, intimate practice; something as essential for living as breathing.

Today, when Akaxe talks about his maestros, he refers to Maestro Meza, as his "master"[59] of Tonalpohualli, ceremonies, and some meditation exercises; and to Maestro Alfredo, as his "master" of Danza. He rarely mentions Totocani. Finally, he also recalls Maestro Xiuhmitzin as being the one who taught him Yaotiliztli (warriors discipline).

When Akaxe was 13—an important age for the Tonalpohualli Calendar since it marks the completion of a time cycle—he began searching for an identity. That search brought him to his "masters" and to the tools he uses in his teachings today.

It was a feeling of immobility or stasis that impelled him to move around in search of his teachers. An internal movement became the source of external mobility. This impulse, and the idea of transitioning from immobility to mobility, subsequently became a pattern in Akaxe's life.

In Akaxe's biography, the idea of (im)mobility begins as a metaphor, an emotion that would literally force him to move and to search. For Sara Ahmed (2004), emotions "move outwards towards others." Emotions "are not simply 'within' or 'without' . . . they define the contours of the multiple worlds that are inhabited by different subjects." Emotions are what move us and what connect us. In Ahmed's theoretical approach they are also what make us form part of a collective through "bodily others." In this sense, Akaxe's life is connected to emotions that compel him to move in search of teachers, while also staying connected to Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations, as a demarcation of the bodily "other"; the brown mestizo collective that does not comply with categories of states and that has the desire to

[59] I have heard Akaxe translating the Spanish word *maestros* into "masters" several times. However, on one occasion a mixed-raced practitioner with Black and Indigenous ancestry mentioned how uncomfortable they felt when Akaxe used this term. After this, I chose to use the Spanish word, which is usually translated as "teachers." The connotations of "master," however, may be accurate in these specific cases, because not only did these maestros teach Akaxe a subject, they also had behavioral expectations of him that could only be achieved by discipline and control of the mind and body.

"reconnect" with their past and Indigenous ways of life. The result of these movements would lead to the creation of an Institute for the teaching and learning of Toltec practices in Chicago, a place that brings together immigrants, and second-generation Mexicans who long for connectivity to their "ancestral roots."

Akaxe's short online biographies describe him as a "young master." Since first attending his courses I wanted to dig into his process of becoming. I asked him questions about the process that led him to becoming a young master. Sometimes Akaxe would share short versions of these stories in group classes with students. The stories position Akaxe as an authority with a sacred lineage and a deep connection to Indigenous knowledge in Mexico.

2.4 First Call. Mastering Oneself

It is a mystery to me—and probably to many others—how exactly Akaxe Gomez met his teachers. When I have shared his story, people have compared it to how Carlos Castañeda and Don Juan met (Castañeda 1968). The story of Castañeda and Don Juan went under scrutiny after Castañeda was accused of inventing the character of Don Juan; something that destroyed Castañeda's reputation as an anthropologist. But I want to go beyond the idea of fact-checking and focus more on the power of narration, as other anthropologists (Flueckiger 2006; McCarthy Brown 1991) and historians (Oropeza 2019) have done before. The way in which a person recalls and narrates her/his life can say a great deal about that person's positioning within a community. In a religious context, where people become guides, teachers, or healers, their own stories of becoming are also pedagogical (Perez 2016) and performative moments (Busto 2005) which bind the community and the leadership figure into a reciprocal relationship.

It is through his anecdotes about meeting his maestros that Akaxe positions himself as a worthy teacher: one who is different, unusual, and graced with forms of expertise other from what Mexicayotl and Toltecayotl teachers have (e.g. being able to dance and drum at the same time—something that will be discussed in chapters 4 and 5).

In Akaxe's memory, it was in the State of Puebla, which neighbors Mexico City, where he first met his teachers at the age of 13. He told me that his first contact with the Indigenous communities in Puebla was through his Tonalpohualli teacher, Maestro Arturo Meza. After that, he started traveling to Puebla by himself. It was on one of these visits that Akaxe first met his Danza teacher, Maestro Alfredo.

In *secundaria* (middle school), Akaxe would go and see Maestro Alfredo instead of attending school. In Mexico, this common practice of skipping school for the day is known as *irse de pinta.* Because he had to travel by bus to a different state, these *idas de pinta* were overnight stays. He had a greater preference for learning the knowledge over institutional schooling. The fact that he was skipping classes and spending nights away from home created conflicts with his family. When his parents tried to be strict and set boundaries, Akaxe became resentful. He felt misunderstood. Learning and exploring Indigenous disciplines in the highlands of Puebla was more valuable to him than going to school, but his parents did not share the same priorities.

Maestro Alfredo was originally from Amecameca, in Mexico State, but lived in Puebla. In Maestro Alfredo's Danza classes, Akaxe encountered what he describes as a "purer, less contaminated" type of Danza (in comparison to Conchero Danza and the Danza Mexica) (Akaxe Gomez, interviewed September 20, 2018).

While studying a new/old form of Danza, Akaxe noticed differences between what he had learned in his childhood from Totocani and the teachings of Maestro Alfredo. The Danza he learned from Totocani was Conchero style, while the Danza taught by Maestro Alfredo was more "traditional." Maestro Alfredo's Danza was characterized by rigorously marked steps, while the Conchero style emphasized turns and squatting positions without marking the steps of the dance. The music was different as well. Instead of being performed on a mandolin with an armadillo conch as in the Conchero style, it was played on pre-Hispanic drums—the *huehuetl* and *toponaztli*—and the pre-Hispanic flute, the *tlapitzalli*.

The names of the Danzas were different too. The Concheros named their Danzas in Spanish, through a colonial lens. Here are some examples that Akaxe provided me with: the Danza called *Antigua* (old) was *Huitzilopochtli*; *Caballo Celeste* (celestial horse) was *Xiuhtecutli*; *Pólvora* (gunpowder) was *Nextli*: "although *Nextli* in Nahuatl should be translated as ashes, not gunpowder" (Akaxe Gomez, interviewed September 20, 2018). Akaxe noticed that these danzantes danced in their everyday clothes instead of wearing shiny, colorful costumes. He understood that—in all aspects (naming, regalia, music, and movement)—Conchero Danza had been "contaminated" by the Spanish-Catholic world, while this other type of Danza had survived colonization in a "purer" form.

When Akaxe joined Maestro Alfredo he was immediately put to the test by being told to stop wearing his *ayoyotes* (rattles worn on both ankles) and *copilli* (headdress traditional to the Conchero dance). His new maestro told him: "por muchos años dancé sin ayoyotes y yo me sentía como desnudo" (I danced without ayoyotes for many years and I felt naked) (Akaxe Gomez, interviewed September 20, 2018). Taking off his ayoyotes was letting go,

both of old teachings and of the constructed identity around the regalia and the aesthetics of Danza.

Today, the process of removing instruments and regalia is something that Akaxe does with new students when they come from other Danza groups. I observed this on my first trip to Chicago. In our first class, two of the student-practitioners from Santa Barbara were wearing ayoyotes and one danced with a hand rattle. During the first Danza, Akaxe stopped the huehuetl and asked the students to place their rattles (including the ayoyotes) in the center of the circle with the other altar elements. From day one, students were not allowed to practice Danza with regalia, making some of them uncomfortable and suspicious of Akaxe's position of power. But Akaxe believes that one needs to learn how to dance correctly first, marking each step with precision, rather than just walking or jumping. For him, feeling you are a danzate only because of what you are wearing is easy, but *feeling* like a danzante is not the same as *being* a danzante. What Danza is can only be defined by movement, by how the danzante's body marks the steps, with dedication and fervor. Being a danzante is not just about dancing and learning the steps: it is about being committed to the knowledge and offering oneself (see Chapter 4). Akaxe described Danza as being like riding a serpent:

> Danzar es cómo subirte a una serpiente: es vibraciones altas, vibraciones bajas; y dentro de esas vibraciones tú encuentras la fuerza de la danza. Pero si nada más las estás caminando nunca te subes a ninguna vibración y bueno eso fue de las cosas que tuvieron mucho sentido para mí (Akaxe Gomez, interviewed September 20, 2018). (To dance is like riding a serpent: it is high vibrations and low vibrations; and inside those vibrations you'll find the force of the dance. But if you're just walking them [the dances] you'll never ride any of the serpent's vibrations, and well, that was one of the things that made a lot of sense to me).

Danza with Maestro Alfredo turned into a different type of "spirituality." With the *Cem Anahuac,* Akaxe noticed that Danza was becoming "more cultural, less religious." His teacher Totocani still had commitments with the Concheros and had to attend Catholic

ceremonies like the "Cristo de Chalma"[60] or the "Niñopa" in Xochimilco. Danza was practiced as a performance outside the Church. With Maestro Alfredo, however, Danza was a type of ceremony in itself. Each time they danced, they had to make an offering of *copal.*[61]

Whereas Concheros held ceremonies with cathartic endings after night vigils, Maestro Alfredo's ceremonies were anti-climactic:

> Hasta cierto punto, anti-climáticas, porque no había toda la pachanga y toda la faramalla, por así decirlo, de los concheros, ¿verdad? Ellos se presentan, entran y se presentan [a la virgen o santo] con una canción y llegan todos, y los reciben y cada uno se sahuma con mucha ceremonialidad y se dan besitos en la mano, y se le dan besitos al sahumerio. Y las danzas son muchísimos pasos. Y las ceremonias con el Maestro Alfredo eran anti-climáticas, a comparación de esas, eran muy de "esto se hace, esto se pone, esto se ofrenda, se recoge (Akaxe Gomez, interviewed on September 21, 2019). (To a degree, they [the ceremonies] were anti-climactic, because they didn't have the rowdiness and fanfare, as it were, of the Concheros, right? They go into the church and present themselves to the saints with one or two songs, and they all apply aromatic smoke to themselves with great ceremony, and they kiss each other's hands, and then they kiss the *sahumerio*. And the dances have lots of steps. But with Maestro Alfredo, it was anti-climactic in comparison, because it was "this is what we're going to do, lay this on the ground, offer that, pick everything up before you leave).

As we can see, Danza—whether with Maestro Alfredo or the Concheros—is intimately connected with ritual and ceremony (see Chapter 4). Therefore, we can think of Danza as forming part of different types of religiosities in Mexico—from the Conchero to the Mexica—and the in-between practices of towns and cities. It is through Danza that offerings happen. And it is Danza that marks the rhythms of ceremony.

"Religion" in this form, is connected to mobile practices for two reasons. First, it is through Danza, a mobile performance and a practice of movement, that the connection to

[60] Gilberto Giménez's ethnography of the "Cristo de Chalma" is a classic of Mexican anthropology and explores one of the biggest rituals of popular religion in rural México (Gimenez 2013).
[61] Copal is a type of incense. In Chapter 4 I talk more about the intersection between danza and ceremonial offerings as part of the practice.

offering and ceremony happens. Second, it is the active search for spiritual knowledge and traditions that compels people like Akaxe to go from one place to another. It was the search for a Maestro that made him travel back and forth between the city and the highlands where he acquired "Toltec knowledge." Authenticity plays an important role here. The Concheros, seen as syncretic, lose some "authenticity," while Maestro Alfredo, thanks to his positionality of being outside the city and in contact with Indigenous communities, becomes a "more authentic" teacher.

It was through Maestro Alfredo that Akaxe came to meet Maestro Xiuhmitzin. One day in Danza practice, Akaxe overheard one of the other practitioners talked about *guerreros* (warriors). At first, Akaxe thought this person was referring to the other danzantes, because in the Conchero tradition dancers can be referred to as guerreros. But after a few minutes he realized that this person was really discussing about combat warriors—people who practiced not Danza, but a kind of martial art.

To find Maestro Xiuhmitzin, Akaxe carried out an investigation—just like Sherlock Holmes, he said. When people mentioned warriors they did so secretively, and they would always speak about them in Nahuatl, which made Akaxe's search even more challenging. However, after making repeated inquiries, he found out where these warriors practiced. He was not accepted, but he did not leave. In Akaxe's memory he went to Maestro Xiuhmitzin's classes for over a year without being accepted. One day, he was trying to follow the students' steps from afar, when Maestro Xiuhmitzin came up to him and corrected him. From that moment he became one of Xiuhmitzin's students. Today Akaxe teaches *yaotiliztli,* the warrior discipline he learned under Xiuhmitzin.

For five years, Akaxe would travel to the State of Puebla to visit both Maestro Alfredo and Maestro Xiuhmitzin. As with many other spiritual seekers around the globe, travel was essential to his development as both a danzante (*mitotiani*) and a guerrero. These disciplines came with a sense of spirituality, although Akaxe does not exactly describe it as spiritual exactly. He told me that ceremonies would place the "physical disciplines"—a term sometimes used to separate dance, warrior discipline, and archery—side by side with other "disciplines," such as the study of history and the Tonalpohualli calendar. Akaxe told me that one of the most important things that Maestro Alfredo taught him was to see and understand how ceremony and nature were connected (see Chapter 5).

Between the ages of 16 and 18, Akaxe entered the height of his adolescence. If he had been rebellious with his parents and social institutions before, he now went to a much darker place. This was, according to him, the darkest moment of his life. He abused alcohol and drugs to excess, he partied, he was a *punketo*. And yet, despite all the partying, Akaxe never stopped learning from his three maestros (Meza, Alfredo, and Xiuhmitzin). Nor did he stop respecting the path of indigenous spiritualities. He even said that he never dared to consume sacred plants outside of ceremony. While other drugs served a recreational purpose, offering him an escape during his adolescence, the sacred plants—like peyote and mushrooms—were treated with respect and consumed only under the guidance of a *persona de conocimiento* (person of knowledge).

As a desperate measure, Akaxe's father asked Maestro Arturo Meza to take his son under his protection: "aquí le dejo mi piedrecita para que me la pula" (here I give you my little stone, so that you can polish it), were the words that Akaxe remembers his father saying to Maestro Meza. For Akaxe, this was an honor. In part this was because they were honoring

and following the ways of the ancestors according to the *Huehuetlatolli*,[62] where the act of giving your child to a teacher was a way to complete their education. And in part it was because Akaxe felt he had the opportunity to have another father, one who he had admired his entire life. Today, Akaxe refers to Maestro Meza as his "padre del camino": his father of the path.

The story of how he became Maestro Meza's son is one that Akaxe repeats in class. This story shows the respect that Akaxe always pays to Maestro Meza. It also models for students the importance of respecting and honoring their teachers and elders. With this example one can also see how essential it is to replicate the life and practices of pre-Hispanic peoples. The knowledge is not only "knowing"; it is also "doing." "Doing" what traditionally was done in Aztec society, according to how members of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations interpret the Codices and Chronicles.[63] This "doing" functions as a replication and re-appropriation of bodily practices, symbols, and philosophy (see Chapter 4).

While it is true that Akaxe considered himself to be Maestro Meza's son, it was his biological father who helped him stop abusing drugs. It was during a family conversation when his father expressed his love and admiration for him, his youngest son, that Akaxe began to feel different.[64] That same night, Akaxe remembers, he locked himself in his room

[62] In Akaxe's narrative, this moment replicates ancestral instructions found in the *Huehuetlatolli*. The *Huehuetlatolli* is Bernardino de Sahagún's compilation of rules and "theology" of the elders for young people. In the last chapter of the Huehuetlatolis (178 v.) the text indicates how parents gave up their children to the Calmecac (the school for the sons of Aztec nobility). In doing so, mothers and fathers not only brought their children to the school but also renounced them, offering them up to the Calmecac, where the children would clean, learn, and make offerings accordingly (Díaz Cíntora 1995, 125).

[63] People from Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations usually see Codices as sacred texts. More experienced practitioners interpret and follow the Codices that hold the Tonalpohualli, but *principiantes* (beginners) use secondary sources like Maestro Arturo Meza's books and Akaxe's book to understand the symbols (see Chapter 5).

[64] Although this may seem like normal fatherly behavior, we need to understand that in the Mexican cultural context, fathers do not usually express love and admiration openly, and the eldest son is generally the most treasured of the children.

and started drawing a mural of Ehekatl-Quetzalkoatl (*sic*)—the image featured on the cover of the Borgia Codex[65]—on one of the walls. For two weeks, Akaxe remained inside his room: drawing, listening to music, and detoxifying his body. Today, the practice of being in a small space, in solitude, is one that he uses with some students; he calls it "*la cuevita"* (the little cave).

In Akaxe's philosophy, "*la cuevita*" is also an ancestral practice of introspection and healing, primarily used when individuals need to make changes in their lives. What this practice demands is for individuals to fight their own demons. No help is allowed. Akaxe recounts that at this stage of his life, Maestro Xiuhmitzin did not allow him to talk with other warriors because he said Akaxe needed to fight this by himself. He did not go through a Twelve Step program or ask anyone for help. Drawing the symbols and listening to music were his tools for escape: "la música y la pintura fueron los que me sacaron de ahí y los símbolos tan poderosos" (music and painting got me out of there, and those symbols that are so powerful). (Akaxe Gomez, interviewed on September 21, 2019).

After two weeks of drawing and body cleansing, Akaxe opened his bedroom door and invited everyone in the house: "vengan a ver" (come see). The mural was completed and a new stage of his life was about to begin.

2.5 Second Call. The Responsibility to Others. Becoming a Maestro

After two weeks of immobility, of drawing the mural that "healed" his drug dependency, Akaxe was called on to teach. Once again it was his father who told him he had acquired the

[65] This image corresponds to Plate 56 of the Borgia Codex. In the interpretation of the Codex by Gisele Díaz and Alan Rodgers (1993) these two Gods are Mictlantecutli (god of death) and Quetzalcoatl (god of wind and life), but Akaxe teaches that these are Miktlantekutli [sic] and Yayauhki Tezkatlipoka [sic]. In Chapter 5, I explore how these entities are not considered to be gods in Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations.

responsibility to the knowledge and that it was time for him to give back. In 1999, with the permission of Maestro Meza and his other teachers Akaxe—now 19 years old—began to teach Tonalpohualli (the calendar system that he learned from Maestro Meza) and Danza (which he had learned at ZT and from Maestro Alfredo).

His first job as a Tonalpohualli teacher was in a psychotherapeutic institute in Mexico City called MENTE,[66] which was led by a friend of Akaxe's father. This man would go on to become Akaxe's friend as well. Akaxe would refer to him as his *compadre.*[67] In MENTE, Akaxe taught the symbols of the Tonalpohualli. Currently, MENTE's website shows their approach to body-therapy, or "vegetotherapy," a popular technique in Mexico that privileges the use and exposure of emotions through physical movement. MENTE provides courses and seminars to train psychotherapists, but they also offer Tonalpohualli classes centered around human development. One interesting thing about MENTE is that despite not being a center for the study of the knowledge specifically, they nonetheless incorporate it into their psychotherapeutic training and practices.

Today, the way Akaxe teaches the Tonalpohualli and its symbols is influenced by notions of psychology and emotional healing. For Akaxe, the symbols of the Tonalpohualli speak of emotional growth and groundedness. In Tonalpohualli class he has mentioned how modern/Western psychology is informed by the understanding of ancestral knowledge like the Tonalpohualli, and not the other way around. It was not clear to me, though, if Akaxe learned this approach from his compadre, if they established it together, or if Akaxe

[66] MENTE is an invented name. I did not contact the director of the Institute and they do not form a part of the history of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations, other than the role they played in Akaxe's life.
[67] A compadre or *compadrazgo* is a kinship relationship common in México and Latin America. Formally, a compadre (male) or a *comadre* (female) is the godparent of a child, marking a strong bond between adult relationships. It is also a common informal practice however, as in this case, to use "compadre/comadre" as terms to express very close friendships, particularly friendships that resemble a family bond.

developed it himself. Regardless, I consider Akaxe's pedagogy of the Tonalpohualli to be different from that of Maestro Meza and the other teachers[68] because it innovates by placing a particular emphasis on self-reflection and growth, more closely aligned to what MENTE is doing.

At the same time as he was teaching Tonalpohualli at MENTE, Akaxe was also teaching Danza in a public park called the Bosque de Aragon (Aragon Forest).[69] He began with a small group of students: his sister, his girlfriend, and his mother. They would gather in a circle and practice Danza. Akaxe remembers this period fondly and jokes about how close to him his first students were. Gradually, visitors to Aragon Forest who happened to come across them practicing would ask if they could join in, thus becoming Akaxe's students. Danza classes were $10 pesos per person.[70]

Teaching the knowledge in Mexico City never paid Akaxe enough to be financially independent, so he would make ends meet by doing other jobs. He worked as a tattoo artist as well as selling pirated DVDs (*piratería*).

One morning, after about a year of being a maestro in Mexico City, Akaxe woke up knowing he needed to move. Even though the danza group grew and the Tonalpohualli classes were stable, something inside him told him he needed to "*abrir brecha*" (break through) somewhere else. He decided to live in Guadalajara. So, with just enough cash to pay for the bus from Mexico City to Guadalajara, Akaxe set off to start a new stage in his life. He chose Guadalajara because he had family there, which he thought would make things easier,

[68] This observation is subjective and limited to my own experience. I based it on a comparison analysis between the classes I have taken inside these groups (which includes Akaxe, Maestro Meza, Maestro Marin Gutierrez, and MCRA), alongside descriptions I have read in ethnographies about the Mexicayotl Movement (refer to Chapter 1).
[69] Bosque de Aragon is the largest park in Mexico City, after Chapultepec.
[70] In 1999, 10 pesos was almost the equivalent to 1 U.S. dollar.

but his extended family did not react as he had expected upon his arrival. For Akaxe, this (un)welcome situation gave him the push he needed to become independent.[71]

At first, he tried to find a Danza group, Calpulli, or *tienda naturista*[72] where he could introduce himself and possibly start teaching. But Guadalajara had no Danza groups at the time and he could not find a place to teach. However, one day, while he was sitting in Guadalajara's Federalismo Park, a man said to him, "Están chidos tus jades" (your jades are cool), referring to his ear piercing expanders. "Thank you", Akaxe answered, "they were given to me by my teacher." This encounter led to Akaxe finding a group of people interested in learning Tonalpohualli and Danza. Some of them knew Maestro Meza, and they welcomed Akaxe as one of his heirs. Therefore, it was partly through Maestro Meza's lineage, but also thanks to Akaxe's performed identity—his ear piercing and long hair—which was subtle but recognizable to some, that he was finally able to start teaching in this unfamiliar city.

Federalismo Park became the place where he taught Danza during his years in Guadalajara, between 2000-2009. In Akaxe's memory, the location of the park was interesting in itself. The park was situated in front of a small Catholic shrine that had survived despite the modern road construction that surrounded and made it an island. Due to the location's proximity to the church, the danzantes were often exposed to abuse from the women attending it. Akaxe remembered some of the insults the women shouted at them:

> ¡Satánicos! ¡Tienen el diablo metido! Cosas así, bien feas… ¡Se van a ir al infierno! ¡Cómo se atreven! ¡Esta es la casa de Dios y ustedes haciendo esas cosas! Y nosotros pues continuamos danzando pero si *nos llamaron la atención* las viejitas (Akaxe Gomez, interviewed September 21, 2018). ("You're satanic! The devil is inside you!" They would scream things like that, horrible… "You're

[71] It is common in México for young adults not to become independent until they get married or finish college. Children in middle and working-class families often live with their parents or grandparents until well into adulthood.

[72] In México, a *tienda naturista* (naturist store) is a cross between a botanica, a co-op, and a vitamin/supplement store.

> going to hell! How dare you! This is the house of God and you're doing such things!" But we kept on dancing, even though the old ladies scolded us).

Akaxe only recalls the danzantes being accused of being satanic in Guadalajara. He did not remember this happening in Mexico City, where danzantes also practiced outside churches. It is possible that in the early 2000s, Danza, being a regional practice from Central Mexico (Queretaro, Hidalgo, Guanajuato, Pueblo, Mexico City), was more likely to provoke adverse reaction outside these regions. It is also possible that some churches were more accepting than others because they formed part of the Conchero's popular religion.

One student that Akaxe met changed his life. Her name was Patricia and she was a professional psychologist. Patricia invited Akaxe to teach in the dance-therapy group she had. To Akaxe, Patricia and her group were "señoras copetonas," (literally, crested ladies) which is a colloquial way of referring to wealthy women who have the time and money for recreational activities. Akaxe's description of them is also reflected in their mobile practices. The technologies of travel (e.g. car vs bus) provided Akaxe with social information about the people he was teaching (Larsen et al 2006; Sheller 2004): "Todas llegaban en su BMW, en sus carrazos, y yo llegaba en el camión, jajaja." (They'd all arrive in their BMWs, their fancy cars, and I'd get there by bus, hahaha.) Akaxe was not the only one teaching Danza to middle-class women. Since the 1970s, Danza had opened itself up to all Mexicans. This was how the tradition—which had, in its early days, been passed on through family kindship (see Chapter 1)—expanded to other realms of Mexican society.

Meeting Patricia and teaching privileged middle-aged women gave Akaxe new social and geographical mobility. Thanks to what they paid him, he was able to see—for the first time in his life—how social mobility through his teachings might be possible. However, he still was

not making enough to live off, and he had to keep his DVD stand in the public market. After several months of teaching with Patricia, Akaxe was invited to go to Europe.

At the age of almost 21, Akaxe returned to Mexico City to get his passport and say goodbye to family and friends. On this trip he heard the news that Maestro Xiuhmitzin had passed to *Mictlán*.[73] For Akaxe—as for many practitioners of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations—the death of a person is considered a transmigration from this realm of reality to another called Mictlán. Mictlán is where the "essence" of a person (that which is not physical) goes after the body dies. This idea of a metaphysical consciousness is call *teyolia* and it is different from the other energetic forces that animate living beings (like the *tonal* and *ahiyotl*). Passing to Mictlán is also considered a return to nature. It just so happened that Akaxe's trip to Europe coincided with the death of Xiuhmitzin. For both teacher and student, they were each traveling to different destinies in different realms of reality.

Akaxe's journey to Europe was the first time he had left Mexico. In mobility studies and tourism, travel—in contraposition to migration—is seen as a hobby or leisure activity of the upper class (Van Den Abeele 1991) or as a working need (Larsen et al 2006). However, Akaxe's movement opens up a different idea of traveling that can be compared to an idea of mobile "objects" for consumption. On this trip, Akaxe's body was seen and consumed as something exotic. He was the expert, the Danza teacher, but he was also under Patricia's supervision, and his work and knowledge were commodified. Studies of Hinduism, for

[73] In Mexica/Tenochca-influenced indigenous spiritualities from central México, when a person dies, their immaterial body goes on a journey to Mictlán. This place was understood by Spanish colonizers and historians as the underworld. However, people who practice this knowledge today explain that the reality we see and live is called *Tlaticpac*; when we die, our immaterial body—our *teyolia*—transmigrates to a different reality known as Mictlán.

example, have explored the idea of the traveling guru, who goes from local teacher to an international celebrity carrying a body of knowledge and an authenticity marked by his or her place of origin (Srinivas, 2008; Elison 2014; Lucia 2018).

Akaxe's trip to Europe—his plane ticket and accommodation—was financed by Patricia, but he received no compensation or salary. Akaxe went out of curiosity, he wanted to see for himself those White people who practiced Danza: "Ese viaje fue un shock, porque nunca había visto a güeros danzar" (That trip was a shock, because I had never seen White people doing Danza) (Akaxe Gomez, interviewed, September 21, 2018).

Akaxe's persona in Europe[74] was built upon his "racialized authenticity." He was presented as an Aztec, as an indigenous dancer brought over from Mexico. According to Akaxe, he was not aware of this role until he was interviewed by newspapers in Eastern Europe.

It was not the first time that Patricia had gone to Europe with a maestro. As a light-skinned mestiza with class and privileges, she needed someone more "authentic" who could teach "real" Danza, *la tradición*. Patricia also had earned a certain reputation among teachers of these traditions in Mexico. When Akaxe asked Maestro Meza for permission to go, his teacher said that he would grant his permission as long as Akaxe promised to come back to teach in Mexico. But he also warned him that if he wanted to make it back, he'd need to be careful and keep on good terms with Patricia. There were rumors that she had left other Danza teachers behind, who then had to go through the embassy to make it back to Mexico. Patricia kept total control of the trip: finances, plane tickets, and accommodation. Like in the living museums of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Akaxe was toured and

[74] Akaxe and Patricia visited Eastern Europe, mainly Hungary and Austria.

displayed as a living example of what "Aztecs" looked like and how they moved (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998).

It is important to highlight the fact that intellectual and physical exploitation have historically gone hand in hand with the erasure of the individual over a culture's performance (Baker 2010). When tourists travel to a foreign place to exploit a culture's exoticism, it is usually the culture's narrative that survives while the individuals who tell and perform the stories are forgotten. An example that relates closely to Akaxe's fear of being left behind in Europe is the experience of Sitting Bull in the Wild West Show touring Europe when the company (and William Cody) returned to the U.S. without him (Warren 2006). Fortunately, Akaxe was not left behind, but like Sitting Bull, he was brought to Europe for the perceived authenticity of his body and performance.

After his first trip to Europe, Akaxe's mobile practices became optimized. For most of the year he would work between Guadalajara and Mexico City, teaching Tonalpohualli and Danza. During the summers, he and Patricia would return to Europe. For four years, he and Patricia traveled to Europe teaching Danza, until some of the students-practitioners asked Akaxe if he was still happy with how much they were paying him. Akaxe had never received a single paycheck from Patricia, who had been collecting all the money in secret. As well as running this financial scam, Akaxe recalled, Patricia often mistreated her European students. She had no patience with them and would abuse her position of power. Akaxe did not agree with her methods and decided to stop going to Europe. But his students in Europe asked him to come back on his own.

From 2005 to 2009, Akaxe Gomez traveled between Austria, Hungry (visiting various small cities whose names he couldn't recall), Guadalajara, and Mexico City, living like a

"gypsy." No longer Patricia's "employee" meant that Akaxe could build his own career as a global teacher and dancer. The notion of traveling to an unknown, exotic place allowed Akaxe to view his own culture from a different perspective. A retrospective interpretation of the knowledge caused him to change his values about what and how he needed to teach.

Despite his success in Europe, his work was not celebrated by all. In 2009, his name appeared on the web page "New Age Frauds and Plastic Shamans," which claimed that Akaxe was selling ceremonies to New Agers.[75] Akaxe told me about this online forum in our interviews. For him, this was the first negative public confrontation he had faced in his life. He talks openly about how and why he thinks some people disagree with him and his teachings. In his view, his critics either do not know exactly what he is doing, and therefore misunderstand him, or they complain about him being too strict and leave his classes because they "do not want the responsibility of the knowledge." For Akaxe—but also generally for Toltec and Aztec Revitalization practitioners—the knowledge comes with responsibilities, similar to the Concheros' concept of *obligación* (duty) towards the saints, the community, and the tradition. The idea of "responsibility" positions a practitioner as someone who is more than a dancer or a student (for more about responsibility and discipline, see Chapter 4).

By the age of 26, Akaxe was the person he had aspired to be: a young teacher with groups in Mexico and Europe. Two years later, in 2008, he visited the U.S. for the first time, giving a set of lectures in New Mexico. This trip, which seemed at first just another step in his wandering life, marked the beginning of a new search for place.

[75] NAFPS Forum, http://www.newagefraud.org/smf/index.php?topic=2140.0, retrieved on October 19, 2019.

2.6 Searching for Place

Traditions, especially those of indigenous peoples in the Americas, are usually presented as being immobile, both in time (usually seen as being more valid before colonialism) and space (marking a place of origin as unique). When mobility happens inside these traditions, both their authenticity and purity are questioned. Through Akaxe's story of mobility inside Mexico, first as a student, then as a teacher, one can see how tradition changes and is constructed via a process of mobility. He searches for teachers, then students, and he re-shapes what his practices and knowledge production look like.

After his first time in the U.S.—on a trip intended as a family visit—Akaxe was invited to give a number of workshops. One year later, his father, who was living in Chicago with his wife, invited Akaxe to visit. When Akaxe's father asked him what he wanted to do, at first Akaxe did not understand that he meant as a tourist—Akaxe was so used to working while traveling. He asked his father if he could teach some workshops around the area. Since his early 20s, travel had been a working opportunity for Akaxe, not a leisure activity. Similarly as with elder Anita Campion, one can see how common it is for people in Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations to travel to teach. For Anita, this was one of the responsibilities of being a maestro of these disciplines. "Maestros go wherever they are needed," she told me in 2018, when we were organizing Akaxe's trip to Santa Barbara (Fieldnotes, November 2018).

At first, Akaxe met with a variety of groups. Some of them practiced Danza and could be considered part of the Mexicayotl Movement. But another group he participated in at the beginning was a Gnostic dancing group. Because of the existence of both a Mexican community and spiritual and cultural groups in Chicago, Akaxe's arrival was the perfect middle ground for Latinx spiritual seekers (see Chapter 3).

During his first visit to Chicago Akaxe was still semi-nomadic, a lifestyle he had adopted since his first visit to Europe. He would spend some months in Guadalajara, some in Mexico City, and some in Europe. But during his second visit to Chicago, two things came into his life that would change it significantly: a Danza group called Ehua, and Clarissa.

Ehua was a Danza group (Aztec dance) that already existed in Chicago. They asked Akaxe to stay and become their teacher. They told him they had been waiting for a teacher like him. Akaxe accepted, but with certain conditions. He needed the group to deal with the internal conflict they were having. He also asked the danzantes to take off their *ayoyotes* and *plumas.*[76] This was an act of dispossession and teaching that mimicked his experience with Maestro Alfredo. If someone wanted to learn from Akaxe, he demanded that they start from scratch. Some members of Ehua did not conform to Akaxe's new rules and left the group. Akaxe and Ehua collaborated for several years until Akaxe founded his own group.

Moving to Chicago was a gradual process for Akaxe. At first, he traveled back and forth between Chicago and Guadalajara. Some years his stays in the U.S. were longer than others. Some years he would travel to Minnesota to work with another group.

It was not until he began a formal sentimental relationship with Clarissa when, in 2009, Akaxe decided to stay in Chicago. They married one year later. The ceremony was a traditional *amarre de tilma* (the traditional Nahua tying-up ceremony, where the clothes of the couple are tied together to represent the commitment of two souls coming together). This type of wedding ceremony was common before Spanish colonization. It is still important today because Conchero and Mexicayotl (and even New Age) groups have adopted the ceremony to perform marriage rituals. The ceremony guide was Maestro Meza, Akaxe's old

[76] Their ankle rattles and feathers (head-dresses).

Tonalpohualli teacher, who had come from Mexico City to perform the ceremony in Chicago. Akaxe ended his touring life by being tied-up with Clarissa. In Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations, a life partner (especially after the amarre de tilma) is considered to be half of a duality: each individual is considered to be one part of the whole, both complement each other in duality, with similarities and differences that create a whole. From the moment Akaxe and Clarissa bound their clothes assuming the responsibility of being each other's duality; in other words, a dual self.

One of the new challenges Chicago presented to Akaxe was the idea of "community." The groups Akaxe encountered in Chicago not only desired the knowledge, they were also desperate for a sense of community. For Akaxe, this was a mistake. His prior experience told him that when groups based themselves on friendships and social relations, the knowledge became less important. In addition, basing groups on friendship was dangerous because any fight or internal conflict risked tearing the group apart. In Akaxe's opinion, if a group is based solely on the knowledge, any conflicts that may occur will have less of an impact on the group and on his teachings. Akaxe has taken this idea as one of his missions (for more about community in Chicago, see Chapter 3). During my fieldwork, I saw him lecture students about how Matinauhkalli—his institute/shrine in Chicago—was not a community. This was also the reason why Akaxe stopped collaborating with the group Ehua. Ehua wanted to create a family, but Akaxe wanted to create a space of teaching and learning; an institute, not a family. Some Ehua student-practitioners followed Akaxe, but not all of them. Today, both groups—Ehua and Matinauhkalli—work on different sides of the city, offering Danza classes and ceremonial activities.

It was around the time Ehua and Akaxe separated that he and Clarissa decided to travel to California. Akaxe's sister lived in Camarillo and she would provide them with a base. Akaxe gave several talks and used Facebook to organize Danza classes in a public park. Akaxe was on the move again—accompanied this time by Clarissa—seeking students and teaching in Ventura, Oxnard (which has a big Mexican and immigrant community), and Camarillo. Akaxe's memories of California focus less on the place itself and more on his perceptions of the people and practitioners he encountered.

> Es que no hay, no hay gente allá, no hay gente y resulta, hasta cierto punto, difícil de creer porque dice uno pues es California, el movimiento Chicano, todo lo indigenistas está allá, ¿verdad? ¿Qué no le dicen Calif-Aztlán? Pero no hay alguien que verdaderamente quiera seguir una disciplina, no hay gente. Es muy difícil que se encuentren personas que verdaderamente quieran eso [la disciplina]" (Akaxe Gomez, interviewed September 24, 2018). (There are no people there, no people, and it seems hard to believe because you think, well this is California, the Chicano Movement, all the indigenist stuff is here, right? Don't they call it "Calif-Aztlan"? But there's no one who truly wants to follow a discipline, there's nobody. It's hard to find people that really want this [the discipline]).

One afternoon, while he and Clarissa were waiting for students to show up in a park, they had an idea, a *what-if* moment. And it was between all the car rides and waiting in parks that they created what is now Matinauhkalli,[77] an institute for the learning and teaching of Toltec knowledge in Chicago.

First, they needed a name. Something that encompassed all the disciplines Akaxe taught, but also a name that distinguished and separated them from "Mexicayotl." When I asked Akaxe why they wished to distinguish themselves from Mexicayotl, I argued that this was a tradition and that all traditions have ramifications and can be in the process of making (e.g.

[77] In Chapter 3 I talked about Matinauhkalli and how it was created and how it is maintained today in Pilsen, Chicago.

the notion of "invented traditions"). Although it seemed like he agreed with me that Mexicayotl is a tradition, he added: "sí, eso es algo hecho, verdaderamente" (it is something that is completely invented). He was shocked to discover what Mexicayotl groups did in Mexico and California: "no puede ser que esto es lo que queda, no puede ser que esto es lo que la gente hace…" (this can't be what's left, this can't be what people are doing…), he lamented. For Akaxe, Mexicayotl was an invented tradition, different from what he teaches because he considers his knowledge to be ancestral, a purer form of how indigenous people saw and reacted to the world. For Akaxe, this differentiation formed the basis of his own teachings and life story because it positioned him in a place of authority and authenticity, a place that is internally defined by how close teachings and practices are to Toltec and Aztec thought.

But after Akaxe and Clarissa decided they wanted to open an institute, they struggled to come up with a name for it. This was because their institute was tangled up with an already existing tradition (Mexicayotl). The name had to be descriptive, functional, and overarching, and it also had to have a branding component. Who was going to read the name? And what idea would the name generate in the stranger's mind? It was impossible to settle on a single name, so in conversations on car rides and plane journeys they eventually decided to have two names. The first, for the website, was INASCA, which stood for Indigenous/Native Arts and Science of Chikomoztok Academy (*sic*). INASCA incorporated both the North American and Latin American views on Indigenous peoples and American Natives. It also positioned them as a place of origin where arts and knowledge originated: Chikomoztoc. For Akaxe, Chicomoztoc was important because it destabilized the centralization of the Mexica (the Aztec Empire). For him, this knowledge was from and for all the "nations" of Chicomoztoc.

It is also interesting to note that Chicomoztoc has been portrayed as the mythical place from where the Aztecs and the other six Nahua tribes migrated from the north to Mexico-Tenochtitlan. The idea of naming the Academy Chicomoztoc, instead of Anahuac (the name that Mexicayotl groups have chosen to use to refer to the American continent) puts emphasis again on the idea of human mobility and migration. I do not know if Akaxe did this intentionally, but the sole idea of migration and geographical mobility gets encapsulated in how origins and identity are formed. Instead of going back to the Aztec Empire, and Mexico-Tenochtitlan, they have decided to go back even further: to the moment and place from where mobility started for the Nahua people before the Aztecs.[78]

INASCA was descriptive and encapsulated all that they wanted to explain. But it was too long. And, because they wanted to create a Facebook page, they needed a shorter name as well: one that would be attractive to "gringos." Akaxe's experience in Europe had taught him that the knowledge was not only of interest to Mexican nationals. They decided to name the Facebook page "Nahua Lessons." According to Akaxe, "Nahua" means "harmonic," which made perfect sense to his way of understanding the knowledge, because he was teaching "lecciones de armonía" (harmony lessons), using "harmony" as a metaphor for balancing one's emotions and one's self through the application of the different disciplines and classes. After six years of having an online presence as "Nahua Lessons," the name of the Facebook page and Instagram account was changed to Machtia Toltekatl (meaning "to learn or to be committed to learning Toltec knowledge.")

[78] In the *Crónica Mexicayotl*, an early colonial document, Fernando Alvarado Tezozomoc mentions Aztlán and Chicomoztoc as synonyms for the place that held the seven calpullis (tribes) that migrated south and later formed the Aztec Empire (Tezozomoc 1975, 15).

Back in Chicago, in 2013, Akaxe and Clarissa talked to their students about the group's future. At that time Akaxe was still an itinerant teacher. So, with the help of the student-practitioners, they started searching for a space. While they were debating whether to buy or rent, one of the oldest student-practitioners, Juanita, found the perfect space to rent. It was an old convenience store in the neighborhood of Pilsen, a few blocks away from busy 18th Street. The place needed renovating but, after negotiating with the landlords, they decided to take it. Matinauhkalli was about to come into existence.

Conclusion

In this chapter, Akaxe's life story serves as a vehicle for a number of things. First, it is a perfect example of how the search for one's identity and life mission (in spiritual settings) goes hand-in-hand with mobile practices. Second, mobility can be seen in three different ways in the narration of this life on the move:

1) As a displacement of one's body from one place to another. Displacement may be in the form of travel, migration, or refuge (Larsen et al. 2006; Creswell 2006). Akaxe's parents provide an example of internal migration within Mexico: from small, rural places, to Mexico City. This type of migration has been viewed as one of the ways in which indigenous people are de-Indianized through a process of cultural *mestizaje*.[79] In the case of Akaxe, we also see internal migration from Mexico City to Puebla and Guadalajara, first in search of teachers,

[79] As seen in Chapter 1, the process of internal migration from small villages to Mexico City is one of the reasons why the Conchero Movement is seen as urban and syncretic today. The long history of internal migration and cultural assimilation would need another chapter. However, I do not want to suggest that the process of de-Indianization to mestizaje is an easy one. Indigenous people still suffer from racism and discrimination when relocated from their communities to urban areas in Mexico. An example of this can be found in Maria Amalia Garcia (2018) and Jose Aurelio Granados Alcantar and Maria Felix Quezada Ramirez (2018), whose approaches reveal the struggles of indigenous immigrants in urban areas.

and then of students. We can also see an atypical form of tourism—one in which the body travels to faraway places to be considered an exotic commodity.

2) Mobility and its connection to emotions and affect (Adey 2010; Sheller 2004; Van Den Abbelle 1991). Mobility can bring a feeling of excitement and anxiety. These emotions can manifest during a long car ride, as when Akaxe and Clarissa spent so much time between places that they came up with the idea for their future project. Being between places created an imaginary space that enabled them to settle. Flying to an unfamiliar place (which can include the metaphor of dying as a journey) can be exciting and scary at the same time, as was the case with Akaxe's trip to Europe right after his teacher's death. Emotions are what move us and what attach us to place (Ahmed 2004). He was feeling stuck, like he had nothing left to learn or do in a place, and this encouraged Akaxe to move. His mobile practices justify his place in Chicago today, they explain why and how he decided to leave Mexico to teach Toltec practices in a foreign country. These mobile practices also reinforce authenticity, which later provides Akaxe with the authority of being a young but experienced teacher.

In this chapter I also tried to introduce the disciplines practiced in Matinauhkalli. In Chapter 4, I will continue to explore ideas of mobility. Mobility is present in how a physical body expresses itself through disciplines like Danza. The body moves to learn old and new forms, but also to remember. Movement is associated with internal memory and the knowledge. There is also a mechanism of mobile imagination in the act of remembering, a mechanism by which people's minds travel back in time to recreate and reenact how the body moved in the past. This process revives the memory and somatic experiences of a free and sovereign body in pre-colonial times.

In this chapter I also shed light on how Danza, activism, and philosophy ended up converging in the groups that practice Toltec and Mexica spiritualities. It is hard to imagine now, but from the 1940s to the 1980s, Danza was exclusive to the Conchero Movement; people who wanted to learn Danza had to join a Mesa Conchera. Meanwhile, the ideological and linguistic movement—like we saw in Chapter 1—was more urban and middle class, and underpinned the foundations of Calpullis and Mexicayotl. Today, we can still find people and groups more inclined towards either intellectual activities (like Maestro Arturo Meza) or bodily disciplines. Akaxe, as part of the history of the revival of indigenous knowledge, discipline, and practices, has worked to create a space where all disciplines are taught.

Akaxe's story is also important because we can see how Indigenous and Mexica spiritualities are entangled with notions of masculinity. On the one hand, we see gender divisions inherent in the discipline, like the fact that Mikixtli is a sahumadora while her sons are Danza teachers. On the other hand, we notice the strong presence of male teachers and father figures throughout Akaxe's life. Akaxe has two fathers: his biological one, who pushes him onwards at times of hard transition; and Maestro Meza, his father on the path, who is the central figure of knowledge and lineage.

In Chapter 3, I will explore how Akaxe went from mobile subject to establishing a sense of place and belonging in the United States. What are the consequences of him staying? What is being constructed, and who benefits from it? Mobility and place go hand in hand. Chapter 3 is a continuation of the narrative that Akaxe and his students shared with me regarding how they came to be the group they are.

According to Akaxe, after so many years of full mobility, the stability and immobility of his life in Xicago represented a significant change. And yet it was thanks to that immobility that the creation of Matinauhkalli was possible:

"Mi vida, antes de llegar a Xicago era un río. Estaba fluyendo entre pueblitos, Guadalajara, Mexico, hasta Europe. Hasta que en 2012 nos estancamos, pero no nos detuvimos. No dejamos de hacer lo que estábamos haciendo. El río, se siguió moviendo. Ahora ya no es río, es estanque, pero el estanque sigue en movimiento." (My life before Xicago was a river. It was flowing between little towns, Guadalajara, Mexico City, even Europe. In 2012, we[80] came to a standstill. But we didn't stop doing what we were doing. The river kept moving. [My life] is not a river anymore, it's a pond, but a pond that keeps moving) (Akaxe Gomez, in Tonalpohualli class, November 10, 2019).

[80] In Spanish it is common to use the first person plural (*nosotros*/we) to talk about the first person singular (*yo*/I, me). It is a socio-linguistic marker of modesty and humility.

Chapter 3. Matinauhkalli: Creating Walls of Space and Identity

> What is an ideology without a space to which it refers, a space which it describes, whose vocabulary and links it makes use of, and whose code it embodies? (Lefebvre 44, 1991).

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I narrated the life story of Akaxe Yotzin Gomez. I explored notions of mobility as a physical and social act, and also as a metaphor in which ideas of immobility force the body to move in search of more knowledge in Indigenous practices. Throughout Akaxe's life, we can see how tradition, likened to authenticity, is on the move through the body of the teacher. But Akaxe's life story changes dramatically when he finally settles in Mexican Xicago. The present chapter, then, is about the production of spaces (including the quotidian forms of mobility that entails), while transnational and other long-distance forms of mobility—for Akaxe at least—is on hold. In the larger scheme of things, mobility never stops. The students move from their neighborhoods in different parts of the city to travel to the institute and learn from their teacher. While recognizing the mobile practices in play, in this chapter I focus more closely on the places that were produced (rather than the acts of their production) and on how this goes hand-in-hand with the production of identities.

For Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations, the creation of space is also the re-creation of the past. Both time and space are interconnected in the production of ideology and identity. Groups in Mexico and the U.S. have used private or public spaces to gather, study *Tonalpohualli*, practice Danza, and perform ritual activity. For the Mexicayotl, these spaces, regardless of their origin or formal use, have acquired the title of Calpullis.[81] In the times of the Aztec

[81] In Chapter 1 I summarize some of the most important literature about the Mexicayotl (or Mexicanidad). All mention the calpulli as the space where people gather to learn and teach Aztec and Mexica practices.

Empire, a Calpulli was a "social institution similar to a clan in which families group according to blood ties, trade, or cult."[82] (Sahagún 892-3).

Twentieth-century Calpullis have flourished on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. They are social organizations that respond to the need for creating spaces where practice and the Knowledge can be disseminated. Akaxe has been clear—to me as well as his students—that his mission is to create a different kind of space and pedagogy than the Mexicayotl and its Calpullis. Therefore, we should not identify the space he created in Xicago as another Calpulli. Instead, he and his student-practitioners refer to this space as "Matinauhkalli," which means "the house of four wisdoms."[83]

The difference between Matinauhkalli and a Calpulli is not merely semantic—it is organizational. The organization built around Matinauhkalli guides behavior, and influences the way art, disciplines, and philosophy are produced. Re-defining notions of what and how they produce knowledge was also a way of re-defining space. However, it has not been easy to establish new ideas, expectations, and behavioral patterns (from the way people greet each other to the way they mediate between the knowledge learned in Matinauhkalli and their lives outside the space). One contested term is that of "community." While Calpullis are community generators, Matinauhkalli and Akaxe specifically push against the idea of community. Instead, they introduced the term *manada* (animal pack) to define what they are as a congregation.

However, the process of defining who they are in relation to the space (Matinauhkalli) has been one of trial and error for Akaxe, Clarissa (Akaxe's wife), and the student-practitioners. This ongoing process has taken time away from classes due to group discussions or individual

[82] My translation. Original in Spanish: "Caserío. Institución social similar al clan. En ella se agrupaban familias por parentesco, por oficio, o por forma de culto" (Sahagún, 892-3).
[83] See an explanation of the name Matinauhkalli later in this chapter.

clarifications, to the point of creating structural changes and boundaries. As a result, some students have been excluded from the space, either because they decided to leave or because they were expelled.

Before creating Matinauhkalli, Akaxe and Clarissa moved around the city. They lived in Evanston initially, although the places where they taught were all located between Cicero and the city.[84] Cicero was important at the start of Akaxe's career in Xicago because it has a large Mexican population and holds a community center called *Calmecac*,[85] which serves people of color—mainly Latinx from the Xicago Area. In their interviews, both Akaxe and Clarissa explained how these mobile practices (driving from Evanston to Cicero, to the city, etc.) were exhausting and hard. Akaxe could not drive because he did not have a driver's license at the time, which meant Clarissa had to quit her job to drive Akaxe to the places were he was teaching. Sometimes this was in Cicero, sometimes it was in the city, and sometimes it was around Pilsen and Little Village. While Akaxe was teaching in community spaces, studios, coffee shops, and even the private homes of student-practitioners, Clarissa became his driver, confidant, manager, and partner. Finding a space for classes became a necessity. The more people who joined Akaxe's group, the more classes they demanded, and the more stability and structure they required. For Akaxe and Clarissa, having a space of their own aligned with their personal project of creating their own home and family. So, in addition to serving as an institute for Akaxe's teachings, Matinauhkalli became Clarissa's household and the place where they started a family.

[84] Both, Evanston and Cicero are considered suburbs. This becomes important because Matinauhkalli is in the city, not in a suburb, and people interact with Matinauhkalli as a space and a location differently according to their livelihood and their commuting situation.

[85] In Nahuatl "Calmecac" means "house of the lineage" and in the Aztec Empire, the Calmecac was the school for nobility. It is interesting that Mexicayotl uses the word "Calpulli", which has a family structure, instead of "Calmecac" that would be more aligned with ideas of knowledge production.

In this chapter I explore how the creation of hybrid spaces, which are both private and public, is a common practice among communities of color and lower-income families who either cannot afford—or choose not to—separate their living and working spaces. I argue that although such spaces are common, they create invisible institutions that are demarcated by 1) authority (who inhabits the space and who can transgress or walk through it) and discipline in an "invisible" institutionalized[86] dynamic; and 2) gender relations that fluctuate between liberation and tensions between the binary female and male expectations of the household and its limits.

Following Doreen Massey (1999), I found space production to be tangled up with categories of race and gender. It is through the creation of spaces like Matinauhkalli that a philosophy (an ideology) gets reproduced. It is also through the analysis of space production that one can see how social relations are constructed, and with them the narratives of what is experienced inside and outside the confinements of the space. This analysis is possible because space produces social relations in which power is mediated (Lefebvre 1991). In the case of Matinauhkalli, power mediation can be seen in three separate instances. First, in the construction of Pilsen as a Mexican neighborhood that responds to a history of segregation through racial practices. Second, in the constant negotiations of power inside Matinauhkalli, positioning Akaxe and Clarissa as authorities of the space and the tradition itself. Third, Matinauhkalli (and Calpullis in general) respond to what Henri Lefebvre (1991) considers to be the creation of utopian spaces. Matinauhkalli constitutes a space in which student practice acquires a code of ethics and embodies forces that correspond to the imagined world of the ancestors: "What people did before Spanish colonization"; "how they did it"; and "why they

[86] I think of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations as "invisible" institutions.

did it." These questions become the *modus operandi* and ultimate goal of the individual's life within the confinements of a modern and multicultural city such as Xicago. Space and utopia are also connected in this case with notions of discipline: it is through the creation of space that discipline is achieved and knowledge can be reproduced (Foucault 1977).[87] The transition between Matinauhkalli and the city can also be seen as a liminal crossing of these worlds.

In addition, identity and ideologies tend to go hand-in-hand. The Mexicayotl Movement, which has been thought of as deinstitutionalized (by scholars), areligious (by practitioners), and apolitical (by both scholars and practitioners), has constructed a series of ideologies and practices which—while not obvious—have built strong enough foundations for groups to be formed in a transnational context as this type of knowledge is reproduced in specific spaces. The only way a scholar of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations can begin to see them as an institutional power with socio-political repercussions in Mexican society and communities of color outside Mexico is by understanding the way in which these spaces work and build relationships with the outside world.

Among Mexicayotl adherents in Mexico it is common to see Calpullis constructed inside private homes. People go to study and/or practice Danza in the home of their teacher, who shares his personal space with his community. These hybrid places are not unique to Mexican cultures. These spaces also exists in other communities of color and, in general, there are markers of class positionality, where business grow inside households because of lack capital. Elizabeth Pérez (2016) describes how the home of her interlocutor, Ashabi, functions as a house-temple, hosting a community of Lucumí practitioners in Xicago's South Side.[88]

[87] In Chapter 4 I explore ideas of discipline and knowledge production.
[88] Another example of these communal spaces can be seen in the *Mama Lola* ethnography on Vodou practices in N.Y.

I also know from personal experience how these spaces work. My mother still continues her healing practice at home. I grew up seeing patients coming in and out of our living room, knowing that the only private space in the house was my own room. No other space was private: not the bathroom, not the kitchen, and especially not my mother's room where she also used to practice her healing sessions. In a similar way, Matinauhkalli is a household, a shrine, and an institute. All in one. The only private space was Akaxe's and Clarissa's bedroom, to which I never had access. Admittance to different spaces in Matinauhkalli signaled closeness to (maybe even intimacy with) Clarissa and Akaxe. Not every student was allowed to enter the kitchen, for example. And only a few students were permitted to circumvent the time restrictions as well. Only very rarely did I see students in Matinauhkalli at times that did not correspond to scheduled classes. For a while, I visited the space at random times to conduct interviews; at such moments Matinauhkalli was a family household rather than a communal one.

On a micro level, this chapter also explores the subjective and personal implications that these types of spaces bring to the people who share their households with communities. Specifically, I analyze the case of Akaxe's wife, Clarissa, which provides a helpful narrative for exploring space as a place of boundary-making between public and private; inside and outside. Clarissa's story also sheds light on the different roles that a woman and positionality is subjected to in religious and/or spiritual communities led by a single male authority figure.

On one hand, Matinauhkalli represents an utopian space, an instant reality in which practitioners have access to the production of a space that is far from contemporary times and material realities. The meaning of the word "Matinauhkalli" (house of four wisdoms) works as a metaphor for space (construction) and the human mind. In the Tonalpohualli (calendar), *calli*

is the symbol of the house which, according to maestros Arturo Meza and Akaxe Gomez, refers not to the building itself, but to the human mind, a mirror from the outer world to the inner, intimate world.

3.2 Notes on Methodology

In the present chapter I shift from Akaxe's life story to the way in which different narratives created Matinauhkalli as a space. Although Akaxe's interviews are still relevant, Clarissa's voice gains unexpected prominence when talking about the creation of Matinauhkalli. In addition, some of the students' voices, retrieved from open-ended interviews, are also present in this chapter. Through my ethnographic notes and conversations with student-practitioners, I have tried to describe the parts of the city relevant to Matinauhkalli.

Clarissa was one of the last people I interviewed in Xicago. The original idea was to use the same questionnaire that I used for student-practitioners[89] because Clarissa was also Akaxe's student and participated in classes and ceremonies. However, after question four, when I asked her how and when she started "this journey," the interview expanded to engage with the struggles she has had in building both the space and her own identity.

Our first interview was unexpectedly intense and emotional, full of information, self-analysis, and reflection. After this first interview—which took over four hours—Clarissa asked me to come back. She felt uncomfortable with some of the things she had said and wanted to reframe them. At no point had I felt that Clarissa had been offensive or demeaning. However, I respected her wishes and, during the course of a second interview, we decided how best to frame her challenges within Matinauhkalli. It was important to Clarissa to make clear that she

[89] I have attached an appendix containing the list of questions I drew up for student-practitioners.

was the only one responsible for her behavior and actions. In Matinauhkalli, a "sense of responsibility" is taught and understood. Being a *maestro* is a responsibility, being the *wife* of the maestro is also a responsibility. More importantly, being a Macehual involves having a great responsibility towards yourself, your maestro, your community, and future generations.

Although Clarissa spoke about other student-practitioners, friends, and family members, her story always circled back to the space, her relationship to Akaxe, and her search for a new identity (as the wife of a maestro). Clarissa's struggles were compounded by her confusion about her role and by the expectations that her husband and student-practitioners had of her.

Although most of the people involved in Clarissa's struggles no longer form part of Matinauhkalli, I have anonymized student-practitioners in this chapter. Clarissa wanted to protect the community and refrain from pointing fingers or making individuals responsible for what she was expressing through her narrative. She also asked me to portray her as the one responsible for her own story. To honor her agency and request, most of the students are not named in this chapter and are instead referred to as simply "student-practitioner." In addition, Clarissa and I decided to show some of the moments of vulnerability that she has experienced, as well as the community's expectations of her role. In this chapter, with Clarissa's help, I have tried to explore the difficult position in which women close to authority figures (religious/spiritual) are placed. Her story also invites us to reflect on how women often do invisible (and frequently unpaid and unvalued) labor while male authority figures, and even whole communities, refrain from such labor.

3.3 Mexican Xicago. Centering Matinauhkalli in Pilsen

Several times when traveling to Xicago it felt like I was going home. I knew I was going to eat delicious Mexican food for a cheaper price (compared to California) and I knew I

would be speaking Spanish. These three markers: food, economy, and language even made me forget at times that I was still in the United States. But it was also the people, the way they would read me, the small interactions. The "*buenos días*" from strangers while walking to the train; the truck selling fruit in the street; the *pan dulce* as a snack just because it was there; the *café de olla* served in the hipster coffee shop; the *helados* and *aguas de sabores* from La Michoacana; the *jugos* that we (the student-practitioners and I) would guzzle after Danza to rehydrate our exhausted bodies; the street murals with the faces of Sor Juana, Pepe Aguilar, and Che Guevara; the *torillerías*, making fresh tortillas and selling corn dough from early in the morning.

Despite its hard winter, its multiculturalism, and its "farness" from the border, Xicago felt close to home. One time I even dared to ask Ikiltezi, one of Matinauhkalli's students, if there were any white neighborhoods in Xicago. "There are," she said with a laugh, and offered to drive me to one as a tourist attraction. Some Mexican-Americans and Mexican residents prefer the spelling Xicago, to simulate the Nahua sound of 'sh,' present in so many words like *mexica*/meshica, or *mixiote*/mishiote.[90] Thus in this dissertation I have chosen to honor the 'sh' sound and Mexican phonemic orthography and refer to the city as Xicago.

Xicago has the second largest Mexican population in the United States, after Los Angeles.[91] Mexicans, along with other Latin American nationalities (Puerto Rican, Guatemalan, Salvadorian, among others), are grouped as Hispanic, making it the city's largest minority group according to a 2017 census (https://www.chicagotribune.com/hoy/ct-mexicans-and-hispanics-largest-minority-in-chicago-20171013-story.html consulted May 20, 2019).

[90] With time, the Spanish phoneme of /sh/ changed to a grammatical 'ch', like in the cases of Chalma, Chalco, chamaco, etc.

[91] https://www.citylab.com/equity/2014/10/why-chicago-is-still-the-2-us-city-for-mexican-immigrants/381304/

Although migration and U.S./Mexico connections and border crossings have existed since the creation of both nations, literature on Mexican Xicago points that following WWI, the U.S. experienced an unprecedented labor shortage among male workers, creating temporary contracts for Mexican workers to fill. This led to the incorporation of Mexicans into the blue-collar labor force of the city (Arredondo 2008; De Genova 2005). As a consequence the 1920s was the most important decade in the creation of Mexican Xicago.

There were other factors that made Xicago attractive to Mexican migrants. First, it served as a way for Mexicans to escape the racial persecution, discrimination, and deportation from border cities that ensued with the Great Depression. Second, the city became part of the migrant circuits of Mexican and Mexican-American families, that started in the south and moved according to job availability through the Midwest (Oropeza 2019).[92] Third, family networks played a part (Arredondo 2008; Oropeza 2019). Fourth and finally, the blue-collar jobs that were available in Xicago provided higher wages and greater economic stability in opposition to seasonal and agricultural labor (Fernandez 2012).

The Mexican population of Xicago grew quickly. Gabriela F. Arredondo (2008) explains how, despite the unreliability of the U.S. census,[93] data show that the Mexican population in the city grew from one thousand to twenty-one thousand between 1920 and 1930. It is also during this period that the Great Migration took place and many African Americans moved from the American South to South Xicago.[94] In time, more and more Mexicans and other

[92] An example of this can be found in the work of Lorena Oropeza which describes how the Reies Lopez-Tijerina family followed the migrant circuit and eventually settled in Michigan to avoid racial persecution (Oropeza 2019).
[93] Racial censuses are not always reliable. Race is a fluid construct and people identify as different races/ethnicities according to their histories and physical features (for example, some Mexicans identify as white). In addition, when dealing with undocumented populations, censuses tend to be a cause of vulnerability.
[94] Race relations between brown and black neighbors were, and still are, ambiguous. Some Latinx, like Puerto Ricans, were racially ambiguous and though they were categorized as Black at the time, they often did not

Latinx communities settled in the city. By 2018, the Latinx population in Xicago was 2.1 million people, making them the biggest minority and 30% of the city's total population.[95] Latinx is considered an ethnic identity (not a racial one) and some of these people self-identify as "White," "Black," or even "Native American" (as an Indigenous descendent of the American continent, not as an American Indian). Although the Latinx category is problematic and often invisibilizes Black and Indigenous Peoples,[96] it has also created community ties and strengthened solidarity.

Although it is difficult to imagine Xicago's geography as part of the U.S./Mexico borderlands, areas of the city are culturally engraved in what Gloria Anzaldúa (2012) identifies as such: an in-between space that is an *herida abierta* (an open wound) and a cradle of culture and *mestizaje*. Nicholas De Genova (2005) goes further by suggesting that Mexican Xicago should be included in the field of Latin American Studies. In support of De Genova's argument, I believe that scholars engaging with transnational and migrant populations have a responsibility to look at both sides of the "border." The people I have encountered (I include myself as a translational subject and scholar)—and their stories, biographies, and bodies—belong to, dream of, and yearn for, both sides of the border. And they often do so in two languages, framed by two equally important cultures.

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identify as such, since they considered "Black" to be a category for African Americans (Fernandez). Similarly, when staying in Cicero with the Landeros family, the mom cautioned me to not go towards the blue CTA because there were more "morenos" around that area. Although "morenos" translates as brown, not black, she was referring to the African Americans who live on the other side of Cicero. Similarly, a Black Female Dominican Uber driver told me to put on my "cara brava" (tough face) when dropping me off in the area that the mom had warned me not to go to. These interactions told me that some Latinx not only have race bias, but that brown and black neighbors differentiate themselves from each other, and that there is little solidarity between them (except for activist groups and liberal/highly educated people).

[95] Population numbers in the census have become more important now that Latinos, Latinas, and Latinx seek public representation and public office positions https://abc7chicago.com/society/latino-leaders-say-2020-census-participation-is-critical/5713866/

[96] I think the framework of Latinx indigeneity can be helpful for re-thinking and looking critically at the term "Latinx" (Urrieta and Calderón 2019).

The history of Xicago's neighborhoods is the history of U.S. racism and segregation, and the creation of the "other" as racially and linguistically different from the Anglo-Saxon "norm." Gabriela F. Arredondo (2008) explains the techniques employed by landowners to keep some neighborhoods Black and brown-free. In the case of Mexicans, they were usually identified by skin color and accent.[97] In Xicago, as in much of the U.S., Mexicans were racialized through their national identity and language,[98] disrupting the black and white racial dichotomy.

The way in which Mexicans and Latinx have been racialized, and how these communities have learned to negotiate these racializing behaviors of inclusion and exclusion in the city, has created new ways in which the binary racial thinking of the Midwest has been disrupted. For Lilia Fernandez, Mexicans have become a liminal race: "Race has been inscribed in the very geography of the city" (Fernandez 2012, 3). Mexican neighborhoods are the result of segregation, but also creations of hybrid cultural cradles. The South Side, Lower West Side, Back-in-the-Yards/Pakington, and the City of Cicero are the main areas of the city where Mexicans and Mexican-Americans live their everyday lives, establish businesses, bilingual schools, coffee shops, restaurants, galleries and community centers, and make and display public art. Mexican Xicago has also been portrayed in the literary work of Chicana writers Sandra Cisneros (1991) and Erika L. Sanchez (2017).[99]

[97] Arredondo also talks about Mexicans trying to pass as white (of either Polish or Italian descent) to be able to live in better neighborhoods, but their accents will signify racial attributes of Mexicanness.
[98] For more on the racialization of language consult Aparicio (1998; 2000); Urciuoli (1996) and, for raciolinguistics, Flores and Rosa (2015).
[99] Both Cisneros and Sanchez wrote novels narrating the coming-of-age stories of the daughters of immigrants living in Chicago. Their protagonists, Esperanza and Julia, reflect on their identities as Mexican-Americans and share their experiences of living between rural Mexico and urban Chicago.

Since its formation in the mid-nineteenth century, Pilsen has been considered a neighborhood for immigrants. This started with German and Irish immigrants, followed by the Bohemian population that left its mark on the neighborhood's name and distinct architecture.[100] It was not until the 1950-60s, when the Harrison-Halsted neighborhood was purchased in order to build the new University of Illinois campus,[101] that the Mexican and Mexican-American population re-located to Pilsen (Fernandez 2012).

One of the distinctive features of Pilsen is the plethora of murals surrounding the neighborhood. The influence of Mexican murals came with the Mexican migration that began in the 1920s. According to the Department of Planning and Development of the City of Xicago, the oldest mural in Pilsen dates from 1978 (Department of Planning and Development 2019). The Mexican Chicagoans who worked on the walls of Pilsen drew on themes of nationalism, cultural pride, and social justice. Murals in Pilsen can also be seen as forming historical bridges, a way of incorporating "Mexicanness" into American life.

One of the artists who echoed the work of the WPA artists was Mario Castillo, a Vietnam veteran. Castillo's first public mural, *Peace* or *Metafísica*, was part of the Neighborhood Improvement and Beautification Program which involved pedagogical exercises with elementary school children as well as the production of mural art. Castillo's work became important to me after I saw his indoor mural *Mayahual*[102] during my first visit to the Museum of Mexican Art. In this mural there is a central human figure connected by different colored

[100] For an official history of the neighborhood consult the Department of Planning and Development (February 2019).

[101] The UIC construction brought massive displacement, not just of Mexican families, but also of African-American, Italian, Jewish, and Greek families (Department of Planning and Development 2019, 27).

[102] To see the mural *Mayahual*, visit Mario Castillo's website: http://www.mariocastillo.net/art/archives/2005/12/mayahuel_mural.php

lines to the rest of the painting, resembling an individual's cosmos. With Mesoamerican motifs from different cultures (Olmec, Toltec, Aztec, Mayan) and symbols of nature, it seemed to me that the mural was pointing to something else, something that people in Matinauhkalli seemed to be experiencing as well: a full connection with their surroundings, a metaphysical worldview in which the individual, nature, and energy are one. Without saying much, I showed a picture of the mural to Zabdi, one of the student-practitioners at the time. "Yeah, that's me," he said with a smirk.

For Clarissa, it is no coincidence that a space like Matinauhkalli should flourish in Xicago. After visiting Akaxe in Mexico for a few months, she came back to Xicago with him, and it was here that Akaxe encountered Ocelocoatl, a famous Danza teacher from Mexico who was also doing seasonal teaching in some of the same places as Akaxe. "Chicago! Of all places. That's weird…" I said to Clarissa. "Right?" she replied. "That's exactly what I was saying to Akaxe when we got back from Mexico. I was just like, well, Chicago… If you look at it on a map, it's in the center of the Northern continent, by all these waters, and water communicates, and connects a lot. I feel there's some sort of vortex here, because Chicago is such a microcosm of all the issues in the country, it's so segregated, it's so politically corrupt, so violent. Like, we have all the weather we could possibly have. We have winds from the south and winds from the north, so it's interesting…" (Clarissa Gonzalez March 5, 2019). Xicago as a city is a special place, with a unique location and an accumulation of nature: all the weather, the water, the winds. Setting aside the metaphysical interpretation of Xicago's uniqueness, this has been a historical Mexican city.

In addition, historians of religion in the U.S. have focused on Xicago and the religious hubs created in the city. It is not coincidental that an industrial city like Xicago, with a

growing working class and ethnic migrations and mobilities, has hosted churches, temples, and institutes from different religious backgrounds. For example, it is not by chance that the Moody Institute has been a cradle of Evangelical Christianity (Carpenter 1999) and Latino Christianity (Espinoza 2008, 263-95); or that the biggest place to pray to the Virgin of Guadalupe outside of Tepeyac, Mexico is in North Xicago (Peña 2011); or that the "ethnic religions" (Johnson 2010) or "racio-religio" movements, such as the Moorish Science Temple of America and the Nation of Islam (Weisenfeld 2016), were created in Xicago after the Great Migration. Ethnographers have also found Yoruba diasporic Black communities with living religious practices in the area (Pérez 2016).

When Akaxe and his students came to Pilsen, they fit right in. The fact that a space like Matinauhkalli could succeed in this neighborhood was not down to luck. It has an extremely privileged location; just a few blocks away from the CTA pink line and 18th Street,[103] and a few blocks from the Museum of Mexican Art where *Mayahual* is on permanent display. This gives easy access from the Pilsen/La Villita corridor to students or anyone coming from other neighborhoods or from the suburbs. Matinauhkalli can also lay claim to a long history of Mexican artists, intellectuals, and activists (and spiritual activists).

The house that Akaxe and Clarissa converted into Matinauhkalli had been a small Mexican supermarket (*una tiendita*). One of the student-practitioners, Izayotl, who was born and raised in Pilsen, told me how his mother used to send him to buy *tortillas* there. He witnessed the full transformation of Matinauhkalli. The supermarket had closed after a shooting. According to

[103] The CTA is the main public transportation system in Chicago. Matinauhkalli is two blocks away from Damen station, and three blocks away from 18th. It is also two blocks away from Ashland, one of the main avenues, with a constant flow of buses. When doing my field visits to Chicago, the majority of the students had a car, but a few still used public transportation. I used public transportation as well, except when a class ended very late, in which case I would take an Uber or Lyft. It is also worth noting that 18th Street is a popular and busy street, where Latinx life is vibrant and evolving throughout the day.

Akaxe's narrative, the owner had been injured by a bullet and, as a result, decided to sell the store. Akaxe reflects on how Pilsen used to be more dangerous. Gentrification has accelerated and crime and gang violence have gone down since he and Clarissa moved in. This has a bittersweet taste for them: "Ahorita ya se está gentrificando rápido y como le decía tiene sus puntos positivos y sus puntos negativos porque al no poder pagar la renta de los pandilleros, pues se tienen que ir, se tienen que ir, mover hacia el sur." (It is gentrifying quickly now, as I was saying, and this has its positive points and its negative points, because when gangsters are unable to pay rent they have to move south.) (Akaxe Gomez, September 26, 2018). The general perception that student-practitioners have of gentrification is that although it raises rent, causing problems for Mexican and Mexican-American families facing financial insecurity, it also forces gang members to move south so violence and shootings occur in the area less frequently than before.

Although Akaxe is happy that violence has gone down in the neighborhood, he is also conscious that gentrification will not work in their favor. For him, having a space like Matinauhkalli in Pilsen is also an act of resistance: "Aunque se vengan muchos güeros, nosotros vamos a seguir tocando el huehuetl, sin importar que tan fuerte y raro suene para ellos. Nosotros aquí seguiremos." (Even if lots of white people come, we'll keep playing the *huehuetl* [Aztec drum], no matter how loud or weird it sounds to them. We'll still be here.)" (Akaxe Gomez, September 26, 2018).

Today, Pilsen and Little Village (La Villita) are in an ongoing struggle against gentrification which directly affects Matinauhkalli student-practitioners. For student-practitioners and their families, the Pilsen/Little Village corridor is home. Students like Xiuhminatzin, Tlayolotl, Ana, and Crystal—who all grew up in La Villita—have expressed their anxiety about the increase

in rent and mega-constructions that will impact on them and their families as established residents. Some have even become activists, working to halt constructions and clean up abandoned spaces.

At first, Matinauhkalli was a run-down building with no walls separating the rooms and poor ventilation, although it did at least have a big kitchen with a double sink. The supermarket used to also sell *tortas* at the back, and the kitchen still looks like a restaurant kitchen. The space was clearly in need of renovation, but Akaxe and Clarissa did not have the resources to carry it out. It was largely thanks to the labor of a student who worked in construction that the space was transformed from a dilapidated supermarket to an institute. In exchange for the student's labor, Akaxe did not charge them tuition for Danza classes. Akaxe told me this story, declaring his gratitude for the student's work and assistance during the reconstruction of Matinauhkalli. The student in question was able to attend classes for free for over four years. Other practitioners who have invested their labor in the space over the years have also received a reduction in tuition fees.

As well as this exchange format, student-practitioners have "spatial responsibilities," especially cleaning the space. Every so often, instead of having class, students will invest their time in sweeping, cleaning the floors, and disinfecting the mats. They will also clean the bathroom and dust the general areas.

3.4 Matinauhkalli, a Space of Passage: From Mexicanos to Macehuales

While Clarissa and Akaxe use a variety of names for their project online and on social media,[104] the name of the space itself and the one that student-practitioners use is

[104] The name for the web page is INASCA. They also have two public Facebook pages; one goes by the title Nahua Lessons, while the other, more active, account is Machtia Toltekatl. Their Instagram is also titled Machtia Toltekatl. In addition, both Clarissa and Akaxe have personal accounts. From his Instagram profile,

"Matinauhkalli," the house of four wisdoms. In Mesoamerican thought and Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations the number four is important. Four signifies the *rumbos* (directions) and complexity of the four Tezcatlipoka avatars. The north is Mictlampa, and Yayahuki Tezcatlipoka (black) is positioned here; the east is Tlahiztlampa, Xipe Totec or Tlatlahuki Tezcatlipoka (red); south is Huitztlampa, Tlaloc, or Blue Tezcatlipoka; and the west is named Cihuatlampa and it is where Quetzalcoatl, or the White Tezcatlipoka, is situated. The four directions and Tezcatlipokas have a cosmogonical meaning in Aztec religion and Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations: the four directions hold the world, while the Tezcatlipokas represent the creation of the world. Thus, Matinauhkalli is linked with how Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations re-interpret *teotls* (gods) as forms of nature and/or the human psyche (see Chapter 5). The four wisdoms are therefore internal functions, connected with Tezkatlipoka as a discipline, not a god, and with the four principles of the Macehual, which were created by Akaxe.[105] This space, once a convenience store, was gradually transformed into what is now the house of four wisdoms.

From my first visit in 2017, I found that entering the space came with a somatic experience. Things—objects, paintings, altars—would change according to the cycles of nature, which follow the *veintenas* (20-day cycles) in the Tonalpohualli calendar (see Chapter 5). Entering Matinauhkalli felt like being in another world and a different time. The light was usually dim, like the type of lighting used in movies to depict a dream scene. The images all around the walls are constant stimuli and aesthetically very different from Western art. Although the

@akaxegomez, Akaxe posts his art, the images he creates for merchandise and prints, and tattoos. Clarissa's account is @bloodmoonhealing, and she posts about her work as herbalist.

[105] In Chapter 5, I talk more about the principles of the Macehual, which are ALWAYS BE grateful, respectful, honest, and of service.

images have changed throughout the years, they are always symbols created by Akaxe and his students, imitating and manipulating Mesoamerican Codex aesthetics.

In 2018, the floors on which classes were taught were changed from tile to a matted floor. Big squares of black and red foam protect students' joints from the physical movements in Danza and *Yaotiliztli* combat. During this same year, two clay images were incorporated into the main entrance, Xipe-Totec and Tlazohteotl; as well as a clay fountain with a Tlaloc mask on the top. Although Xipe-Totec, Tlazohteotl, and Tlaloc can be identified as gods in Mesoamerican mythology, I avoid the use of Western religious terminology. For the people in Matinauhkalli, these teotls are not gods, but rather: 1) symbols and representations of nature that help connect their psyches with specific natural forces; and 2) forms of knowledge, even *grados* (ranks), that sages would acquire after formative periods in classical Mesoamerica (for more on this topic, see Chapter 5).

Inside the space there is a central altar that changes according to the cycles of the moon and the veintena.[106] To the left and right of this altar, long fabrics covered with Akaxe's paintings hang like curtains to conceal storage spaces. One of the storage spaces contains the bows and arrows used in *Millaniztli* (archery class), while the other contains *huehuetls* and the *toponaztli* for *Mitotiliztli* (Danza class). Against the wall in the left corner, there are two piles of foam pillows that are used for Tonalpohualli (symbols and calendar class) and other "non-active"[107] classes. There is also a hidden door that leads to a downstairs room. This has been a multi-purpose room, but it mainly functions as Akaxe's office. It is also where male students

[106] Although students clean the space as part of their responsibilities, only Clarissa and Akaxe are allowed to change the altar, with Clarissa being the main altar keeper.

[107] In Matinauhkalli, there are the physical disciplines, which are regular classes, like Danza, Yaotiliztli and Millaniztli. They also have an ongoing Tonalpohualli class. In rotation they have other "non-physical" classes including Nahuatl, Self-healing, Cantos (chants in Nahuatl), Meta-languages, Kalpillismo, etc. By "non-physical" classes I mean classes in which students sit and take notes rather than engage in physical activity.

can change clothes before classes. Female students have to change in the bathroom or behind a curtain next to the washing machine. Although men and women share the space equally, gender divisions become obvious when it is time to change clothes. Men are able to gather in a space to change before class, while women must wait their turn to get changed in these smaller spaces.

Past the big space where classes are taught, there is a small hallway that leads to the bathroom on the left. On the right-hand side of the hallway there are two doors. The first leads to a multi-purpose room, while the second leads to Akaxe's and Clarissa bedroom. At the end of the hallway is the kitchen, which contains a sink; pantries for utensils, cookware, and food; and a long rectangular table that seats at least eight people. The tiny hallway divides the space and marks the limit between the communal space and the semi-private household. The kitchen is multi-purpose, sometimes it is used for Matinauhkalli events, and other times it is used by the household.

When entering the space, there is a code of conduct which must be learned.[108] Everyone must leave their shoes near the door. There are two big rugs where the shoes of student-practitioners are arranged according to arrival time. Coats and sweaters are left in an open closet that provides hooks to hang the outwear. Bags are left in the lower compartments of the same closet. Everyone must enter the space barefoot and without personal belongings (except in Tonalpohualli class, where students can bring laptops and notebooks for note taking). Upon arrival, students much bow to the little figures in the entrance. Students greet Maestro Akaxe

[108] Newcomers will always receive a crash-course on the basics, like where to put their shoes and coats, and how to greet each other. They will then gradually incorporate new forms of conduct. In Matinauhkalli, there is a certain flexibility towards new people, but once someone learns a new code, they are expected to follow it without mistakes, otherwise they can expect consequences and verbal reprimands.

and each other in Nahuatl, either with the informal greeting, "*niltze"* (hello) or by saying "*nimitzpiani*" (–excuse me or with permission– if you are just arriving to the space) or "*ximopanolti*" (–welcome– if you are already in the space and are answering the person who is arriving and greeting you). Students know that they cannot congregate or hang around inside the space after class. They are all asked to change back into their regular clothes and leave the space as quickly as possible. Building friendships is to be done outside Matinauhkalli. The only exception to this strict policy of leaving the space when classes are finished in on Sundays, when student-practitioners are allowed to stay between classes. The rule is also broken when there are public lectures in the space. When public events do occur, it is obvious who is a student-practitioner and who has come to Matinauhkalli for the first time.[109]

Entering the space requires a certain transformation for each individual. Matinauhkalli becomes a place of passage, where students leave their ordinary lives behind to learn how to become extraordinary.[110] Their first token of transformation occurs with the greetings, which they make not only to the people in the space already, but also to the *chanequitos* (the statues representing forces of nature, located in the main entrance) and to the altar. The salutation entails crossing both arms in the form of an x in front of the chest and bowing gently. This is meant to prepare a student's mind and body before entering the space and performing the practice. The second major token of transformation is related to clothing; it begins with the

[109] An example of this is when there was a lecture given after the *Ochpaniztli* ceremony (fieldnotes from September 24, 2019). Once the lecture was over, people remained behind, mingling, while student-practitioners were coming and going, attempting to "transform" the lecture room into an empty space again. When lectures are given in Matinauhkalli, cushions are provided for attendees to sit on the floor. At the end of classes or lectures, cushions must be returned to the storage space, and the space is usually cleaned.

[110] Arnold Van Gennep (1961) considers what I am calling a "place of passage" part of a rite of passage when referring to territory. For Van Gennep, this rite of passage can be interpreted as when "a person leaves one world behind him and enters a new one" (19). In Matinauhkalli, this process comes with embodied and performative actions in which a student-practitioner not only enters a different type of world, but also embodies a different self.

taking off of shoes, and then involves using the corresponding attire for each physical discipline (non-physical disciplines do not require a change of clothing).[111]

In theory, entering Matinauhkalli and adopting a different code of conduct towards your teacher, your ancestors, and your peers is only a replication of how you are supposed to behave in the outside world as well. Coming into the space should be a transformative process, a movement towards a *macehual* identity, towards becoming an individual who has integrated the knowledge—physical and intellectual—into everyday life. This is a balance that student-practitioners struggle to achieve due to the demands of urban life. Matinauhkalli provides a momentary space where students can learn and practice what it means to be a *macehual*.[112] However, student-practitioners come and go, while Clarissa stays in the same space. She too aims to become a macehual, while simultaneously building her idea of home in a space that is both public and private.

3.5 Walls of Space and Identity. A Constant Creation

Akaxe's decision to stay in Xicago meant that his range of mobility was reduced, but his sense of making a space of his own grew. Akaxe did not build the space by himself, however. It was with student-practitioners' help and Clarissa's labor that Matinauhkalli exists.

From the beginning of their relationship, Clarissa has contributed to the success of Akaxe's career in Xicago. She has also taken on an important role in the creation of the space. When

[111] More information about types of attire and their meaning is provided in Chapter 4.

[112] Behaving like a macehual inside and outside Matinauhkalli has proved to be challenging. Some students expressed their frustration when they thought they were being judged by Akaxe, Clarissa, or other students for having "ordinary" lives, or for wanting something else or different from what was expected of them. Some students decided to leave Matinauhkalli because of this pressure. There were also a few instances in which male student-practitioners broke codes of conduct, making female student-practitioners feel unsafe. In these instances, Akaxe and Clarissa decided to expel these men from Matinauhkalli. Whatever the measures taken, both Clarissa and Akaxe struggle with what it meant to exercise this type of power against someone else. They often talk about their reluctance to police students. The few cases when they have done so were exceptions, carried out in order to provide basic safety measures for female students.

they first met Akaxe hired Clarissa to organize his classes. She was in charge of his agenda: finding places where he could teach, and promoting his classes and workshops. This type of work was not new to Clarissa as she had been a community organizer before she met Akaxe. She felt excited about how she could help him grow:

> We first met actually, he actually 'hired' me before we started dating and because of all this stuff and I was like: 'Dude, I am going to blow you up, *you* are gonna become the next Deepak Chopra!' And he was like 'Hold up, no, no, no… this is not supposed to be personality-based, it is supposed to be about the *knowledge*.' And I was like 'damn… (Clarissa Gonzalez, May 5, 2019.)

Clarissa and Akaxe's relationship was always permeated by two elements: the knowledge and their labor. Although she was not allowed to ask questions after class—and they had an understanding about separating their relationship from the classes—the way in which Akaxe spoke to her was through the concepts and symbols of the knowledge. For example, when Akaxe hired her, she remembers he was very clear in saying he (Akaxe) was not her boss. *Ipalnemohua* (Everything By Which We Live) was going to be her boss, but it was also going to watch her and take care of her. In this sense, Akaxe positions his life's mission and everyday life as something that cannot be separated from the knowledge. Working "for him" was not really working for him but helping him organize and create a greater good through his teachings. Therefore, being his partner also equated living within the knowledge and having full commitment to it.

Clarissa, with Akaxe's guidance, was essential to the creation and everyday function of Matinauhkalli. Like the walls that divide her private house from the institute, she has also had to put up boundaries between Akaxe and the students. For her, Akaxe's position as maestro swings from the giver to the "host" of a parasitic relationship: "[it] was really frustrating that they were not paying and then they were trying to suck every piece of information out of him

and I was like, 'dude, they are like parasites,' so it made me become very protective of him." (Clarissa Gonzalez, May 5, 2019). It was common for students to attach themselves to Akaxe after class, especially before Matinauhkalli was founded and he was teaching in different places. The students would try and get a private consultation so they could bombard him with questions: How does this or that concept apply to their lives? What does this dream mean? What should they do when they feel a certain energy, sickness, or non-physical entity? Not only was Matinauhkalli a way to stop being mobile—it was also a refuge for individual autonomy.

> When he was teaching classes at other places he was stuck, but as soon as we came here [Matinauhkalli] it was hilarious, because as soon as the class is over, right away he's like *fwoosh, se metía a su cuarto* [he's gone into his room], hahaha… It was so funny. It was like… finally I have an out, you know? I have a way to escape (Clarissa March 5, 2019).

Akaxe is able to escape when he is in Matinauhkalli because it functions as a triple space that fulfills each of Akaxe's three main roles. He is a teacher, a *Temachtiani*; he is a ceremonial guide, a *Tlamakazke*; and he is a private person who forms part of a family with twenty-first century needs and expectations. In Matinauhkalli the ideas of private and communal delineate spaces and relationships. In Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations it is common for teachers to become authoritative, charismatic figures, like the Hindu figure of the guru. India has a history of what Amanda Lucia (2018) calls "haptic logics," the guru/disciple relationship in which it is believed that the guru can transfer shakti to their disciples through touch. Although this idea does not exist in the teacher/student relationship in Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations, some of these logic mechanisms have been transferred through spiritual contact with New Age groups. Some students may become devoted to their teacher and to their physical presence and proximity. Akaxe is not the only teacher receiving

this type of attention from students. I also witnessed this with Maestro Arturo Meza, whom younger women sought to be close to after classes or during *Temazcal* (sweat lodge). These logics—though different from the Hindu religions—can have similar outcomes of abuse that Amanda Lucia has labeled an institutional problem within spiritual communities. Discussion of the consequences of haptic logics is something this dissertation does not do. However, it is worth mentioning that some of these interactions do happen in spaces like Matinauhkalli, thus emphasizing the need for Akaxe to have his own room where he can escape to so he can avoid more intimate contact with students, at least in public.

Although Matinauhkalli is Akaxe's grand dream, the space is a multi-layered construction that includes all the participants. It was clear from my interviews that everyone has an emotional investment in, and a sense of entitlement to, the space. Some student-practitioners felt that they were the ones responsible for Matinauhkalli existing. One of them located the space that became Matinauhkalli; another did construction work to renovate the building; and many others contributed large or small sums of money to pay the rent and the utility bills when tuition fees were not enough. However, it is important to clarify that the level of involvement has not always been consistent. Some students limit their interactions to paying tuition and going to classes, while others have taken more extensive responsibility for the space. The basic responsibilities of student-practitioners are paying tuition and cleaning the space (which sometimes happens during Danza or Yaotiliztli class). However, the majority also contribute with extra-curricular activities during ceremonies and workshops, or—to take a specific example— on the occasion of Maestro Meza's visit.[113] In September

[113] As mentioned in Chapter 2, Maestro Meza is Akaxe's Tonalpohualli teacher. He has influenced Akaxe from a young age. Maestro Meza has traveled to Chicago several times to visit Akaxe and his family, and also to give talks and workshops with his wife, Angelita.

2017, I went to Xicago to attend Maestro Meza's workshops. Students had volunteered to bring food, juices, and *agua de sabores* to Matinauhkalli for Maestro Meza and his wife, Maestra Angelita. The commitment of these students freed Akaxe and Clarissa from cooking for their visiting maestros and also—since students would bring enough food for the four of them—from cooking for themselves. Although Akaxe complained about some students "not helping enough," there was a sense of abundance of food and communal resources. In addition, preparing meals for Maestro Meza during his visits allowed students to have one-on-one time with him, which was impossible to obtain by only attending the public talks. This is also an example of haptic logics: students are happy to give because they believe they will gain a closer, more personal interaction with the teacher/elder in return. However, though students gave willingly, there was an underlying resentment towards Clarissa, who practitioners felt was not doing enough.

For Doreen Massey (1994), gender articulation can be seen in the dichotomous thinking present in the narratives I retrieved from Akaxe and Clarissa. More importantly, it can also be seen in the narratives that circulate among student-practitioners. Akaxe—being the man—holds and transmits the knowledge. In some ways, he can be seen in the dichotomy of what corresponds to the "rational." He is also the world traveler (see Chapter 2); while Clarissa is the "local" Chicagoan woman whose objective could appear to be building a home for herself. However, Clarissa wanted—and worked—to build an institute for Toltec knowledge just as much as Akaxe did. Since Matinauhkalli was both the "working place" and the "place called home," the way gender identities were created in the space may not have been evident to some. However, it is through relationships of power and labor that these distinctions arise.

At first glance, the making of place seems to be largely due to Akaxe's knowledge and the participation of students. However, a big part of the integration of the space happens thanks to Clarissa's unrecognized labor. Massey argues that space creates not only social relations, but also gendered identities. For Massey, gender division in spaces—as we will see in the case of Matinauhkalli—are created through labor divisions, where women's labor has historically been considered less skilled, less important, and even, in instances, invisible. There is no doubt that Clarissa's labor in Matinauhkalli has been invisible. Whereas a woman's labor in the household is usually dismissed by her male counterpart, Clarissa's work goes unrecognized because of the patriarchal gaze[114] that both men and women in the space unconsciously engage with:

> Y: "Yeah, I was gonna ask you if you consider what you do for Matinauhkalli part of your job?"
>
> C: "Omg, yes. It's so much work… Since I got pregnant I haven't been doing so much work, also it was a lot more before. He [Akaxe] has trained the *guerreros* [warriors, referring to Yaotiliztli students], to help clean. But at the beginning I was the janitor, I was setting up the space. Now students set up the space, students help clean the front part.[115] This past weekend, I said I needed people, because now with the baby I can't do everything. So, I needed someone to open up the door, someone for Skype, someone to pay attention to the camera, etc. Before, I used to do all of that. It's also like children, we don't realize how much moms are doing until we get our own place and we get to do everything. We used to go to Calmecac and once we got this space, Matinauhkalli, I did not realized how much Calmecac was giving us. We never took extra toilet paper, or extra cleaning supplies, we would just go and grab their stuff. This is definitely a job" (Clarissa Gonzalez, May 5, 2019).

Clarissa's struggle with who she was inside Matinauhkalli is directly connected to ideas of domesticity, home-creation, and a search for identity that can be seen in other instances

[114] I borrow Doreen Massey's (1994) idea of the "patriarchal gaze" to see how patriarchal structures can form a part of men and women's perception of space creation and labor. My intention is not to accuse people (and consequently victimize Clarissa).

[115] By "front part," Clarissa is referring to the communal spaces. Guerreros do not clean the private spaces. Nor do they clean the kitchen, unless there is a ceremony which necessitates its use.

when the household becomes both a place of consumption and a space of ritual production (Hancock 1999). Clarissa's invisible labor not only produces an active space for learning, organizing classes, schedules, etc.; it is also linked to ceremony.

Although Akaxe is the ceremony guide, it is usually Clarissa who cleans and changes the different elements of the main altar according to the veintenas and the lunar calendar. Labor involved in altar production is invisible, partly because of the patriarchal gaze, and partly because it is done when nobody else is around. Following Massey's logic of dichotomy, men are connected to time; so although it is Clarissa who creates the schedules, it is Akaxe who sets the time to teach; it is therefore—in practical terms—his time that is used to welcome everyone to the space. In contraposition, Clarissa can sometimes be interpreted as being a timeless entity. It is in her own time that small changes to the altar are carried out. Although not quite a domestic altar—because it is within view of student-practitioners—altar production has been linked to women's histories (*herstories*) and to a connection with the sacred (Turner 1999). Since Clarissa is the primary person responsible for both the main altar and the one in the middle of the Danza circle, it is not surprising that she has built an intimate relationship between the altar, its elements, and her own body.[116]

But Clarissa was not "naturally" bound to ideas of womanhood and home-making. Before meeting Akaxe, she was an organizer, leader, and activist in the queer scene for people of color in Xicago, having a special role in the Dyke March.[117] Her personal story and

[116] In the center of the small altar that Clarissa prepares for Danza there is always a clay vase. I noticed that the position and content of the vase would sometimes change. For example, sometimes the vase was upside down. It would alternate between being full of water, half full of water, or a quarter full of water. When I asked Clarissa if the vase was signaling something about the *veintena* cycles of nature, she told me that the vase was actually following moon cycles, and that these were also aligned with her own moon cycle (menstruation).
[117] The Chicago Dyke March is a mobilization and festival that aims to bring visibility to lesbian, bisexual, and queer women of color in contraposition to Pride. Other women in Matinauhkalli, like Ikiltezi and Yoli, were also very active in Dyke March before Matinauhkalli.

connections with feminism and queer movements in the area meant that her *amarre de tilma* (a ceremony of the union of dualities in Toltec and Aztec traditions; marriage) with Akaxe—and the idea of "building a home"—were more challenging. From the very formation of Matinauhkalli as a project, questions about womanhood, feminism, and identity arose for Clarissa.

For Clarissa, the idea of building a home and engaging in the domestic sphere was initially confusing and conflicting. It was not the role she was fulfilling with Akaxe, but the role the student-practitioners at Matinauhkalli assigned to her that made her feel conflicted. She felt she was caught between the patriarchal gaze, the expectations of fulfilling roles usually assigned to women, and her own feminist rebellion against gendered assumptions. For about a year, she was engaged in a dual struggle: helping to establish Matinauhkalli while her own identity was falling apart.

> C: Are you familiar with the Hero's Journey?
> Y: Joseph Campbell?[118] Yeah, yeah…
> C: So, this idea you go to the underworld and come back out, etc. I was definitely in that hole, in that darkness…
> Y: The threshold?
> C: Yes! That was when we came here to Matinauhkalli… And it was the people that I saw every day, the people that *me cayeron peor, pobrecitos* [I couldn't stand, poor things]. They knew. And those are the same people I ended up loving later, but at that moment of my life I was just… I wanted to be alone. And people coming into our personal spaces… it was hard to navigate it all. I felt I was dissolving myself. I didn't have any walls, and I realized I did not know how to be" (Clarissa Gonzalez, interviewed March 14, 2019).

[118] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) has been used in literary studies and religious studies to understand mythical characters and the narrative of religious leaders. The protagonist embarks on a journey between two worlds, and in the making of this journey becomes a "hero." In this sense, Clarissa is using the "heroes journey" as a map to explain her own struggle to adapt to two different worlds.

For Clarissa, the physical walls they had constructed in Matinauhkalli were still not clear boundaries, so people would enter their private spaces. This was also true of personal boundaries, and so—on top of her own struggles—Clarissa felt the need to build walls to protect Akaxe. My two interviews with her were emotional. I could almost feel the pain and strength she had inside her. I had so many questions. How did a woman who had been organizing Dyke Marches in Xicago, who had identified as queer, who had so many stories of rebellion against patriarchal structures end up being "the wife" of a maestro? I asked her if she had felt she had to renounce her feminist identity. For me, some of the pain she was feeling and the roles she was fulfilling seemed at odds with what she had been before Akaxe and Matinauhkalli. But I was not the only one asking those questions: she had asked herself what her role was many times:

> So, I was wondering, am I the perpetual hostess [in Matinauhkalli]? Am I the mother [of the *manada*]? And also, my perspective was that the mother brings the stuff while the father sits there, right? The father is sitting and talking [refering to Akaxe teaching] so am I supposed to bring the *atolito*[119]? And like… what is happening? I didn't want to be a mom, so how was I supposed to play that role? How I was supposed to be welcoming and a good hostess without being in a slave role? (Clarissa Gonzalez, interviewed March 14, 2019).

Questioning her own position led to some changes. Who am I? What is my role? She displayed an ironic attitude, and a bittersweet sense of humor, when she ask herself: "Am I supposed to bring the *atolito?*" Clarissa's solution to her dilemma was to physically leave. She started delegating tasks in Matinauhkalli and went back to work. She recovered her financial independence and a sense of identity, she was her own person, not just Akaxe's wife. Through mobility and labor, she created other spaces of being, away from the

[119] *Atolito* (diminutive of *atole*) is a hot Mexican beverage made from corn and sweet flavors.

house/shrine/institute she lived in. In this case, space, mobility and gendered identity are combined to show assumptions and negotiations. In a similar example, Doreen Massey has said: “The mobility of Cindy Sherman's identity is troubling to the patriarchal gaze; Owen's comment about 'the masculine desire to fix the woman in a stable and stabilizing identity' ('Flexible sexism') may be tied in with a desire to fix in space and place. One gender-disturbing message might be—in terms of both identity and space—keep moving!” (Massey 1994, 11). It did not solve everything but becoming a mobile entity, instead of working solely for Matinauhkalli, gave Clarissa greater visibility and respect among student-practitioners and broke the expectation of her fulfilling a mother role for the *manada*.

I asked Clarissa if she thought she had had to renounce things from her past when she married Akaxe and established Matinauhkalli. But she explained to me that even before meeting Akaxe her identity had started to shift. She had stepped out of activism and started looking for more “radical healing justice” (Clarissa Gonzalez, interviewed March 14, 2019). Regarding her position as a feminist, she said:

> The feminism thing was more of a shift. I haven’t sacrificed anything in any shape or form, it’s more of a shift from angrily pointing fingers at men to ‘alright, let’s teach them.’ And because there is this idea that people that are oppressed always have to ditch the oppressor. And for that, you need to be emotionally ready. But the conclusion to my personal truth is that they are not going to figure it out on their own, and as we all figured out, the good, really conscious people are the ones asking questions and trying to learn from others. But we are still the ones that have to teach (Clarissa Gonzalez, interviewed March 14, 2019).

In our interview, Clarissa revealed a lot about Matinauhkalli, about the creation of space and how her own identity was shaken when she started living in this liminal space: a space that was not private, public, or communal, and a space that was in between times and frameworks of thinking. A space that was hers, and her responsibility, but also Akaxe’s, and

a space transitioning to become student driven. In the process of recreating herself, Clarissa laid the foundational bricks of Matinauhkalli. At the time of the interview, besides being a mother (biological), Clarissa was developing her own herbal remedy and healing business. She is still the social media manager and content creator for Matinauhkalli, but she has delegated some of the responsibilities to students and Akaxe himself.

Matinauhkalli as a liminal space is hard to define. It serves as a place between the sacred and the secular, the private and the collective; while being all these things at the same time. Clearly, what Matinauhkalli did for its people could not easily be defined, but it separated itself from a Calpulli, the term usually used in Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations and the Mexicayotl:

> C: When Akaxe describes this place, it's as something between a shrine and a dojo-school.
>
> Y: House-temple?
>
> C: But temple sounds very religious…
>
> Y: Shrine too…?
>
> C: Shrine too… yeah…
>
> C: Then… institute is what we should be shifting towards. In the beginning, I.N.A.S.C.A was going to be an academy… Now we need to shift it to institute, because it describes more, it means it has principles and values, and that there is growth, and can expand, etc. But… in this incorporation… when I am describing it, there is community building, but Akaxe is not about community. He says… we should be coming here to learn together, not to be friends, that is not our main objective, like in other Calpullis, it is not about socializing. And realizing that what this is really about is leadership development. Because that was not the goal from the get-go, but it is what it truly is, because all these tools, when you apply them, you are just constantly polishing yourself and all the students, all the youth, because this is so rigorous, because it has such high standards, they started to apply this to their lives outside of here. And where they weren't overachievers, now they are all overachievers. They all decided to go to college, they are taking leadership roles, constantly trying to achieve higher goals, after they came here" (Clarissa Gonzalez, interviewed March 5, 2019).

It is hard to comprehend Clarissa's shift. Not only did she construct a space that redefined who she was, she also redefined her ideas of feminism. This reminds me of Patrisia Gonzales' description of Renee Senogales's definition of Native American feminism as a feminism that is focused on the "responsibilities" of women within their communities, instead of their "rights" (Gonzalez 2012, Loc 1034). Clarissa's view also resembles the unspoken feminist perspective of Esperanza in *Translated Woman (*Behar 1993), who, with irony in both discourse and action, resists the stereotype of the "Mexican woman" while also being and embracing the inescapable structures of race and gender. For a Western/white feminist, Clarissa's resolution may seem odd, even disappointing. However, it is possible that different feminisms can exist and fulfill women's needs towards building diverse identities of what womanhood means in both communities of color and religious/spiritual contexts.

3.6 Belonging to Matinauhkalli: "The House of Four Wisdoms"

Ahuehuetzin, a student-practitioner since Akaxe's first visits to Xicago, spent her childhood in rural Mexico. In her town, social activities were ruled according to the rainy season and the crop cycle. "Hasta los juegos" (Even the games) amongst kids were a reflection of nature and weather (Ahuehuetzin, interviewed September 28, 2019). Growing up, she used to participate in similar ceremonies to those held in Matinauhkalli. Even though it is possible for a person to carry out a ceremony alone, for Ahuehuetzin, the sense of community and communion was the most valuable childhood experience she could have. For her, the importance of ceremony is not just knowing what to do but getting together and organizing people in ways that show gratitude and respect to nature and the seasonal

changes. Although she had spent most of her adult life far away from her town, thanks to Matinauhkalli she was able to reconnect with her childhood experiences in Mexico.

On March 7, 2019, during the preparation of the *Nemontemi* ceremony (the changing of the year), Akaxe spoke to the group and shared how moved he was by the Danzas they were practicing for the offering. He said that in the past, organization had been lacking, and people had not known what to do before the ceremony. However, they had each grown as a *mitotiani* (*danzante*, dancer) and they were now beginning to understand what to do on the day of the ceremony. "Voy a estar muy feliz cuando todos sepan qué hacer y nadie tenga que hablar." (I'm going to be very happy when everyone knows what to do and no one needs to talk) [during the ceremony]) (Fieldnotes, March 7, 2019).

These insights from Akaxe and Ahuehuetzin point to how community is built around space and ceremony. Space is an implicit component where ceremony, and its preparation, materializes from the actions of practitioners. However, Matinauhkalli has created something that resembles community during ceremony but is not referred to as community by the teacher. The students and their teacher have differing understandings and definitions of what community means, and this generates moments of tension and confusion at times. This drives me to consider the following question: how does the semantic understanding of the word "community" build boundaries within Matinauhkalli? I also wonder if changing the meaning of a word alters behaviors and perceptions or creates confusion and resentment.

In this section of the chapter, I focus on how "space" and "community" are interconnected categories, and I explore some of the consequences of building a space without a community. Historically, Danza groups have been characterized by the creation of Calpullis, which function as extended families for their members. Even if bloodlines are not

shared, people have felt the need to belong. This idea may be an extension of the Conchero organization of *mesas*, where there is a hierarchical role and a notion of brother and sisterhood, as in a family. Akaxe's opinion, which he conveys in interview, is that students coming together out of a desire to build a sense of family does not work, because when personal conflicts arise, the students' commitment to the knowledge is broken.

Vicente, a danzante from Santa Barbara, California, with whom I traveled to Xicago a few times, told me about how the Calpulli in Santa Barbara collapsed because personal problems were brought into the Danza circle. "That energy that people have, like fighting at home and bringing it into the circle, that was affecting us. And that group got separated… eso tronó en el Capulli, because of personal issues" (Vicente, February 8, 2019). This example makes it clear that a constant mediation between belonging and preserving the knowledge is not something unique to Matinauhkalli (or Akaxe).

For Akaxe, the idea of NOT constructing a community is essential to the success of Matinauhkalli. He himself has experienced how the knowledge is devalued when "personal drama" comes to dominate these spaces. Therefore, Matinauhkalli should function as a place of congregation, a place where everyone shares a learning objective rather than a sense of belonging. In interviews I found that for Akaxe and Clarissa, the term that solves some ambiguities is "congregation". Although they also use "manada", to refer to themselves in terms of belonging and "congregation" to explain the specific behavior of getting together without forming a community.

Matinauhkalli's objective is to create an institute, a place exclusively for teaching and learning. Building the physical walls of Matinauhkalli also implied building ideological walls, as well as a new language available to teacher and practitioners. The exercise was to

constantly repeat and clarify what they were and what they were not. They are an institute, not a Calpulli; they are striving to be macehuales, not *mexicas* (a term often used in Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations); they are a space for learning and practicing the knowledge, not for socializing. But the most contested statement was that Matinauhkalli is not a community.

Although confusing—even incongruent-seeming—to student-practitioners longing for community, Akaxe's and Clarissa's resolution against being a community had a constructive ideal behind it. Rather than provide a place for discussing people's problems and personal issues, Matinauhkalli existed to furnish students with the tools they needed to learn the knowledge and apply it to all their life challenges. This would help everyone thrive. However, despite this rhetoric, there are two occasions when Matinauhkalli does function as community: during ceremony activities, and during the annual Pilsen Open Studios Festival—a yearly event involving Latinx artist studios and small businesses in the neighborhood.

It is also important to mention that although building a sense of community is discouraged, and there is not a family vibe in Matinauhkalli, student-practitioners still build friendships and romantic relationships amongst themselves.

Despite the different ideas of what a community is and what it should look like, it is almost impossible for people who continually congregate in a place to leave it and not engage with other members outside the space. This is partly because they construct a vocabulary and a set of behaviors shared only with those inside the space. And it is also because the experiences that are shared in class and during ceremony are intense and formative of individual and collective identities (I will talk more about these constructions in chapters 4 and 5).

Social relationships and the space are interconnected. Relationships are formed in the space, or people come into the space thanks to their outside relationships (a friend's recommendation for example). Tlayolotl knew Izayot before coming to Matinauhkalli. It was Izayot who came first. Tlayolotl had already been gradually incorporating the disciplines into her life, but it was because of Izayot's commitment and her acquisition of the knowledge and a specific vocabulary that she grew interested in more disciplines and decided to invest time and money in Matinauhkalli. Although Izayot only invited Tlayolotl a couple of times, Tlayolotl had noticed that her friend had been saying and doing things differently since he had begun attending Matinauhkalli (Tlayolotl, interviewed October 23, 2018). On the other hand, Judith and Zabdiel did not know each other before Matinauhkalli. She came to her first Danza class after seeing a Facebook post. Zabdiel knew Akaxe from Danza lessons in Minnesota, before they both ended up living in Xicago. Zabdiel was a Mexica dancer before coming to Matinauhkalli. Judith, on the other hand, was completely new to this world. After a few months of sharing classes, the two had formed a friendship that endured even after they each decided to leave Matinauhkalli (fieldnotes 2018-2019). It is common to see student-practitioners hang out in pairs (eg. Tlayolotl and Izayotl; Judith and Zabdiel; Ikiltezi and Zitlaltokatzin; Ana and Crystal; etc.) but this is not always the case. Sometimes, students will organize bigger events, like the time Zabdiel, Juanita, and Jazmin invited me to the Celso Piña concert. However, there are some students who do not socialize outside of Matinauhkalli. They go straight home after class and limit their relationships to different contexts.

Community building usually goes hand in hand with the creation of place. In Matinauhkalli however, this is ambivalent. Some would argue that there *is* a sense of

community, despite Akaxe's push against it. Others would support Akaxe's stand and agree that there is no community in Matinauhkalli, just a congregation, as he has advocated for. People go there to learn, and then they leave the space and continue with their lives. Nonetheless, some have built friendships and grab a taco or a drink together after classes or ceremonies. Some have even shared more intimate spaces and live together as roommates or romantic partners.

The position of not building a community inside the space results in different interpretations and effects. On one hand, it makes the "community" (the people who participate in the space on a regular basis) weaker, so when crises happen there is little room to congregate, organize, and construct a dialogue. Some students have pushed against this idea, bringing their personal stories into the circle[120] after class or ceremony. During my visits in 2018 and 2019, sexual harassment and domestic violence were topics that shook the notion of what community really meant. Akaxe and Clarissa talked to the group and warned them that they could not police behaviors outside Matinauhkalli. One incident, however, occurred inside Matinauhkalli, when two female students felt threatened by a male student. This led to the expulsion of the man. Although Akaxe does not forbid the students from meeting up outside Matinauhkalli, there is a feeling among some student-practitioners that their life struggles are being silenced. At the same time, building a family-based community would threaten Akaxe and Clarissa's privacy and boundaries. In this sense, building a space

[120] After Danza class there is always a space for debriefing. Everyone sits in a circle; sometimes food and beverages are shared, though sometimes it is just a space for talking. The idea of the circle is to give people an opportunity to reflect on the class. However, as mentioned above, in some cases people decide to share their personal narratives and problems with others in the circle. I will address the idea of the circle in more detail in Chapter 4.

with walls is tangled up with notions of social roles and power in leadership positions, while compromising student-practitioners' sense of belonging.

Several times I heard student-practitioners, and Akaxe himself, use the word *manada* to refer to themselves. The idea of them being a "manada" (a pack of animals) is linked to the idea of learning from nature. For Akaxe, nature is the ultimate teacher.

> For Akaxe, a manada stays together to build a common goal, but when the sick and old cannot follow anymore, they are left out without question. Also, everyone has a role in the manada. They all fulfill a role (responsibility) (Fieldnotes September 28, 2018).

The concept of the manada is also symbolically important because it can refer to coyotes which, as Akaxe notes, live in packs. The symbol of *Huehuecoyotl* is a coyote dancing. Signaling concepts of nature, like the coyote (either biologically correct or imaginary) is an important practice that connects practitioners with the idea of the knowledge and Mesoamerican symbols as living traditions (see Chapter 5). Thus, the idea of being a pack of coyotes interlinks with notions of Danza and *communitas*. As I will explain shortly, communitas might be the term we can use to get a better understanding of what Matinauhkalli is. Matinauhkalli's manada is not completely fixed: people come and go, stop taking classes, change schedules, etc. There is, however, a core group of students who are the most consistent attendees since Akaxe started coming to Xicago from Mexico.

The concept of "manada" is an attempt to replace the notion of community, however there is still a continual negotiation between student-practitioners and the power structures (represented in this case by Akaxe and Clarissa) about what community means. These negotiations make the reality of power structures clear, but they also highlight the process of

"crossing" from the outside world to Matinauhkalli[121] (*who* enters the space and *how* they do so) and explore the question of what centers an idea of belonging.

3.7 Opening the doors of Matinauhkalli. When the Communitas is in Contact with the Community

When discussing what community is and is not, Victor Turner's concept of *communitas* may be helpful in differentiating this contestation. For Turner, communitas, as opposed to structure and an "area of common living" (Turner 1969, 96) is a "relationship between concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals" (Turner 1969, 131) that can be differentiated through three forms: 1) a spontaneous communitas; 2) a normative communitas (when people get organized to mobilize resources in pursuit of a single goal); and 3) an ideological communitas (usually connected to utopias). Matinauhkalli and its internal struggle to define what it is can benefit from this anthropological concept. From my fieldwork experience, I see Matinauhkalli as both a normative and an ideological communitas because it mobilizes resources and pushes people towards the goal of acquiring the knowledge. In addition, because the idea of the knowledge is tangled up with the pursuit of an utopian place and time (Mexico-Tenochtitlan before colonization) and connected to the idea of a better future (decolonization), so Matinauhkalli also belongs to the category of ideological communitas.

Despite the constant efforts to reframe the community as manada, there are two moments when the concept of community becomes blurred again: 1) during the annual Pilsen Open

[121] I have tried to be cautious about defining this process as the simplistic dichotomy presented by Van Gennep and Turner as the threshold between the sacred of the profane (or the secular) for two main reasons: 1) What is sacred and what is secular is not divided in dichotomous terms, and some practitioners live through different notions of what and when they are connected to "forces of nature." And 2) the two categories of sacred and secular do not work for this community, mainly because of its (again) binary division of a reality that is lived differently.

Studios festival; and 2) during ceremonies (veintena ceremonies and special ceremonies). The huge amount of organizational work that the manada does in preparation for these events, and the clear distinction between who is a student and who is a visitor to Matinauhkalli, create—albeit momentarily—a real sense of belonging among the students. In both cases the doors of Matinauhkalli were opened to the general public, and student-practitioners were expected to behave in accordance with what the knowledge dictates, and to distinguish themselves from others who were either new or unfamiliar with the knowledge.

3.7.1 Pilsen Open Studios

> 18th St. Pilsen Open Studios was started in 2003 by a group of longtime Pilsen artists, most but not all of them Latino. The focus of the event is on 'studios' as the place of production, allowing the public a rare glimpse at where (and how) art in Pilsen is made. All artists involved in the event either work or live in the neighborhood or have a strong historical connection to Pilsen. A limited number of cultural spaces/cafes in Pilsen also participate in this event to show work from Pilsen-connected artists who don't have a studio in the neighborhood (Consulted November 19, 2019 https://www.pilsenopenstudios.com/about).

On the website of Pilsen Studios, there is a short description of every studio participating in this yearly event. The program for the event provides a map that locates the studio and/or artist in the neighborhood. Matinauhkalli is number 11, and one can read "exploring the wisdom of ancient Mesoamerica," next to a small symbol of a *tekpatl* (flint) drawing by Akaxe. The tekpatl has become his signature, and he inscribes it on his paintings in place of his name.[122]

Since 2015, Matinauhkalli has opened its doors to the general public once a year to offer visitors a glimpse of what Akaxe and his students practice and produce. Pilsen Studios is

[122] In the Tonalpohualli calendar system, Akaxe is a tekpatl.

important because Akaxe is able to present himself not just as a maestro, but as an artist in the Chicagoan community. Besides teaching classes, Akaxe has an online presence in the virtual marketplace called Redbubble.[123] Akaxe is a tattoo artist; using the human body as a canvas for the creation of individualized Mesoamerican symbols. Veronica Valadez (2012) also describes Californian danzantes engaging in tattooing practices as part of their commitment and knowledge acquisition through Danza. Although I do not explore tattooing, it is a topic that connects with other forms of embodied knowledge (see Chapter 4). In line with the practices that he teaches, Akaxe positions his art as primarily Mesoamerican. He re-creates codex pictographic language to communicate messages he receives from his own *Tezcatlipoka*[124] (ancient memory) and uses a canvas (paper, *amate*, or the human body) to represent his visions.

Because his art resembles codices and the processes of *tlacuilos* (codex creators) in the sense that it is seeking to generate symbolic meanings and messages rather than aesthetic pleasure, Akaxe does not sign his artwork. However, he sometimes leaves his symbol—the tekpatl—which identifies him as the creator. The ambiguity between collective art and individual recognition is echoed in another form of ambiguity between contemporary expectations and the utopia of decolonization.

During the Pilsen Open Studios festival I attended, Matinauhkalli exhibited five huehuetls—all carved and painted by Akaxe and the student-practitioners—in the main room

[123] Redbubble is an online platform where artists sell their art. You can find Akaxe's symbols on t-shirts, sweaters, mugs, prints, etc. (Redbubble, Consulted March 4, 2020 https://www.redbubble.com/people/tecuani122112/portfolio)

[124] For Akaxe and the students in Matinauhkalli—as well as for Maestro Meza and his Calpulli—Tezcatlipoca (spelled "Tezcatlipoka" in Matinauhkalli) is not a God. For them, Spanish chronicles and historians have misunderstood the significance of this symbol. Tezcaplipoca, is, in the Florentine Codex "the one that is everywhere" (Sahagún 29). For Akaxe, this actually refers to an ancient memory (aka a collective and individual memory) that everyone carries inside them and that changes according to each individual's ancestry.

where classes are usually held. A “do not touch” sign was on each of the huehuetls. Hanging on the walls, Akaxe’s art—painted on green or red fabric—covered storage spaces and the foam targets used during Millaniztli. Next to the symbols on the fabrics, there was a description in Spanish to give visitors a curated experience of what they were seeing. There was also an iPad displaying images of Akaxe’s tattoo art.

In 2018, Matinauhkalli offered a class called Meta-languages, in which students studied the meaning of certain symbols and learned to draw according to Mesoamerican aesthetics. The work of these students was also shown in the space. All student’s painted the same object, but with different levels of complexity and coloring, depending on the student’s abilities and time management. At the beginning of the day, some students were still working on their projects, so that both students and their work formed part of the exhibit.

Although Pilsen Open Studios is a neighborhood event, it attracts more local tourists than neighbors. Matinauhkalli’s usual population is People Of Color—primarily people of Mexican descent—but Pilsen Open Studios is the one time when White Americans come and see what the space is about. They look around, buy souvenirs, and often ask questions. During Pilsen Studios in 2018, I talked with one of these visitors. The woman was from Chicago but had never been in Pilsen before. She asked a student-practitioner called Xiuhminatzin about the meaning of the word “Toltec.” “It is a knowledge that helps us connect with cycles of nature, and it comes from the Toltec people,” Xiuhminatzin told her (Fieldnotes, October 2018). The visitor also asked about the type of classes Matinauhkalli offered. When we told her about about Danza, her eyes opened wide. She had been “looking for” something like that. The word “Toltec” had “called to her.” She had not known why exactly, but she knew she was there for “something.” Then, she told us about a dance she had

learned. She squatted and moved her arms up and down, then went back to a standing position and stretched her arms up again, in circles. “That’s very cool,” Xiuhminatzin said politely. The woman seemed excited about the space and the concept of Danza but she never came back.

Something similar happened at the evening event that Matinauhkalli organized during Pilsen Open Studios when the guerreros—the students who practice the warrior discipline, Yaotiliztli—provided a demonstration, followed by a short workshop, which the audience was invited to join. We joined in pairs and followed directions on how to move. We did a sequence of three movements that felt like self-defense drills. Visitors in the workshop were engaged and enthusiastic.

Although there is a significant influx of visitors during Pilsen Open Studios, once the festival has ended, Matinauhkalli goes back to its normal everyday activities. Pilsen Open Studios presents an opportunity for Akaxe and his students to attract more students and boost tuition fees. And, perhaps more importantly, it is a way for Matinauhkalli to connect with—and be part of—the historical neighborhood of Pilsen. In addition, the event offers a way of visibilizing the work of practitioners, and it enables Akaxe to present himself as a teacher of Mesoamerican disciplines and a creator of Mesoamerican art.

3.7.2 Ceremony. A Shrine for Everyone?

During the three years I have known Akaxe and Matinauhkalli, I have seen three locations where ceremony takes place. For special summer ceremonies—involving the most people—Akaxe, Clarissa, and the student-practitioners go to public parks in the Chicago Area. In 2017, for example, a big ceremony was organized in a nature reserve to celebrate Maestro Meza’s 80th birthday. When the weather is not good, bigger ceremonies, such as the

2018 Nemontemi Ceremony (Tonalpohualli's New Year's Eve) are held at the Tech cafe, a coffee shop owned by Akaxe's friends. From what I saw from a distance in 2019-2020, ceremonies were being held more frequently in Matinauhkalli, even when they were larger occasions or special events.

Ceremonies are held according to the Aztec veintenas (20-day count) calendar. Most veintena ceremonies are only open to Matinauhkalli student-practitioners, providing a sense of intimacy. Every so often, however, ceremonies are open to the general public. When members of the public do attend, it is usually people who have listened to one of Akaxe's talks. Such talks help outsiders understand why ceremonies take place.

During ceremonies Matinauhkalli experiences an extension of social relations, and communitas becomes community. Everyone who attends the ceremony participates in it to some degree: observing, dancing, or partaking in the moment of communion when everyone sits and shares food and drink. This extension of community happens gradually. The first step is usually when student-practitioners invite relatives and friends. An example of this was in the 2017 *Siembra de Nombre* ceremony when guerreros acquiring their new names invited their families to join them in the process of initiation and celebration. Another step is when practitioners attend a more exclusive ceremony activity (without actually attending classes) and incorporate themselves as observer-participants. Finally, the general public is invited through social media. Before the ceremony, Akaxe will offer a special lecture on the veintena. People can then join the ceremony.

Ceremonies are free to attend. At some of them, guerreros and danzantes provide food and water, while at others only fruit is shared. But I have never been to a ceremony where nothing is shared afterwards. The ceremony usually ends with everyone sitting in a big circle

and sharing food. This communion is not to be confused with a party: it mostly takes place in silence, although thanks is given for the moment and for the food being shared. Student-practitioners organize among themselves around who is going to bring what. Resources are paid for by the student-practitioners who each contribute what they can afford. Outsider participants are never expected to bring anything. Everyone is seated in a circle, but no one can start eating until Akaxe does. When food is passed around the circle, it begins with Akaxe, then goes to Clarissa, and then continues clockwise.

At every event I attended, the level of organization was astonishing, especially considering how people were giving up both time and economic resources. The guerreros would stand stoically and silently, always ready to help. They would move quickly around the space, solving problems almost before they happened. They were strong, agile, and yet almost imperceptible. Danzantes, on the other hand, gave an impression of lightness as they sang and prepared the altar and food. Sometimes these two personalities overlap in one person, as is the case with Tlayolotl, Ikiltezi, Izayot, and Xiuhminatzin who are danzantes and guerreros at the same time.

Usually, ceremony has a performative component, where the outside audience observe what student-practitioners prepare as body offerings (danza and warrior moves). Once the offerings have been made, the public is invited to be part of the space and to commune with the teacher and practitioners through food and conversation. From the start, Akaxe warns the public that what they are watching is not a "performance." The danzas have not been prepared as a spectacle for people to enjoy; every dance and drill has a reason behind it and is seen as an offering. For the 2018 Nemontemi offerings, for example, the dances were fast

and physically demanding,[125] while other ceremonies involve dances with different steps and levels of difficulty depending on the season.

During ceremony students experience higher levels of cohesion and solidarity. For some, it is during these times especially that the idea of not being a community seems an incongruity. Students are required to provide time, money, and physical presence, and in their coming together for the event, they resemble a community. When ceremony time comes, the idea of non-community does not exist: everyone has to take part so that the ceremony can function.

Observing the group's struggle to (not) build a community in Matinauhkalli, I could see the ongoing process of making definitions work in everyday life; semantics change and a different reality is created. Akaxe defines "institute" in opposition to "community"; and "teaching/learning" in opposition to "socializing." Clarissa defines "private space and identity" in opposition to "collective space and identity." The students would receive these definitions and challenge them; they would use a different referent, either going back to a normative semantic of the word or accepting the new meaning and changing it. Some students would adapt to the new vocabulary, while others would resist it. Even though I have suggested using "communitas" as a term to help us understand the nature of social relations in Matinauhkalli, the reality is that student-practitioners are in a state of constant struggle and negotiation with leaders to define who and what they are.

[125] Because the nature of Nemontemi ceremonies is one of renewal, they are usually the most serious and grueling. Student-practitioners not only dance the most demanding dances, they also engage in fasting activities that can last from 24 hours to 7 days, depending on the individual.

Although there are no formal rites of initiation[126] in Matinauhkalli, there are rites of expulsion[127] that can exile individuals from the space and, in some cases, from the other student-practitioners. Because of the secrecy involved in such occurrences I never witnessed this happening and only heard about it in informal conversation. However, it is known that once you are expelled from Matinauhkalli there is no coming back, not even to public events, and much less a ceremonial activity.

During the Pilsen Open Studios festival and for ceremonial events Akaxe was positioned as the central figure in Matinauhkalli, while Clarissa—and her labor and contributions to the space—were rendered invisible. Matinauhkalli would not have become part of the Pilsen community in the way that it has. Furthermore, although ceremonies are guided by Akaxe, it is thanks to Clarissa's labor that they are attended by the general public. She is, after all, Matinauhkalli's administrator and social media manager. While largely invisible thus far, I see Clarissa behind the scenes—as this chapter has shown—ready and waiting to take on her role as part of the space.

Conclusion

In this chapter I explored the process of space creation, social relations, and gendered identities as they are assumed, constructed, and contested. From a historical and local perspective, Matinauhkalli is situated in Pilsen, a neighborhood that—along with Little Village and other areas—can be considered Mexican Xicago. I argue that it is not coincidental that a space like Matinauhkalli should exist in a neighborhood such as Pilsen.

[126] Although there are no initiations in Matinauhkalli, there are rites of passage that each individual can go through. In Chapter 4, I explore two of these rites of passage (naming ceremony and celibacy).
[127] For Van Gennep (1960), a rite of separation is when a person renounces, or is forced to renounce, the community and the privileges granted by the community.

Student-practitioners have their own interpretations of why Matinauhkalli has been able to flourish in Xicago, but I argue that the city has long been a focal point for the creation of Mexican and Latinx communities thanks to high levels of blue-collar labor bringing seasonal workers to take on stable factory jobs in the city. Because of its multicultural population, Xicago has also been a hub for a variety of religious movements. It was in Xicago where the Moody Bible Institute was founded, giving both white and Latinx evangelicals a place to study (Carpenter 1999). Because of the Great Migration, many Black communities grew up in Xicago and established religions like the Nation of Islam and the Moorish Science Temple. Caribbean and Afro-diasporic centers of religions, such as Lucumí, also sprung up in the city, and Black Christian Churches were constructed. Latinx Catholicism has an important place in the city's history as well. The Shrine of Saint Jude has served Latinx Catholics and women's devotion since the early twentieth century (Orsi 1998). The shrine of the Virgen of Guadalupe on the outskirts of Northern Xicago has been compared with its original sacred space of Tepeyac in Mexico City. The pilgrimage to the Guadalupe shrine in Xicago constructs a history of transnational religious mobility (Peña 2011). Although less studied, Native Americans and the Native American Church are also present in the city; just a few blocks from Matinauhkalli, the Iztaccihuatl Native American Church holds ceremonies and activities.[128]

The production of space and the way it is named (Matinauhkalli vs Calpulli) allows us to observe distinctive social relations between three different agents: Akaxe, Clarissa, and the student-practitioners. At odds with learned practices, students struggle against their need to

[128] For more information about Native Youth in Chicago, please refer to the International Indigenous Youth Council https://indigenousyouth.org/voices

define their space as a community—a label which Akaxe and Clarissa reject. I propose that Victor Turner's "communitas" is a concept that may resolve some of the anxieties towards defining who and what student-practitioners are in relation to their space. Following on from the concept of communitas, I argue that Matinauhkalli is a liminal space. Its liminality is most obvious during ceremony, but it is there at other moments too because, as a utopian space, Matinauhkalli functions as a laboratory where students practice to be macehuales.

Not only does space make power hierarchies evident, it also reproduces gendered assumptions regarding locality and labor. In negotiating the definitions of what she was in relation to the space, Clarissa went through a process of redefining herself as a woman and as a worker in—and for—Matinauhkalli. Through her interview we can see how she negotiates her own identity and challenges assumptions of the patriarchal gaze. In contraposition to dichotomous ideas of time/men and space/women, Clarissa moves out from the space to break free from assumptions of womanhood (and the idea of a community mother). It is through mobility and the use of time—both inside and outside the space—that she can reconcile her position inside Matinauhkalli as a woman and wife and as her independent self.

Following Doreen Massey, I argue that rather than being fixed, identities and spaces are processes in constant change. Matinauhkalli, and the social relations and identities constructed around it, are excellent examples of this. Although I have provided descriptions of the space, I stopped myself from using too many images of Matinauhkalli taken between 2018 and 2019 because I wanted to challenge the idea of fixity that we usually relate to space. Matinauhkalli has been different to me on every single visit. Although there are consistencies in the ideology, and in the people I meet, it is always changing. Akaxe, Clarissa, and the student-practitioners all contribute to these changes, transforming the space

according to the veintena, improving material things that have a direct impact on their bodily practices, and aligning their “dojo-shrine” to their necessities and beliefs.

Henri Lefebvre formulates the question: “What is an ideology without a space to which it refers, a space which it describes, whose vocabulary and links it makes use of, and whose code it embodies?” (Lefebvre 44). In this chapter I have attempted to describe that space, Matinauhkalli, as the loci that holds the vocabulary, learned behavior, and philosophy of what it means to be a Macehual. In the following chapter I will address how those codes become embodied through practices, thought, and movement.

Chapter 4: Bodies in Movement. Macehual Physical Disciplines and Embodied Knowledge

> Yanitsa: If someone that does not know anything about what you practice asks you about it, how would you define it?
>
> Ikiltezi: Usually I just say that it's precolonial knowledge. I just hate "precolonial," and these are disciplines, but then I get them off my back, because I don't want to talk about this with many, many, people. I feel because it's something very close to me, very private… something that I want to protect, almost, even though it doesn't need me to protect it because it can protect itself. I feel like they would be seeing me almost naked when I share this…
>
> Zabdiel: Mmmm… I would say it is a series of practices that engage your intellect, psychology, behavior, diet, your epigenetics and endurance in order to rewire yourself into the person you want to become.
>
> Jazmin-Tekpalichtiani: See, that's hard [laughter]… that's hard [laughter]… that's hard to do because a lot of people ask me and I'm not sure what to say… ummmmm… I mean, what is it that I do? I'm… I'm learning the ways of my ancestors. I'm trying to get in touch with this ancestral knowledge that I am told I have inside of me already.

Introduction

When I was conducting my interviews with student-practitioners in Xicago, some of the biggest challenges were knowing how to classify what they were doing, knowing what to call their practices, and understanding the effect that Matinauhkalli had on their outside lives. All of this was something that could not be defined with a single word. In addition, there were semantic restrictions imposed on the students by their teacher, Akaxe. Whatever this experience was for these students, it was NOT a religion. But it was something intimate and beautiful, something that required time and involved a learning process, and something that would ultimately help them become who they wanted to be. In this chapter, and the one that

follows, I will be describing the practices that student-practitioners engage in—both inside and outside Matinauhkalli—to enter a process of "becoming." Here I focus on the physical disciplines that students practice, while Chapter 5 explores the intellectual knowledge they study to become *macehuales*. Both sets of practices become part of the everyday life of students as embodied forms of time (precolonial), place (Central Mexico) and a utopian being (the macehual) which, as Zabdiel puts it, "rewire" the identities and behaviors of individuals and collectives. As a whole, this set of practices—the physical discipline and the study of history and Tonalpohualli—is referred to by student-practitioners as "the knowledge."

In this chapter I will focus on the physical disciplines that students engage with in Matinauhkalli. Danza (Azteca) or Macehualiztli is not only the most attended class, it is also the discipline that is most practiced in Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations. However, in Matinauhkalli, Danza is one of three disciplines that students can practice. Besides Danza, there is also Warrior Discipline (Yaotiliztli) and Archery (Millaniztli). All three are physical disciplines of embodied knowledge. In this chapter I argue that through physical disciplines student-practitioners gain knowledge that helps them connect with a utopian past, present, and future; a place where their bodies achieve not just a state of *merecimiento,*[129] but of discipline, pride, and sovereignty; and a place where memory plays a role in historical and embodied consciousness.

Within the humanistic social sciences, scholars have seen the body as a medium of religious expression (Meyer 2013; Luhrmann 2004), as an archive that preserves untold

[129] *Merecimiento*, means to deserve. This idea is bound to the definition of Macehual (the one who deserves). As shown in the Huehuetlatolli, *merecimiento* was an important idea of Aztec society. Danza groups have adopted this idea as part of their philosophical practices to shape their identities.

histories (Daniel 2005, Pandey 2013), and as a repertoire[130] of knowledge and culture that does not reach the text (Taylor 2013). Thus, the body survives, contains, and expresses in contraposition to the Western intellectual and textual tradition. It is also common to see the body as an instrument for dance in performative actions of communities of color (Schechner 1995; Sklar 2001). In this chapter, becoming a macehual is a process of learning, relearning, and engaging in practices to discipline both mind and body. And even though the body becomes the most evident resource for scholars to analyze "lost" histories, it is usually through a combination of bodily performance and intellectual inquiry that these communities resist colonial knowledge and counteract the telling of their histories through a Westernized lens.

Danza Conchera, Azteca, Mexica, and Danza Macehual are different forms of the same dance tradition that has, through time, catalyzed into a process of change. According to my interlocutors, Danza Macehual has gone through decolonization (purification), "eliminating" elements of Catholicism and Spanish culture (see Chapter 1). If the Conchero dancers have been recognized as the guardians of the tradition, they are also seen by others like Akaxe, as syncretic and colonized. While macehuales—often considered more authentic and closer to the "original" Nahua dance—are also, undeniably, a newer addition to the tradition. As part of a process of "recovering" history,[131] contemporary macehuales in Xicago have taken it upon themselves to undo layers of tradition in order to achieve "purity."

[130] For Diana Taylor, the archive and the repertoire is not something between the written and the spoken word, but "between the archive of supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones) and the so-called ephemeral repertoire of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e. spoken language, dance, sports, ritual) (Taylor 2013, 19).

[131] Recovering history occurs through the study and personal interpretation of Mesoamerican Codices. This sometimes involves non-traditional methods of learning, like lucid dreaming or meditating, to "recover" information (Fieldwork November 2019).

To become a macehual in Xicago today, one has to engage in a process of disciplining the body and studying concepts and a version of Mesoamerican history that connects practitioners with a closer version of how they imagine their ancestors. For Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations—and for Matinauhkalli practitioners in particular—Mesoamerica represents a utopian society where people lived in harmony with nature, working every day to achieve the best version of themselves. To become a macehual is to achieve a first level of identity shift, or as Zabdiel described it "rewiring." It is to re-educate yourself and align your identity and values to the knowledge. For Maestro Akaxe Yotzin, becoming a macehual—the lowest and most basic level of the social structure—is an almost impossible feat for a contemporary individual. Thus, trying to achieve a higher position in Aztec society—such as Temachtiani (teacher), Tlamakaztle (ceremonial guide), or Tlamatini (philosopher)—could be considered not just impossible but pretentious.

In precolonial Aztec society, the term "macehual" (Hispanicized form of *macehualtin*) to refered to the commoner class in their stratified social system. A related term—"*macehualiztli*"—was used to describe ritual dancing, or dance as offering (Sten 1990). Therefore, for people in Xicago, "macehual" has a dual connotation: the commoner and the dancer. Macehualiztli is the most common word used in Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations, although there were other Nahua words used for dances, such as *mitotiliztli*, which evolved into the Spanish word "mitote" (messiness/public fights) (Mundi 2012), and the lesser known *netotiliztli*, which referred to general dancing (Sten 1990).

According to the Huehuetlatolli (Díaz Cíntora 1995), pre-colonial Nahua oral tradition that was compiled as the word of the sages,[132] everyone was born a macehual. Even those coming from noble families had to gain their position (merecimiento). The idea of merecimiento—to deserve something—is closely linked to the idea of responsibility. According to this tradition, in Aztec times everyone was born equal and had to work hard to deserve more than being a commoner, even the children of noble families. However, gaining privileges also meant gaining responsibilities towards their community, thus the process of *merecer* was taken seriously by rigorous education and oversight of the elders. Similarly, for student practitioners in Xicago, there is no such thing as *being* a macehual, there is only *becoming* one.

In this chapter, I explore the practices that student-practitioners engage in as part of this process of becoming. For colonized societies, the body has become a space in which the colonized order is revised and challenged. Historically, a number of Indigenous and Black peoples have implemented bodily forms of resistance through dance and/or martial arts (or defense methods). Some examples of this are Afro-Caribbean dance, Hawaiian Hula, Brazilian Capoeira, and Filipino Kali. With global mobility and migration processes, some of these practices have spread to countries like the U.S. These examples, along with the Danza of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations, reveal the resilience of Indigenous peoples. This type of resistance disrupts the colonial order through performances and actions which—while they can be seen as being out of context or from another time—actually demonstrate the continual existence of these communities in the face of genocide and assimilation.

[132] For me, the Huehuetlatolli can also be considered a book of Aztec theology that combines moral pedagogies and a belief system (Díaz Cíntora, 1995).

Here and in the following chapter I will review most of the disciplines studied in Matinauhkalli. However, two disciplines in particular can provide a cross-cultural and inter-group comparative analysis: Dance (analyzed in this chapter) and the study of the calendar (analyzed in the next chapter). These two disciplines are especially useful—first, because they are practiced widely in Mexicayotl circles, and secondly, because these are the disciplines with a historical connection to early twentieth century revitalization efforts. After Mexicayotl and the Nieva family, other disciplines have emerged in both Mexico and the U.S. In Matinauhkalli, disciplines like Millaniztli (archery), Cantos (ritual chants), Ehekapahnimine (breathing exercises/meditation), and Yaotiliztli (warrior discipline), among others, are also important and integral to the notion of becoming a macehual. Therefore, in this dissertation I argue that embodied knowledge in Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations occurs in a reciprocal process of shaping and disciplining both mind and body. It is true that Indigenous and Black populations after colonization have engaged with bodily practices as way of healing and survival. However, by seeing only the body, scholars can fall into the colonized trap of erasing philosophies, methodologies, theologies, and histories that groups and communities intellectually engage. In this study I consider both sides equally important and complementary.

On the Matinauhkalli website the areas of focus are divided into sections: arts (Danza, music, chants), physical disciplines (Danza, Yaotiliztli, Ehekapahtimine), science and history (Nahuatl, math, Tonalpohualli, Pre-Cuauhtémoc history, and Kalpulismo), philosophy (Huehuetlatolli, science of Tezcatlipoka, symbols in ancient context, pre-Cuauhtemoc philosophy), and rites of passage (personalized *tonalamatl*, tattoos, and ceremony). (Information retrieved from http://www.inasca.org/areas-of-focus.html April 23, 2019). The

number of classes taught in Matinauhkalli is large, and I do not catalogue them all in this chapter. Instead of providing an exhaustive description of their classes (available on the website), I shed light on some of the physical disciplines and, more importantly, explore how these classes and disciplines affect student-practitioners' everyday lives.

In Matinauhkalli, the ultimate goal for student-practitioners is to acquire *conocimiento* (the knowledge). The idea of acquiring the knowledge is an integral process that comes from all disciplines with the objective of making student-practitioners' lives and behaviors "better." Having the knowledge within and becoming a macehual can occur when concepts and practices from all classes come together as a whole, both in and outside Matinauhkalli.

4.1 Notes on Methodology

The first time I traveled to Xicago was in April 2017. I arrived at Matinauhkalli not really knowing what I was doing.[133] But after a few days of classes in Matinauhkalli I started to feel that this was where I wanted to do my fieldwork. I returned in September of that same year, to a special event celebrating the 80th birthday of Maestro Arturo Meza (who, as noted in Chapter 2, is one of Akaxe's most influential teachers). Maestro Meza had come from Malinalco, Mexico, along with his wife, to attend the ceremony. It was during this second visit that I asked Akaxe if I could do my research in Matinauhkalli. I also spoke informally with two student-practitioners, Judith and Ikiltezi, with whom I had bonded during the first trip. After Akaxe approved my research, I started taking Tonalpohualli class via Skype. In June 2018, I officially began my research with a trip made without the students from C.A.P.[134]. My Human Subject Protocol for research was approved in September 2018 and

[133] The story on how I came to Matinauhkalli is narrated in Chapter 2.
[134] In Chapter 2 I explained how I first came to Chicago thanks to C.A.P, a non-profit organization from Goleta that helped Aztec dancers from that city to travel to Chicago to learn from Akaxe.

that same month I traveled to Xicago and communicated my research interests and goals to Akaxe and the Matinauhkalli students. I received a positive welcome from almost everyone at Matinauhkalli. “We are here to help” and “Let me know how I can help you achieve your goals” were two of the answers from the practitioners. However, not all of them were so open at the time. I know a few felt uncomfortable and avoided interviews and conversations with me.

There were two things that facilitated my fieldwork in 2018. First, in 2017 I had made two previous trips that enabled me to get to know names and faces, and make connections with student-practitioners. From the start, Ikiltezi and Judith were my principal consultants. Ikiltezi and I shared the same “potential in the Tonalpohualli”—we were both *Cozcacuahtli* (vulture) and this resonated with her (see Chapter 5 for potentials and Tonalpohualli practices). Judith and I grew especially close during my second trip to Xicago when she offered me housing with her and her parents. Judith and her family soon became essential to my research. After she moved to Austin in the summer of 2018 to begin her own Ph.D. program, she offered me her room in her parents’ home in Cicero, Illinois.

Another asset that contributed to my fieldwork was taking Tonalpohualli classes on Sundays. Joining the *manada* online enabled me to feel part of the group, even when I was not in Xicago. Through class participation and online activities the manada came to know my name and recognize my interest. In 2018, before starting the interview process with student-practitioners, I had undertaken two previous trips in which I engaged exclusively in learning and practicing the disciplines from a student’s point of view.

At the beginning of my research journey I thought joining Danza (Mitotiliztli) and Tonalpohualli (calendar study) would be enough for my research, but after a month Akaxe cautioned me:

> Sabe, Yanitsa, muchas de las personas que vienen a danza, vienen a otras disciplinas; este conocimiento no se centra en Mitotiliztli o Macehualiztli, sino en un conocimiento integral y heurístico, que con solo una disciplina no se puede comprender. (You know, Yanitsa, a lot of people that come to Danza come to other disciplines as well. This knowledge is not centered in Mitotiliztli or Macehualiztli (dance), it's a heuristic and integral knowledge that you cannot understand from studying just one discipline) (Fieldnotes September 17, 2018).

With some initial reluctance I joined other classes and, over time, came to understand how interconnected everything was and how student-practitioners wove their knowledge (through mind and body) into different layers inside Matinauhkalli and into their everyday lives.

For this chapter I employed qualitative methods and adopted both emic and etic perspectives. While I do not consider myself part of the Matinauhkalli, I had the privilege of being able to enter these communities relatively easily due to my family history of connections to key agents in Revitalization groups. I immersed myself in the disciplines to try and learn as much as I could, not only from the teachings, but also from the experiences of student-practitioners. Although my personal experiences are, in the end, subjective (and of less importance than those of the students), I position myself as a vulnerable ethnographer who experienced emotions, doubts, and feelings of awe around the people with whom I worked. I moved my body through the pain and joy that each discipline gave me. I also moved my mind, coming to question myself, my beliefs, my normativity, and my assumptions more than once during the fieldwork. Coming back home to California (from Xicago) was always a process of re-adaptation and struggle; a reverse culture shock.

I center my analysis on my ethnographic notes, Akaxe's sermons or teaching moments, informal conversations, and formal interviews with student-practitioners. All of them helped me understand the concepts and symbols that form what I can call the "macehual worldview" or—as I suggest in Chapter 5—the macehual theology. There were two informants who were key to helping me understand and retain the concepts. Neither of them are part of Matinauhkalli anymore but we still keep special friendships.

I conducted a total of 11 open-ended interviews with student-practitioners, whose real names (either given at birth or after ceremony in Matinauhkalli) will appear throughout the chapter. As with other decisions in this research, I opted for a collaborative resolution on how to name my interlocutors. We decided against anonymity for two important reasons: 1) The names of student-practitioners have an important function, both in their lives and in Matinauhkalli. In most cases, their macehual names form part of the embodied knowledge discussed in this chapter; 2) Because the students, like Akaxe, are producing forms of art and thinking that are worthy of recognition.

During my time in Matinauhkalli I took several classes, either in person or (when I was in California) online. My last trip to Xicago occurred in September 2019, but my last Tonalpohualli class (via Skype) was in April 2020. Here I present an estimation of the number of classes I took and the hours I invested in each discipline:

Mitotiliztli / Danza **(Dance)**	**28 classes, (56 hours)**
Yaotiliztli **(Warrior discipline / martial arts)**	20 classes, (40 hours)
Millaniztli **(Archery)**	8 classes, (16 hours)
Tonalpohualli **(calendar study)**	Approx. 108 classes (216 hours) (Without counting hours of study for evaluations)
Metalanguages **(Drawing of Toltec Symbols)**	6 classes, (12 hours)
Self-healing **(Talking about trauma and how to heal through symbols and Huehuetlatolli)**	12 classes, (24 hours)

Table 1. Classes taken in Matinauhkalli

Most of my fieldwork diary narrates stories of frustration and failure. Keeping up with the disciplines was hard. Both Danza and Yaotiliztli made me realize I had muscles I had never felt before, and my body hurt. It also made me appreciate carbohydrates more than ever! I was craving food and sleep, but I was also trying to keep a regular schedule by going to the library in the mornings, simulating "normality" as much as I could, and keeping up with my fieldnotes. Yaotiliztli class started around 10:30 p.m. and ended between 12:30 or 1:30 a.m., so I was going to bed between 2:00 or 3:00 a.m. at least twice a week. I knew some practitioners had to wake up around 6:00 a.m. to start their days. I always admired and marvelled at how student-practitioners carried on their lives, as they all had professional jobs and had to combine working and studying. Although they would occasionally admit to me how hard juggling everything was, they never complained. Generally, they held the view that these disciplines helped them live their everyday lives. I, however, could only endure this level of discipline because I knew it was going to end. Setting off on the path to become a macehual is not easy or romantic. It is a serious endeavor that costs time, money, and relationships; it can also provoke identity shifts, which can be rewarding but physically and emotionally painful.

4.2 Student-practitioners

From my experience, students at Matinauhkalli come and go. Some of them are there long-term, but that does not mean they will always be students. The information I gathered about student-practitioners in Matinauhkalli corresponds to the years 2017-2019. By 2020, many of the students I interviewed had left the space. However, since the circumstances of their leaving arose after my ethnographic inquiry, I do not incorporate them into this dissertation. During my time at Matinauhkalli, student-practitioners seemed to be sexually

heterogenous, with almost half of them identifying as queer (despite the fact that some were in heterosexual relationships), and the other half heterosexual. The social composition also revealed that student-practitioners are young professionals, whose parents were—or are—working class. However, student-practitioners seemed to achieve a certain social mobility through higher education. Aside from a few children who occasionally joined classes (and whose experiences I did not include in this dissertation) and a small number of elderly people (usually women in their 70s), students were between the ages of 20 and 40.

While I was doing my fieldwork, the majority of the student-practitioners were Mexican or of Mexican descent (either born in Mexico or with at least one parent born in Mexico). However, I have seen other nationalities and ethnicities practice Toltec and Aztec revivals. During my master's degree fieldwork (Buendia 2014) I saw Japanese, French, and Spaniards people come to Mexico for ceremonies. During fieldwork in Goleta (2017), I saw one mixed-race (Italian, Black, and Native American) danzante, and in Xicago I met and interviewed a Chinese-American Tonalpohualli student. This diversity is important because, as mentioned in previous chapters, Akaxe's teaching of the knowledge has shifted from national/Mexican to a global knowledge that can benefit anyone. For Akaxe, the knowledge should be universal and not exclusive to Mexicans. Like other religious and spiritual movements, Toltec Revitalizations are starting to shift from being a nationalistic movement (e.g. Mexicayotl), to a "universal" belief system.[135]

Most students at Matinauhkalli come from low-income, working-class families. However, most have professional jobs or are studying to obtain a degree (the majority of

[135] I am being careful not to label this a religion, because the people I worked with do not identify what they do as religion. However, a conversation about labeling practices as a religion will be in the following chapter, where an accomodation with the idea of religion is made and the concept incorporated with precaution.

those I met were working toward their bachelor's, one was in the process of doing her master's, while two were working towards a Ph.D.). A large majority of students belong to immigrant families, and their connections to Mexico are intimate and always linked to their family histories. Although a few of the students' parents came from Mexico City, the majority were from rural parts of Mexico. Rural Mexico is varied in region, culture, and ecosystem. The deserts of Queretaro that Xiuhminatzin remembers are very different from the arid ranches of Durango that Tlayolotl recalls, and neither are like the ranches of Michoacán where Judith would visit her family, or the tropical climate of Veracruz where Zabdiel was born. The diversity of the origins of the families of students-practitioners in Matinauhkalli usually gets erased in the U.S., where migrant families become homogenized as simply "Mexican." Students' memories of rural Mexico are important when engaging with the knowledge. If the Mexicayotl identifies its philosophy with Mexico (as a nation), Matinauhkalli breaks nationalism down to become both universal and pan-Indigenous. Ahuehuetzin, for example, grew up in an agricultural town in rural Guanajuato and this knowledge gave her the tools to reconnect with, and understand, her Indigenous experiences as a child.

As noted in Chapter 3, the idea of community is contingent and contradictory in Matinauhkalli. On several occasions I heard Akaxe and the student-practitioners use the word "manada" (pack) to refer to each other. The manada is symbolically important because it refers to coyotes and—as Akaxe notes—coyotes live in packs. In addition, the symbol of *Huehuecoyotl* is a coyote dancing. Although Akaxe does not talk about this connection explicitly, he has included drawings of the dancing coyote in his own art. The concept of being a pack of coyotes can be linked to notions of Danza—not just in terms of a rejection of

the idea of community (as shown in Chapter 3) but also as an allegory of dancing bodies in connection to symbols of nature.

Matinauhkalli's manada is not entirely fixed: people come and go, they stop taking classes or they change schedules. When I did my fieldwork there seemed to be a core number of students who had attended consistently since Akaxe first came to Xicago from Mexico. However, half of these students left Matinauhkalli between 2020 and 2021.

Students came to Matinauhkalli by two main routes. Either through word of mouth (a friend, or a friend of a friend, telling them about a class or *plática* [public talk] which they were curious about and attended); or through social media (seeing a Facebook event and coming to see what it was all about). Before becoming student-practitioners, these seekers arrive curious about their identity as brown mestizos (for racial politics see Chapter 1). Matinauhkalli provided disciplines, as well as answers to questions about who they were, and gave them a narrative about where they came from, beyond their parents' histories and back to their Mesoamerican ancestors.

4.3 Bodies in Movement

Usually, students enter Toltec and Aztec Revitalization groups either through Danza or the study of the Tonalpohualli. In this section I only address Danza and the other physical disciplines. Physical disciplines involve practitioners using their bodies to generate something—usually some kind of movement—in which the body receives a stimulus and generates a somatic experience, like dancing, chanting or even breathing (meditation). In this chapter I also include the practice of name-changing because it signifies a moment of transformation: after the naming ceremony, the body and the social and individual identity of the practitioner are different from what they were before.

Some of the student-practitioners had dancing experience before they came to Matinauhkalli. For example, Jazmin/Tekpalichtiani used to be a professional folkloric dancer (*danza folklórica*[136]) and teacher. Izayot was a bachata choreographer and break dancer. Zabdiel and Zitlatokatzin had been in different Mexica/Conchero Danza groups before meeting Maestro Akaxe. However, not everyone comes to Matinauhkalli with previous dancing experience. For some of them, moving their bodies is something completely new and challenging.[137]

In this section, I focus on the two main physical disciplines (Yaotiliztli and Danza) before offering an overview of other disciplines that involve the body and somatic experiences (Millaniztli and Macehual Naming). Yaotiliztli—the warrior discipline—is the most physically demanding discipline in Matinauhkalli and involves a life commitment. Once a student is committed to being a *guerrero* (warrior) they cannot stop. If someone chooses to stop attending Yaotiliztli classes, they are expelled from all Matinauhkalli classes and ceremonial activities. Danza is a physically challenging cardiovascular activity, but it does not require the level of commitment that Yaotiliztli does. In Millaniztli (archery)—unlike Yaotiliztli and Danza—there is little to no sweat involved; however, because this class alternates archery practice with meditation, it works as an effective bridge between mind and body. All practices incorporate both physical and mental challenges at certain points.

[136] Danza folklórica refers to a dance performance that demonstrates a variety of regional dance styles from all over Mexico. In The U.S., danza folklórica has been widely studied by ethnographers like Olga Nájera-Ramirez (1994), and Mathew Kristal (2011)

[137] When I was at Matinauhkalli there were a number of people who were completely new to danza and physical disciplines. Ana, for example, told me she had felt scared of Danza at first because she was used to being disconnected from her body, and Danza provided her with a way of fully reconnecting with, and accepting her body.

4.3.1 Yaotiliztli

The first time I saw Yaotiliztli in April 2017, I thought I was watching the ancient Codices coming to life. The images that I had seen so often were now being embodied, represented, and reproduced. Akaxe invited me and the other students from Santa Barbara to join the class, but only as observers; we were asked not to reveal what we witnessed. After a few days, we were allowed to join the class, where we learned breathing exercises and slow body movement (akin to a combination of yoga and tai-chi).

Yaotiliztli is the discipline with the highest level of secrecy. Only guerreros know what goes on inside the classes. Nonetheless, Akaxe has been opening up parts of Yaotiliztli to the public since the summer of 2017, showcasing individual and partner combat drills, during ceremonies or the Pilsen Open Studios festival. After I joined Yaotiliztli it took me at least four classes (two weeks) to switch from fitness exercises to simple drills. The first drills I learned were with a partner, Tlayolotl. These drills were not combat-based, but served, according to Akaxe, to strengthen our muscles and bodies by breaking the tissue and re-strengthening it. Tlayolotl and I would take turns, making movements to hit certain parts of the arms, the upper-back, and the legs. I was always afraid of hurting Tlayolotl, but she would urge me on, saying “más fuerte, más fuerte” (harder, harder). After this I was allowed to follow drills that Guerreros were practicing, but even then—after weeks of practice—certain things were still secret. I was not allowed to stay in class when the guerreros received their first evaluation, and I was never taught complicated drills or movements; nor was I ever corrected by Akaxe who, I knew from personal experience, viewed correction as a way of belonging (a privilege).

The notion of secrecy around Yaotiliztli comes from Akaxe's own narrative of how he learned it in the highlands of Puebla. For him, the few indigenous people that knew Yaotiliztli were young warriors chosen by their teacher. Their knowledge of the discipline meant that they carried the bodily movement of a form of combat hidden from public sight after the Spanish conquest. Akaxe has told students that one of the reasons he did not want to teach Yaotiliztli initially was because he did not want to put the discipline under scrutiny. Many do not believe Yaotiliztli ever existed, and Akaxe and Clarissa have had altercations on social media regarding the veracity of what they do.[138] Codices and other archeological records[139] prove the existence of warriors (especially the *ocelotl* [jaguar] and *cuauhtli* [eagle] warriors), but there are no indications of how they moved or what they practiced. Therefore, the movements involved become part of a "fiction contract."[140] Student-practitioners follow Akaxe's movements in order to learn them, trusting in the process and giving credence to Akaxe's narrative of how he learned the discipline.

All religious, spiritual, and mystical traditions engage in different degrees of secrecy. However, in contraposition to some religious movements where secrecy is reserved for ritual, ceremony in Matinauhkalli is a moment for communion between insiders and outsiders. Instead it is in Yaotiliztli classes that secrecy is maintained and nurtured. This secrecy is not

[138] Besides Akaxe, there is a school in Mexico City that claims to teach a form of Aztec martial art called Xilam, which is based on different forms of indigenous combat forms (Xilam, retrieved from https://www.xilam.org/, April 30, 2020), while Eduardo Lozano professes to teach another warrior discipline called Yaomachtia (Consulted April 30, 2020 http://newspaperrock.bluecorncomics.com/2011/01/origin-of-yaomachtia.html.)

[139] The Mendoza Codex, folios 19-45, show military regalia in the Aztec civilization (retrieved from https://codicemendoza.inah.gob.mx/index.php?lang=english&folio_number=52&type=r&section=m, May 26, 2021).

[140] In literary studies, the fiction contract is an agreement between the reader and the book, which involves the reader suspending belief in the story presented in the narrative. In this specific case the contract entails the belief that everything learned in Yaotiliztli comes from authentic indigenous sources that have carried the movements in their bodies through the centuries since colonization.

due to the movements being considered sacred, but because of the history of persecution and genocide of the warrior class during the Spanish conquest. As well as telling students his own story with the discipline, Akaxe shares with them why it is so closely guarded. For Akaxe, this secrecy must continue so that the discipline is not lost, questioned, or appropriated.

Despite the amount of secrecy around Yaotiliztli, it is the students of this discipline who maintain Matinauhkalli as a space.[141] These students are also those most prepared to hold a ceremony during the *veintenas* (20-day calendar), and it is mainly during this class that Matinauhkalli gets cleaned and renovated. On a number of occasions we were given the task of cleaning the space instead of having regular class. It is all part of the service warriors provide; to be a warrior is not just about developing skills, it is also about being ready to serve others at all times.

Another distinctive characteristic of Yaotiliztli is that it has a "system of consequences."[142] A "consequence" occurs when someone is late or has not studied or learned the correct movement, or if someone is not paying attention. According to Akaxe the consequence system is supposed to make student-practitioners more aware of their responsibilities. The system of consequences later came to be introduced into other disciplines. On September 27, 2018, it was instituted in Danza class. Not long after this date, Tlayolotl was late to class. As a result she had to dance most of the class carrying a *teponaztli* (a wooden slit drum). At the end of the class she said how grateful she was for being

[141] During my fieldwork I saw a shift from Clarissa to Guerreros as the ones in charge of maintaining the space clean and functional. However, Clarissa was still the organizer and social media manager.
[142] Students and Akaxe refer to this simply as "consequences" or "*consecuencias*." I refer to it as a "system" because it consists of organized elements that are intended to modify students' behaviors towards the discipline.

reminded of her responsibility as a danzante, adding that she had tried to carry the teponaztli with honor.

Xiuhminatzin has become a prime example of an individual who has acquired discipline and responsibility, and his story is often told by Akaxe during class. When Xiuhminatzin first joined Yaotiliztli he would frequently arrive late, until one day Akaxe told him he was not allowed to participate. However, instead of quitting, Xiuhminatzin started to arrive an hour early to Yaotiliztli class (4 am instead of 5 am) and wait outside. After four months, he was allowed back into the class. Xiuhminatzin also told me about other consequences he had endured, like maintaining a handstand against the wall throughout the class, or standing in two buckets while carrying a *huehuetl* (big drum) for the whole two hours of class. The consequence system is closely related to the idea of responsibility, which is essential to achieving the macehual path. No one in Yaotiliztli has avoided consequences altogether. Akaxe and his students would never refer to consequences as punishments; for them, the idea of consequences is aligned with the idea of becoming a macehual. Accepting a consequence for failing to meet a responsibility is almost normalized in Matinauhkalli, although it does still provoke fear among some students.

Although Yaotiliztli is challenging for the body, student-practitioners say that developing physical strength is not the hardest part; the real challenge lies in learning how to fight their internal enemies. Zabdiel told me that, for him, Yaotiliztli was about breaking yourself into little pieces in order to reconstruct yourself. He added that even though Danza could be challenging and strict, and bring you face to face with your fears, Yaotiliztli forces you to reach deeper—not to become the best version of yourself, but to become the version *beyond*

the best version of yourself. “You then have to find that version and, once you do, go beyond that” (Fieldnotes, September 28, 2018).

For Akaxe, Yaotiliztli is the most difficult of all the disciplines because it involves defeating your internal enemies: fear, trauma and doubt. It also involves knowing and accepting when you have been defeated. Although Akaxe manages to lure some students to Yaotiliztli, he warns that it is not for everyone:

> Yaotiliztli es una disciplina para el que es necio, enojón, para el que cree que tiene un carácter muy fuerte en la vida. Obviamente va a ser muy doloroso someterse a sí mismo, pero va a ser muy bueno para esas personas. En Yaotiliztli, tienes que ser como una piedra, sólido, pero para poder ser sólido tienes que aguantar presión de todas partes. Pero en Yaotiliztli se dice ‘utiliza tu enojo no contra los demás, sino para ser mas estricto contigo mismo, para ver tus propios enemigos’. En Yaotiliztli se practica todo para someter al enemigo, pero el otro tiene que saber cuándo es sometido. Si no acepta su sometimiento se va a lastimar, o en tiempos ancestrales, hasta morir.
> (Yaotiliztli is a discipline for the stubborn, for those who get mad easily, for those who are strong willed and difficult. Obviously, it is very painful to submit to oneself, but it is also very good for these individuals. In Yaotiliztli, you have to be solid like a stone. But to be solid you need to handle pressure from all sides. In Yaotiliztli you must use your anger—not against others, but to be stricter with yourself, to see your own enemies. In Yaotiliztli, we practice how to defeat the enemy, but the other must know when they have been defeated; otherwise they may get hurt or, as in ancestral times, even die) (Fieldnotes, April 7, 2019).

Yaotiliztli is not pain or injury-free. A number of people were injured while I was doing my fieldwork, and I observed Zabdiel deal with a year-long knee injury—acquired in Yaotiliztli—that ended up requiring surgery.

Students from Yaotiliztli have to practice celibacy, considered the highest level of self-discipline. Every student-practitioner must be celibate to various degrees, although the primary goal is to withdraw yourself from pleasures. Celibacy is an intimate process, which usually involves sexual abstinence, so student-practitioners do not talk about it openly. The

practice of celibacy is also linked to Tonalpohualli knowledge, because it is supposed to prepare people for their "vuelta de años" (turning of years) which symbolizes a shift in identity or internal growth every thirteen years.

I heard student-practitioners talking about *celibato* after a class in which Akaxe had shared his own process of celibato. Xiuhminatzin was the only one who talked about the subject during our interview. For him, the process allowed him to re-discover who he really was.

> I felt that I was a starving all the time. It wasn't a challenge to eliminate substances, so like drinking and smoking. I knew deep down in my heart that I always wanted to stop doing it and I was just looking for an excuse to do it… I feel that I was born to be sober (…). But then I wanted to take the process further: sleeping on the floor, long periods of isolation, I'm talking about doing things to intentionally put yourself in uncomfortable positions" (Xiuhminatzin, interviewed October 23, 2018).

Celibato and Yaotiliztli go hand in hand because they are both constructed on a framework of intimacy and secrecy. It is through these practices that students experience the *deeper* parts of themselves. The practice of celibacy and the system of consequences both serve the Guerreros as corrective markers and students' identities change as a result of practicing the discipline.

For Michel Foucault, discipline as a method is used to explain the power of the state and the prison system in modern societies. Within his historical analysis, however, discipline is situated first in religious orders: "For centuries, the religious orders have been masters of discipline: they were the specialists of time, the great technicians of rhythm and regular activities" (Foucault 1997, 250). Religious discipline is different from the one of vassalage, mainly because their "function was to obtain renunciations rather than increases of utility" (Foucault 1997, 137). The discipline imposed in Matinauhkalli fits Foucault's understanding

of religious discipline. However, for student-practitioners, discipline and punishment are ideas connected to ancestral pedagogies that help them to decolonize themselves. In the Huehuetlatolli one can observe how physical punishment used to be a common disciplinary method for improving the individual in Aztec society. Akaxe, does not practice some of the harshest methods described in the Huehuetlatolli, like burning chili until the individual person cries, or direct corporal punishment. He has adapted the methods, limiting them to actions individuals must do by themselves, like carrying *huehuetls* or doing handstands. According to Foucault, discipline does not come from an institution, but is instead a type of internalized power (Foucault 19, 215), to which we must ask, where is that power coming from? The ancestors? The teacher? The internal social norms generated by teacher and students?

Ironically, macehuales practice their bodily disciplines under Foucault's logic of evolution and genesis. For Foucault, discipline in the eighteenth century reveals these two concepts as the signature social discoveries of the era, discoveries which correlate to new forms of power; the evolution and creation of history—in both society and the individual—go hand in hand with the creation of power. Socially speaking, people in Matinauhkalli believe in ideas of social and individual evolution, in which progression is measured and is contingent to positions of power inside these communities. Ideas of evolution, however, come from the European Enlightenment and not from Toltec/Aztec philosophies like the Huehuetlatolli. This ambiguity relies on both colonial impositions and the similarities seen between the Aztec and Spanish worlds. According to Carrasco and Sessions (1998), Aztecs lived in a society that resembled the pyramid structure of social stratification in which there were few possibilities for social mobility between the two major stratifications: *pipitzin*

(nobles) and *macehuales* (commoners). However, according to León-Portilla (1961), Aztec thought was guided by a dualistic understanding of acceptance and constant change in both nature and the human condition. When analyzed, the Aztec notion of change is connected to death and earthly transcendence through beauty produced in this world, rather than through European ideas of progress and evolution that decanted in notions of bettering the self.

4.3.2 Macehualiztli - Mitotiliztli - Danza

Danza is one of the classes that brings the most joy to student-practitioners. When I asked them which class was their favorite, most were careful when answering because they see the benefits of each class and understand that they are interconnected. However, the majority admitted that Danza was the class that brought them most joy (not the one they needed, not the one that challenged them or that provided the most benefits, but the one that made them happiest). [143]

Scholars of Danza Mexica and Azteca have argued that Danza is an *amoxtli* (codex) (Valadez 2012) and a tool for political activism (Collin 2014, Luna 2011). For student-practitioners in Matinauhkalli, Danza is also a discipline that helps them better themselves and unlock their potential. It is a discipline that connects body and mind, and it can also channel different emotions.

The Conchero, Mexica/Aztec, and *macehual* dances are considered "flower danzas." If we follow Maria Sten's dance classification system (1991), we recognize five different types of dance practiced in Mesoamerica.[144] All of them are flower dances, performed in a circle

[143] This is in contrast to Yaotiliztli, which students can see the benefits of, but which they admit is not their favorite class.

[144] In her ethnography of Aztec dances, Maria Sten explains that, according to colonial sources there are four types of dance we can identified from pre-colonial times. The five types of dances Sten identifies are: 1) Pasos llanos, con musica y cantos (sin ademanes); 2. Danzas con ademanes; 3. Danzas en zig-zag or *de culebreo*; 4.

and, according to Sten, mimicking the dance structure of "flowers." This means that the dance is divided into two parts. The first is the base (this can be a sequence of four types of steps: water, air, fire, or earth) and it does not usually change. The second is the flower, a sequence of steps that changes throughout the dance, repeating twice before changing. The combination of base and flower is unique to the dance. Some of these flower dances can also fall into the category of mimetic dances.

For Sten, mimetic dances involve the dancer being "possessed," but my experience in Matinauhkalli is different. Not only is there no possession,[145] but the dancer embodies the animal form rather than "imitates" it. I would argue that these dances are forms of embodied knowledge, not mimetic dancing. Acquiring the bodily movements of the *cuauhtli* (eagle) or *itzquintli* (dog) (to mention just two examples) is to absorb the psychological qualities which, according to the Tonalpohualli, those animal symbols provide. In *itzquintli* for example, Akaxe reminded us that when dancing we needed to let go of our old skin, to take it all off in order to acquire new skin that would cover our bodies again. The skin of the dog is being renewed, so is that of the danzantes. Dancing as animal forms is not imitating them; rather it

Danzas con flores; 5. Danzas mimeticas, no figurativas (Sten 89). Dances were performed according to the celebrated veintena. For example, Sten points out that Ochpaniztli had more ziz-zag dances to signify the movement of the serpent, fertility and seasonal change. After centuries of change and colonization, Mexicans still practice different types of dances that can be traced to Mesoamerican times. Some of these dances are incorporated into Catholic celebrations in honor of a patron Saint. Mexican anthropology has been successful in documenting and analyzing different layers of "fiestas patronales" (patron saint festivities) around the country. Some of these dances are made in zig-zag, some are simple dances with music and songs, and some are mimetic. Although the categories Sten created to recognize the dances described by Sahagún and Duran pedagogically, it is probable that they actually overlapped in performance. Nowadays, these danzas are all over Mexico and most of them have a syncretic component. Contemporary Aztec/Mexica dance is practiced exclusively in a circle.

[145] There are other religious dances in which possession is essential to the dance or the end game of the bodily movements. Danza can be a path to connect the body with the spirit. However, this is not the case for Mexica/Aztec and *macehual* dances.

is through movement that the dancer embodies animal qualities that are transferred by the body itself and by the teacher's explanations of the movements.

Although these dances can be grouped into one large category as *danza macehual*, there are two different rhythms that distinguish dance styles. *Danzas rituales* (ritual dances) are slower than *danzas guerreras* (warrior dancers) which tend to be faster in rhythm and movement. Despite their names, both types of Danza are *ofrendas* (offerings) in ceremony. During an informal conversation I had with Judith while we ate tacos after a Danza class, she told me to pay attention to which dances we were practicing in Matinauhkalli. In her experience, during the winter there was a tendency to practice more danzas rituales, which are slower, "because the earth is in the Mictlan, in rest" (Fieldnotes, July 26, 2018). During spring and summer, dances were both ritual and warrior style.

The rhythm of the dance is guided by the sound of the huehuetl (drum), the main instrument in Danza. Each Danza has three main components: 1) *paso de pedimento* (the asking-permission step), 2) *paso base* (the base step), 3) *flor* (the flower). There are two different *pasos de pedimento*—one for danzas rituales and another for danzas guerreras.

Flower in Nahuatl is *xochitl* and carries different symbolic meanings. For the Aztecs, flowers represented the beauty of the world expressed in nature. For Carrasco and Scott (1998), art represented a direct connection to the sacred and the gods in Aztec times. Macehualiztli, the ritual dance, may have involved a symbolic connection between the flower and the movements, but this is not explained in the Chronicles or Carrasco. In contemporary Danza groups the dance named "flor" changes every two sequences, alternating with the base step in between. How danzantes usually choreograph a dance is with a combination of the flower and the base step. The order of a danza would be as follows:

Sequence 1: ***Paso de pedimento***

Sequence 2: ***Paso base*** **Sequence 3:** ***Flor*** **A** **Sequence 4:** ***Paso base*** **Sequence 5:** ***Flor A***	First Flower
Sequence 6: ***Paso base*** **Sequence 7:** ***Flor B*** **Sequence 8:** ***Paso base*** **Sequence 9:** ***Flor B***	Second flower
Sequence 10: ***Paso base*** **Sequence 11:** ***Flor C*** **Sequence 12:** ***Paso base*** **Sequence 13:** ***Flor C***	Third flower
Etc.	Dances have varying numbers of flowers and it is common to dance only the first five to eight flowers, and not the whole sequence.

Table 2. Danza structure

A Danza can have approximately ten or more flowers. However, not all the flowers are executed in Danza practice. In class, a Danza can involve between three and thirteen *flores* (flowers), depending on the intention of the class and their level of knowledge.

In Matinauhkalli, Danza class has a repetitive structure, yet each class is different and surprising. Student-practitioners know which Danza they are performing as soon as Akaxe starts playing the huehuetl. Usually it is he who guides them through the pace of the dance. One of the aspects that differentiates Akaxe from other teachers of similar traditions is his ability to dance and play the huehuetl at the same time. He does not need another experienced danzante to teach movement, nor does he need another musician to accompany the dance. Over the years he has acquired this dual ability, making him a fully autonomous teacher in what it is a communal practice.

Before class there are procedures in place that each student-practitioner must follow. First they must change their clothes. Women usually wear white skirts (with leggings underneath) and white t-shirts. Men wear the traditional Mesoamerican *maxtlatl* (a type of loincloth), under which some wear tights; while on their torsos, men wear a red, black, or white t-shirt. Everyone also has to wear a red or white *ixkuauilmekatl* (a band around the head) and a *xitlihmekatl* (a band around the waist that covers the belly button).

To warm up, students do squats, push-ups, and stretches. Then, when Akaxe comes up from the basement to the main salon, everyone forms a circle. In the middle of the circle there is always a small altar, usually prepared by Ixpahuatzin or by an experienced danzante like Ikiltezi.

The circle is then “opened”. It is common in Mexica and Aztec dances for this to be done by playing the *totocani* (caracol, conch shell) to the four directions. In Matinauhkalli,

however, the conch does not feature; instead, the circle is opened and closed by a ritual chant that evocates six, and not four, directions and forces of nature (Quetzalkoalt, Huitzilopochtli, Xipe-Totec, Tezcatlipoka, Tonanztin-Tlali, and Tonantzin-Meztli).

Once the circle is opened, class begins with mental exercises and warming up the body. The mental exercises consist of students reciting what Akaxe directs them to, and it goes from person to person: numbering in Nahuatl (Ce, Ome, Yei, Nahui…) the 20 potentials of the Tonalpohualli (Cipactli, Ehecatl, Calli, Cuetzpallin…) and the *regentes* (companion to the *potenciales* and *trecenas* in the Tonalpohualli). For more advanced students, the options can also be said out loud: the *regentes* to *trecenas*, *señores de la noche* (lords of night), and *las trece aves* (the thirteen birds of thought). For practitioners, warming up involves preparing both mind and body, because once movement begins there are no breaks, and everyone must be fully present in the circle to avoid interrupting the *tonal* (energy flow) generated by the dance.

There are some instances when the body takes a break, usually between danzas guerreras. If practitioners were breathing heavily after an exhausting dance, Akaxe would instruct them: *fluimos* (let's flow). That would be the cue for students to start walking to their left, without breaking the circle. Walking does not happen in silence, however, because while catching their breath, student-practitioners chant in Nahuatl. While they chant, the students walk with a bouncing gait; there is a lot of energy in the room, along with heavy breathing, sweating bodies and smiling faces. In doing this, students are able to recover their breath before the next flower. According to Akaxe, he reconstructed the chants with the help of a musician friend in Guadalajara; they took on the task of putting music to lyrics they chose from the

Florentine Codex. Unlike Conchero dancers, however, who usually sing Spanish Catholic praises, these songs are poems and chants from the Aztec Empire.

The closing of the circles is done with the same chant used to open it. Akaxe then instructs us to thank the *chanequitos. Chaneques*, or *chanequitos* (the diminutive form) are statues or small figurines which, according to Akaxe, represent forces of nature:

> Un chaneque es un recipiente, como nosotros somos recipientes de nuestro consciente. Somos recipientes de personalidades y están monitoreadas y registradas en el cerebro. Lo mas interesante de los recipientes es que las personalidades multiples pueden cambiar la composicion física y química de una persona. Los chaneques son recipientes y tienen una entidad. Un chaneque es un yeyelitacatl, que está ahí para proteger, proveer un pensamiento, etc. Se les pide que lleguen y que ocupen un recipiente, pero no piden nada a cambio (A chaneque is a vessel, as we are wessels of our consciousness. We are vessels of personalities that are monitored and registred in the brain. The most interestring thing about the vessels is that multiple personalities can change the physical composition and chemistry of a person. The chaneques are vessels and contain an entity. A chaneque is a yeyelitacatl, they are there to protect, to provide a thought, etc. They are asked to come and contained a vessel, but they should not be asked for anything in return) (Tonalpohualli Class, August 4, 2019).

Breaking the circle one by one, students bow to the water statue in the front of the room and then to the bust of *Huehueteotl* in the main altar. If practitioners have brought fruit to class, the guerreros (Yaotiliztli practitioners) stand up at this point and bring out fresh water and fruit for people to share. When everyone is back in the circle, they pass along the plate of fruit, and Akaxe asks: "¿Cómo se sintieron? ¿Qué aprendieron?" ("How did you feel? What did you learn?"). This is the cue for students to share their experiences of the class.

During my time at Matinauhkalli, students usually expressed feelings of gratitude and appreciation at the end of each Danza class. Sometimes this could feel repetitive: "Buenas noches, I felt good…" was the standard answer. I frequently heard student-practitioners say that they had experienced emotional shifts during the class: they came to class feeling

overwhelmed, sad, or frustrated, but felt relieved and happy by the end. As a consequence, Akaxe would often lecture students after Danza class, reminding them that it is a discipline, not therapy:

> Akaxe told us to take Danza as a discipline, not a medicine. Danza is not therapy, or a way to detox yourself—it should be your discipline. You should take care of what you do with your life outside Danza, and not expect to solve those issues in here (Fieldnotes September 18th, 2018).

Some nights this was also the moment for clarification, confrontation, and *regaños* (scolding). On October 23, 2019, for example, there were three unusual interventions because they involved negotiation and feedback from students to their maestro and not the other way around:

> First, Jazmin said that she did not agree with Maestro's notion of our outside lives being irrelevant. She said it with a big smile and without being confrontational, just making clear what she believed. Then, Ahuehuetzin said that while Danza classes were physically challenging, they were also intellectually challenging and provided the push she needed to learn things and get better. Then, Zabdiel said he found it interesting that people almost always identified with one *flor* from the first time [the] rounds started. So if, for example, someone was flower 2 in the beginning, that person was almost like the embodiment of the second flower, meaning that when the order was change or rotated, it was hard because the person had to stop being flower 2 and become flower 5 or 1. Zabdiel also explained a theory about stress in psychology called "choking" and he said that it would be interesting to see if being made to carry the huehuetl, or being given another consequence, was something that would improve their performance by causing the "right amount" of stress (Fieldnotes October 23, 2018).

The topics broached on this occasion show that student-practitioners are not passive subjects receiving teachings, but rather intellectual beings who negotiate teachings with old world assumptions and their own semantic framework. They are also discipline-seekers, as shown by Ahuehuetzin's expressed need for learning. Although this type of intervention were not unusual in Matinauhkalli, it was common for students to want Akaxe's opinion in

personal issues. At the end, practitioners were grateful for the discipline they learned through their bodily movements in both Danza and Yaotiliztli.

When confrontations or clarifications occurred in Matinauhkalli, I noticed that there would often be a follow up. For example, after Jazmin disagreed with Akaxe about their outside lives being insignificant, Akaxe brought the topic up again at the end of the following class. He broached the subject during the meditation between the closing of the circle and the *sharing word*.

> [In today's meditation] Akaxe told us to see our feet and legs as a *maguey* and imagine how everything was born from there. He asked us to remember that our lives are insignificant when compared to nature and the cosmos, and that the only relevant thing are the actions we leave behind us. For me, this way of paraphrasing his lesson of what it means to be insignificant was better received from practitioners. It was a reminder not to let the ego win. His message was: we are not the ones leaving things in the world, it is our actions; therefore we need to work constantly to achieve what we want to do and what we want to leave behind (Fieldnotes October 25, 2018).

As well as the structure of each class, Danza pedagogy consists of repetition, uplifting emotions, responsibility, games[146], and consequences. In Zabdiel's view, while Yaotiliztli would break you down in order to rebuild you, Danza was always uplifting. However, other student-practitioners had more complex responses to Danza, sometimes finding it intimidating, exhausting, or healing.

Even though Danza is not as grueling as Yaotiliztli, it still requires a significant amount of commitment and discipline. It is a rigorous exercise, but it can also be compared to an art form in which danzantes express themselves through the beat of the huehuetl. Danza also involves a "system of consequences," in which students are tested and reprehended. Akaxe

[146] In some Danza classes there are games in which students have to follow a certain order of dance, or only practice the flower of the dance, etc.

sets a high bar of expectation regarding how students should behave and learn. Not meeting these standards can bring consequences like those outlined above, or even expulsion from the group. On a number of occasions during class, Akaxe warned us that Matinauhkalli is not a gym, and that being a danzante is not (just) fun, it is making a commitment to yourself, your maestro, and your manada. Jazmin-Tekpaliachtiani explained how she had to find a balance between the amount of expectation put on her by Akaxe and what she was willing to give after class:

> *Maestro Akaxe* started putting… umm… certain expectations on us, right? And, like, if you can't live up to that expectation, then maybe you shouldn't be in the class… like, god, *pero yo quiero danzar!* [but I want to dance!] Okay, I'll do that, okay, I can do that, alright great, now we're doing that. And then he puts something else on it… I'm going to fight him on this one, no, no *maestro*, I'm an actress I can't dedicate all this time to this, you know? Like, I have priorities… Okay, I can do that. And that's how I kept going and he kept putting more and more expectations on us, and I kept going (Jazmin- Tekpalitchiani interviewed March 13, 2018).

Danza is about bodily movement, but it is also about rhythm, music, and singing. Everything involved with Danza has symbolism that connects with emotions, humanity, and nature. Some danzas are actual embodiments of animals (in Iztacuauhtli for example, dancers spread their arms like the wings of an eagle; in Tochtli, dancers squat and jump as if enacting the hops of a rabbit). Other dances call forth forces of nature; in Coatlicue, for example, the steps and arm movements simulate a snake to symbolize the earth moving and renewing.

The main instrument, the huehuetl, represents this type of symbolic philosophy. For Akaxe, it is important not to play the huehuetl with sticks (as in Mexica and Aztec dances). Instead one must play the huehuetl with bare hands, as a form of respect to the instrument. In Matinauhkalli it is taught that the hands of the drummer represent humanity; the skin of the drum represents the skin of the animal that sacrificed itself for us (humans), and the wooden

base is the symbol of nature. Elements of the human, animal and plant kingdoms are fully represented, respected, and honored in music, dance, and the Tonalpohualli.

As mentioned earlier, the pedagogy behind Danza class incorporates mental and physical challenges. For Tlayolotl, one of the outcomes of Danza is to "understand more about yourself, your physical body, and your intellectual capacity" (Tlayolotl, interviewed October 23, 2018). For Judith, *pulir una danza* (to polish or perfect a dance) "awakens" the form of the dance, while, in turn, the form of the dance helps practitioners to awaken their *Tezcatlipoka* (the unconscious/ancestral memory). If the form of the dance is not polished, practitioners are simply dancing, without changing their consciousness and doing the internal work they need to do (Fieldnotes July 26, 2018). Thus, Danza is an external physical movement with internal/emotional consequences for practitioners. Through October and November 2018, Akaxe started speaking about "unlocking our potentials" in and through Danza practice:

> After one more try with another Danza, Maestro stopped playing the huehuetl and said that we needed to let our *potenciales* teach us (…). To do this, he said, we need to allow our body to teach us. It is not that we can control and teach our body how to dance; on the contrary, we have to forget who we are in order to *let our body teach us what the body already knows*. He said that sometimes he doesn't remember a Danza step right away, but when he lets his body move, he remembers. Akaxe warned us about thinking that we control our body, because it is actually *our body that has the control and the information we need to be better*, unless there is a disease or the body is too old (Fieldnotes, October 23, 2018).

Connected to the idea of dancing to unlock the internal *potentials* is the fact that Danza is central to ceremony and that it is, ultimately, an offering. Unlike Aztec/Mexica dances, practitioners in Matinauhkalli do not perform as dancers in public settings. Therefore, rather than performing, the goal is to generate the *tonal* (energy) that the individual (needs) and that the collective can offer in ceremony. Danza also serves as a vehicle for connecting with

ancestral memory. In Matinauhkalli, a Danza class is not just learning how to move the body according to the rhythm of the huehuetl, it is also an exercise of memory and belonging. I borrow the term "re-membering" from Sally Ann Ness (1992), who argues that dance "tests the limits of the normal constructions of the social life" (Ness 6). Re-membering in Matinauhkalli takes on a new meaning, adding a metaphysical reality that expands the body and the individual into a collective ancestral memory. Thus, the past is not something that people engage with by reading and studying, but something that is embodied and alive in practitioners' bodies and that they can awaken through practice and discipline.

Danza class is based on a unique pedagogy that tests students' commitment, discipline, and memory. One night we were sitting in circle after Danza class and, as usual, students brought water and fruit to share. One by one we shared our experiences of class: how we felt, what we had learned. This practice of recurrent sharing has brought moments of realization, negotiation, and discovery to student-practitioners and their teacher. When my turn came, I thanked the teachers and the group for allowing me to be there. Then I said that for the first time I felt that my body was remembering. They all nodded. Memory had a different connotation, it was not the act of short-term or long-term memory, nor the importance of remembering the steps, but the subtle connection between one's body and the ancestral body. "People can spend years dancing and still not allow their bodies to remember," Xipahuatzin explained. "You are connecting with your Tezcatlipoka," Judith said me.

Danza is connected to ceremony because, like the 20-day calendar and the rites of passage,[147] each Danza practice conveys ritual activity. The ritualistic elements of Danza are linked to the idea that movement generates energy, which is why the opening, closing, and

[147] E.g. *siembra de nombre* (name giving) and *amarre de tilma* (marriage).

respecting of the circle is important. Also, when practitioners walk (*fluyen*, literally flow) in between dances, Akaxe instructs us not to leave our arms and hands hanging down. Instead, they must either be on our waist to contain the energy, or raised to the ceiling to get the energy flowing. Otherwise, danzantes can lose the energy generated in the dance movement. Another ritualistic element of the class is putting on and wearing the *ixkuauilmekatl* (headband) and the *xitlihmekatl* (waistband), to protect thoughts (head) and the organs (waist). Not everyone does this, but I saw some of the most advanced danzantes placing their ixkuauilmekatl in front of one of the *chanequitos* or in front of the altar, and closing their eyes. Finally, placing an altar in the middle of the circle and thanking the chanequitos are elements of ritual incorporated in every class.

Although Akaxe warned student-practitioners not to treat Danza as therapy, he has also said that Danza can be healing. Danza has allowed Ana to reconnect with her body and heal bodily trauma:

> When I was nine I had this experience that was, like, really traumatizing and it kind of made me avoid my body, like, *cualquier cosa que sentía…* I would run away from it [my own body]. So in high school I never joined any sports 'cuz, like, I didn't want to feel my body, you know? And then, *este*, it wasn't until I joined Danza, after self-healing… So, it wasn't until self-healing that I understood why I was running away from my own body. I knew that for me to get to the place where I wanted to be was to create a relationship with my body (…). I knew that being active and seeking a discipline that, like, really made you connect with your body was what I needed (Ana, interviewed October 20, 2018).

Akaxe himself has said that some of his students in Europe were able to cure conditions like infertility. These "benefits" of Danza are unique and not everyone can access them. The idea of authenticity and of "polishing" a Danza is how Akaxe and his students distinguish themselves from Mexicayotl groups that practice Danza Azteca, Mexica, or Conchera. This Danza, unlike the others, can help the practitioner heal and unlock their potential:

> La danza trae muchos beneficios de autoconocimiento. No todas las danzas, tienen este efecto. Hay gente que danza y solo hacen el movimiento sin trabajo interno y eso no es la danza macehual. [Dance brings lots of benefits of self-knowledge. Not all dances have this effect. There are people that dance and they just do the movement without the internal work and that is not Danza Macehual] (Akaxe Gomez, Fieldnotes, July 22, 2018).

Physical disciplines like Danza provide student-practitioners with lots of "benefits," as both Akaxe and the students told me, but it is important to note that such disciplines are intended to be practiced by able bodies. While not all danzantes are slim and fit, they are all expected to move their bodies in ways that are not easy. When older people join in the practice, their movements are modified. For people with injuries, participating in a physical discipline can range from very-challenging to impossible. Although there is some flexibility regarding recovery time, there is an expectation that bodies will heal and return to classes in the same capacity as before. This was also the case when pregnancies occurred in the manada. During my time in Matinauhkalli I saw two specific examples of this. When Zabdiel got his knee injury, he was still expected to attend classes and keep learning from stillness. In the end, Zabdiel underwent surgery and left Matinauhkalli. Also, after Ahuehuetzin had her fourth child, she was expected to go back to Danza after finishing her *cuarentena*—40 days after giving birth. Although Zabdiel and Ahuehuetzin did not complain about the policy of quick recovery at the moment of experiencing it, I heard from some students (who no longer attend Matinauhkalli) that if you did not have an able body, these disciplines were not for you. These people felt daunted by, and even unwelcome at Matinauhkalli, and rejected by Akaxe.

4.3.3 Milaniztli and Other Physical Disciplines

The following classes can be considered physical disciplines because through them the body acquires, produces, and performs knowledge that leads practitioners to the *macehual path*. Those classes are: Chants, Millaniztli (archery), and Ehekapatimine (breathing exercises/meditation). Unlike Yaotiliztli and Danza, these disciplines are offered in rotation, only once or twice a year.[148]

Particular to these disciplines is that their knowledge gets incorporated into other classes. For example, Chants are always present in Danza, while Ehekapahtimine (meditation) is sometimes incorporated into Danza or Millaniztli as part of the practice.

A description of the classes with the schedule can be found in Matinaukalli's webpage administrated by Clarissa. Part of the description of Chants class reads as follows:

> Chants are an essential part in the path of the Macehual as a way to show gratitude to the forces of Nature and the Universe that allow us to exist as conscious beings. By making song offerings, we are able to exist harmoniously and be of service in return (Consulted April 23, 2019 http://www.inasca.org/nahuatl-chants--wind-offerings.html).

In 2018, I attended my first Millaniztli class with a bow and arrow that Judith had lent me. For the first couple of classes, however, Akaxe instructed me to leave the tools at the front of the room, by my backpack. He told me that before I began shooting I needed to learn how to breathe and move my body.

Millaniztli practitioners stand in a line near one of the walls; then slowly walk to the edge of the main salon, facing the kitchen area—where a wall with targets has been prepared—and take turns shooting. They usually set up in groups of three, and are only allowed to shoot

[148] Except for Millaniztli (archery) which is always in Matinauhkalli's calendar. However, there are two versions of Millaniztli: the physical practice of shooting, and the study of philosophy of Millaniztli.

three times—twice standing, and then down on one knee. Millaniztli has a ceremonial atmosphere. Nobody is allowed to talk, so the only thing you hear is the asynchronistic breathing of the practitioners and the thud of the arrow as it hits the target. Practitioners take the time they need to breathe, focus and shoot. Practitioners must be focused on their shooting and also aware of surroundings. When the final person in the group shoots their last arrow, they must thank everyone with the word "tlazohkamati."

In a similar way to how Danza and Yaotiliztli become paths for self-improvement and self-healing, Millaniztli transforms the act of shooting into a metaphor for learning to make decisions and take actions in everyday life. To do this successfully, practitioners must be disciplined.

> Akaxe said that the objective is not to shoot the arrow, but to make each part of the procedure perfect. The process starts when you walk towards your shooting position. Then you must take the arrow with perfect calmness and place it in the bow. Aligning your body is as important as shooting. He also explained that learning where to put our attention is re-training our minds. It is a process of decolonizing. He said: 'When walking, look in front of you, not to the floor. Do not put your head down. For too many years we have been ashamed and disempowered. It is time to walk with dignity and pride. But without being resentful and angry, because a lot of people of the Mexicayotl are resentful of the Spaniards and want to fight… but fight what? That does not make any sense today. What we need to fight are the ideas of colonization that have told us that we are not valuable, or that we have to keep our head down. Let's show the world our power by the way we walk, by how we conduct ourselves, and by the actions we take (Fieldnotes September 28, 2018).

Both fighting and decolonizing become an act of the mind and the body. Breaking the stereotype of the submissive Indian, the peasant, the brown body sleeping under the sun and hiding beneath the big sombrero, of the servant walking behind his master with his head down. This passive image has permeated U.S. media, and it is also an enduring stereotype in Mexico, feeding and justifying racism against Indigenous peoples and brown mestizos who

have not fully "assimilated" to Mestizo/Mexican culture. Part of Matinauhkalli's work (and, to an extent, of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations[149]) is to reclaim pride at being Mexican, not as colonial subjects, but as autonomous and sovereign individuals. The idea of decolonizing oneself is present in Matinauhkalli as part of the objectives of re-learning.

4.4 Aiming, Naming. Other Embodied Knowledge

As explained in the Introduction, I use the term student-practitioner to talk about those attending Matinauhkalli, as a collective; but I also use it to anonymize some people for specific reasons (if they did not give explicit consent or if I got the information second hand).

When I began my visits to Xicago in September 2018, four people already had their Macehual names: Ikiltezi, Izayotl, Tlayolotl, and Xiuhminatzin. In December 2019, during a ceremony that I did not attend, two more people changed their names. Even though I interviewed these people when they still went by their old Christian names, I asked them which they would prefer I use. Ahuehuetzin asked me to use her new name, but Clarissa-Ixpahuatzin was unsure. For Ixpahuatzin, her name was a reminder of who she needed to be, not who she was; she wanted to share her name with people, but at the same time, she felt she needed to protect it. As part of the process of transition, Clarissa and I decided (collaboratively) that we would keep her old name in Chapter 3 but that, starting with this chapter, she would be referred to as Ixpahuatzin. This transition between chapters is an example of the process that student-practitioners undergo when changing their names. For all of them, a new name requires internal work and commitment. Gaining a new name is a process of identity shift that occurs over time and that is different for each person.

[149] Although Akaxe is a critic of Mexicayotl, it is fair to say that most Danza groups seek to create a positive image of a brown and indigenous body that has been stripped of pride and recognition due to systemic forms of racism.

Like Ixpahuatzin, some student-practitioners use their names according to context. Tlayolotl, for example, still uses Maria when she is with her family and at work. For her, there is conflict in negotiating her new name: "How do I tell my mom to stop calling me the name she gave me?" (Tlayolotl, interviewed October 23, 2018). However, when she meets someone new she introduces herself as Tlayolotl. Similarly, Xiuhminatzin told me he uses three different names. His Macehual name, Xiuhminatzin; his artistic name, Mobius Bloom; and his old name, Alex, when he is with friends and family. Like Tlayolotl, Xiuhminatzin admitted that negotiating his names in the outside world can be frustrating. They tried to enforce their new names at first, but eventually gave up, due to a lack of success. Like Clarissa, they told me they wanted to protect their names. But they also felt they could not explain the importance of their new names to people outside Matinauhkalli.

> I requested that everyone called me Xiuhminatzin but people didn't do it, my family didn't do it, my mom kind of… Sometimes, I think, when she is trying to get on my good side or something… And my girlfriend, I told her about it *y como que tampoco se le pegó* [she didn't get it either], so she calls me Alex. Everyone calls me Alex [he laughs] (Xiuhminatzin, interviewed October 23, 2018).

Others, like Ikiltezi and Izayot, took a more radical approach by making their Macehual names their legal names as well. Ikiltezi was the first to decide she was changing her name legally.

> Ikiltezi: I asked Maestro if I could change it legally, so I'm going to get my final paper on November 1, and it was financed by the state too, so I was, like, cool. No, *pero también* (but also) my last name.
>
> Yanitsa: Cómo va a ser tu apellido? (What is your last name going to be?)
>
> Ikiltezi: Macehuani. It means "the one who deserves." So it's going to be the same as Yankuilliani (Akaxe and Clarissa's daughter).
>
> Yanitsa: So she is Yankuiliani Macehuani? I didn't know that…
>
> Ikiltezi: Yeah, and it also means danzante… hahaha. It's intense, right? And if you think about it, it's not going to play on my behalf in society, but it's like, okay, *chido* (cool), I am not willing to cater so that I can

> accumulate money or get a good job (Ikiltezi, interviewed October 24, 2018).

Like Ikiltezi, Izayot also decided to change his name legally. He changed his last name to Macehualli, which has a similar meaning to Macehuani (the one who deserves), but he altered the spelling in order to differentiate himself from Akaxe's family.

The process of choosing a name comes from the relationship student-practitioners build with their maestro (Akaxe) and on individual decision making. It is the student-practitioner who must ask their maestro for the name. Students told me that Akaxe takes responsibility for giving them three different options, from which they may choose one.

For Ikiltezi and Xiuhminatzin, the process by which Akaxe chose their names was as important as the final process of choosing the right one. Xiuhminatzin was more secretive about it. A few of times during our interview he retracted his words and asked me to stop recording. He was afraid of what people would think, and wanted to protect his maestro's reputation. According to Xiuhminatzin, Akaxe is not the one who chooses the names. With signs of uncertainty and doubt, he told me:

> I guess that the more you get to know the work that maestro is doing, the more you realize what a special relationship he has with himself, and I knew that those names… it wasn't just him coming up with names… it was through the relationship that he has with himself that he was able to communicate these things… (Xiuhminatzin, interviewed October 23, 2018).

In a similar manner, but showing less hesitation, Ikiltezi told me that one day, before their *siembra de nombre,*[150] Akaxe informed them that his rank was *Tezcatlipoka*[151]:

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[150] *Siembra de nombre*, literally meaning "to plant your name" is the ceremony that marks the rite of passage involved in acquiring a new name. It is a common ceremony among people practicing Toltec and Aztec revivals and the Mexicayotl Movement. Some would experience their siembre de nombre when they are older, like the cases documented in this chapter, but it is also common to name a newborn during this ceremony.

[151] Tezcatlipoca is one of the deities identified in the Aztec pantheon. However, because people in this Movement do not believe in gods, they revise the history by saying that some of these names, like Tezcatlipoca

> And it was the first time that Maestro publicly let us know about his rank as Tezcatlipoka. It was on one of Maestro's Meza visits. And this was one of the first *siembra de nombres* that he did with his *rango de Tezcatlipoka*. And it wasn't until a year later, when Tlazalhuani asked Maestro whether she could have her ceremony of her *veintyseis años* (twenty-six years). And she asked him whether she could do something with an indigenous name, and he said yes (Ikiltezi, interviewed October 23, 2018).

Xiuhminatzin and Ikiltizi show how the process of choosing a name is not taken lightly. It involves the decision and introspection of both practitioner and teacher. Both parties have to reach beyond their "normal" self to go through the process. Ikiltezi used the name *Tezcatlipoka* to explain the "special relationship" that the maestro has with himself. In Toltec and Aztec revivals, some groups think of *Tezcatlipoka* not as an Aztec God, but as two different things: on one hand, *Tezkatlipoka* is a rank that only a few can acquire (how it comes to be decided who is worthy of such a title is unknown to me); on the other hand, it also refers to "ancestral memory." According to maestros Meza and Akaxe, everyone has an ancestral memory—a *Tezcatlipoka*—but not everyone is able to unlock and access it. In this sense, it is believed that the ancestral memory goes beyond the individual and connects to something bigger than oneself. This is important, because following this logic, student-practitioners choose a name that comes from ancestral memory, and not from the individual's decision.

The meaning of the names has an extra symbolic implication that marks every single student-practitioner. During an informal interview with Yolitziztiani (Yoli), she told me that the experience of changing her name had grounded her and made her feel more like herself. Yoli had a singularly complex relationship with her Spanish name and her Macehual name,

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or Quetzalcoatl, were ranks that people used to hold according to the type of "science" they practiced. I will explain this historical turn (which I call history-fiction) in more detail in section 2 of this chapter.

and even after she stopped attending Matinauhkalli classes, she kept using her Macehual name in everyday life (Fieldnotes, July 26th, 2018).

The meaning of the name each student chooses functions as a reminder of who they want to become.

> Xiuhminatizin: "Entonces, it is a reference to Xiuhtekutli and Xiuhtekutli es el calor celeste que desciende, que viene siendo la gravedad. Entonces tiene relación a la centralidad y la honestidad y porque en esta filosofía, es Xiuhtecuhtli el que nos otorga esas cualidades, entonces… pues el nombre es una responsabilidad de lanzar las flechas, de tirar metas, o lo que sea que viene siendo mi tonal que yo estoy emanando siempre tiene que ser con honestidad y centralidad." (So, it is a reference to Xiuhtekutli, and Xiuhtekutli is the celestial heat that descends, that is gravity. Therefore it is related to centrality and to being honest, because in this philosophy, Xiuhtecutli is the one who gives us those qualities… the name is a responsibility for shooting arrows, goals, since the *tonal* [energy] that comes out of me always has to come with responsibility and centrality.) (Xiuhminatzin, interviewed October 23, 2018).
>
> Tlayolotl: "*Tla* is 'things,' *yolotl* is 'heart,' and *tlachiani* is 'observer.' So, I am aiming to become my name, right? Because it is not like other given names, so that's who you are, now you have to work towards it (…) *Pero tambien me pongo a pensar en los otros nombres, porque* (but I also think about the other names because) Maestro allowed us to have three options and he makes us choose one and sometimes *me pongo a pensar en los otros nombres tambien* (I think of the other names as well) and how they were all names that were chosen so it makes me think how they are in my behavior"[152] (Tlayolot, interviewed October 23, 2018).

For Ikiltezi, as important as the *meaning* is the *act* of taking a different name and changing it through the legal system, which represents a process of "decolonization":

> I've been around this knowledge for a while—around five years or so—and I am so fully into these concepts and practices of *decolonizing* myself and *reconceptualizing* myself in a different way. And I've been taking many of the responsibilities and that seemed like another level to that. I was like, I am ready to take on the responsibility of a Nahua name and he said okay… So [it] was intense… So, it means the one who weaves the cocoon… *la que teje el capullo*" (Ikiltezi, interviewed October 24, 2018).

[152] In these interviews I put English words that I want to highlight in italics.

In Matinauhkalli, each student-practitioner chooses the amount of commitment and discipline they want to put into their studies. Asking Akaxe (and his Tezcatlipoka) to choose a new name and hold the ceremony is a commitment that student-practitioners make when they feel they are ready. It is a rite of passage. From the interviews and reflections of Clarissa/Ixpahuani, Jazmin-Tecpalichniani, Ikiltezi, Izayotl, Tlayolotl, and Xiuhminatzin, one can summarize that the process of having a new name responds to a need for decolonization; they do this by leaving their given Spanish Christian name behind and switching to a symbolic Nahua name which also guides their future. The new name provides practitioners with a constant reminder of who they are and, more importantly, of who they are aiming to be. With the higher commitment involved in bearing an "ancestral" name, they all are trying to achieve a higher version of themselves.

Conclusion: A Physical Reformation?

Physical disciplines generate a connection between mind and body. They cause practitioners to acquire skills that are intended to be reproduced in everyday life. But this connection is only possible through the exercise of mind and the repetition of ceremony. The strength of the relationship between these disciplines and the students' existence outside Matinauhkalli can be measured in terms of how the students choose to live their lives. For Clarissa, this relationship can be clearly seen in the transformation student-practitioners undergo: "We train overachievers, this space creates leaders" (Clarissa, interviewed March 14, 2019).

For Foucault, discipline comes in different modalities. In Matinauhkalli we can see the type of discipline practiced in asceticism or "monastic" discipline. Even though power arises in play, the ultimate goal is to improve the individual and create an "increase of the mastery

of each individual over his own body" (Foucault 1977, 137) rather than increasing the "utility" of the body as part of a political system.[153] Discipline and embodied knowledge through dance and other physical disciplines allow student-practitioners to practice a type of discipline that is connected to ideas of the Huehuetlatolli, while aiming to develop a better version of themselves through Enlightenment conceptions of evolution and progress. The discrepancy—or, à la J.Z. Smith, the incongruency—that we see in these instances comes from the living tension of colonialism. Students are contemporary subjects, but they are also subjects that desire to re-connect and re-member ancestral ways.

In addition, for some student-practitioners, to discipline the body is to decolonize it. For them, the (de)colonial is a state of mind, an individualized action and effort that can be changed through practices and the knowledge. Tuck and Yang (2012) criticize the idea of decolonization as metaphor. For them, decoloniality is not merely a thought, but a set of actions tied to ideas of land ownership. This distinction is as relevant to Macehuales and Mexicayotl as it is to Mexicans who have been deterritorialized from indigenous communities through cultural mestizaje.

Throughout this project, I have illustrated the differences between the Conchero Movement, Danza Azteca and Mexica, and the Macehual *path*. Although Akaxe does not refer to his work as reformation, the fact that he makes explicit comparisons between how he teaches (and what his students practice in Matinauhkalli) on the one hand, and what

[153] Observing the goals of disciplining the body in Matinauhkalli is not to say that it was the same in Aztec society. Much has been written about the social structure of Aztec society and the political apparatus of punishment that practitioners endured. It is interesting to see a reversal of historical process in this case, one that works in direct opposition to Foucault's teleological view of discipline and power. For Foucault, discipline progressed from the monastery to the military, extending through the school system and into a justice system based on prison as correction and punishment. However, what we see in Mexicayotl is that state discipline, as enforced by the Aztec Empire, has reverted to a monastic type of discipline that runs parallel with nation-state discipline.

Mexicayotl groups do on the other, reveals his explicit intention towards “purity.” As in other world religions that tend to go back to the text to “purify” and re-structure dogma, rituals, even morality, Akaxe deploys the Codices, primary sources, and Mexicayotl literature (e.g. Ygnacio Vargas de Iturbide and Arturo Meza) to reframe practices and disciplines. However, it is not just in his discourse that one can see these changes, it is also in his active pedagogy. From the way danzantes dress, to the bodily movements and the incorporation of music, the process of “purifying” the knowledge distinguishes Matinauhkalli (teacher, students and practices) from Mexicayotl groups and ideology.

Chapter 5. Minds of Nature: Time, Nature, and the Denial of Religion

> "*La ley de la mazorca* is basically that you have natural corn, and people picked bigger and bigger corn until they got the size that we have currently, and that's the mentality they did everything with, that was and that is the mentality that they [Mesoamerican people] used to do Danza. So it is picking the trades and the behaviors that you want from nature in a specific set of people, and you just speak those out and anyone that doesn't have those trades or those behaviors doesn't participate anymore."
> (Zabdiel, interviewed October 21, 2019)

> *"Tonalpohualli* to me is pure science, it's a very poetic science, you know? A very beautiful way of explaining science, and so I don't think of religion at all when I think of science, you know? Umm, the dance is a corporal expression of those terms, of those concepts, and I get to see it actually in motion using my body, so that way I feel like that's just an extension of the science, that I'm learning how this earth and universe works and how I work within it, and that seems so far from religion to me."
> (Jazmin/Tekpalichtiani interviewed March 20, 2019)

Introduction

Zabdiel and Tekpalichtiani discussed me their understanding of science in relation to the knowledge. "The knowledge" is an umbrella term that I heard throughout my fieldwork in Matinauhkalli. It refers to a set of ideological interpretations of the world and human behavior. These ideas are learned and embodied through physical disciplines, like those described in the previous chapter, and also through study of the Tonalpohualli (the Aztec calendar) and its symbols. For Zabdiel, this "ancestral science," better known as *la ley de la mazorca* (the corn cob law), has an impact that shapes the minds and bodies of generations by eliminating the weakest link. Zabdiel's words imply a process of natural selection in both the shaping and reproducing of ancestral knowledge and pedagogies. Physical disciplines like Danza follow this type of rule and are therefore rooted in discriminatory practices, with an overtone of positivistic "scientific knowledge" that is justified through a perception of nature

as acceptable and logical (again, scientific). On the other hand, Tekpalichtiani compares the Tonalpohualli, the calendar of divination and astrology, to a "poetic science." Like them, most Macehuales in Xicago have built a vocabulary that categorizes their practices and worldviews as scientific and responding to nature (as something that is seen and codified in Codices and perceived through practices) as opposed to religion.

In this chapter I explore how those involved in Toltec and Aztec Revitalization Movements since the creation of Mexicayotl in the 1940s have made an effort to typify the knowledge as scientific rather than religious. Although scientific knowledge is valid in Indigenous communities, and a pushback against religion is a necessity for some non-Western cultures and peoples, I argue that use of the words "science" and "religion" by student-practitioners in Xicago creates moments of indoctrination and incongruity (ala J.Z. Smith)[154] which—while they may sometimes achieve temporary resolutions—often create problematic tensions in the construction of a belief system. I also argue that, due to this indoctrination, student-practitioners see the world and their relationships through symbols of nature that they employ to interpret their day-to-day lives. This process is different from other attempts to recover and reclaim scientific knowledge by Native and Indigenous individuals, such as Robin Wall Kimmerer[155] (2013) who—through the study of plants—asserts a connection between Indigenous thought and scientific knowledge, religion, and art.

[154] For J.Z. Smith (2004), incongruity comes from a place of dislocation and the need for order between the new and the old world. I use his terminology with caution, while acknowledging that the descriptive category is useful. However, I also distance myself from the idea of incongruity occurring at moments of "clash." Incongruity in this case should be seen as a dialogic moment when two differences are at play without resolution (Roberts 2009).

[155] In Kimmerer's case, however, she also reconciles that her own relationship with nature is part of her Indigenous religion, although she acknowledges that had been unaware of this. When students asked her if the way she treated plants and understood the natural world was part of her religion, she said that it was. And within that religion—that cosmovision of how she and nature cohabit and communicate—she reclaims a wisdom (or a knowledge) that can align with Western ideas and expectations of the scientific method.

In contraposition to this, the Macehuales in Xicago approach nature through symbols and engage in transferring the vocabulary of human activities (e.g. ritual or ceremony, respect and praise to nature, and other moral activities learned through practices) that in other contexts (like academic settings) would be considered religious.

I tried not to impose my own vocabulary and pragmatism on the discussions occurring in Matinauhkalli, despite being tempted to do so at times. Human experience is messy, and embracing messiness is hard to do in academic settings and research. However, I did encounter some historical discussion on why there is a pushback against the word "religion" and why there is such enthusiasm for embracing "science." In this chapter I have tried to make sense of this historical contestation around the use of vocabulary. The words "nature" and "science" come from a history of colonization and imposition of Spanish vocabulary and culture. Since the colonial period, Indigenous peoples in Mexico have been ashamed of their heritage and of identities that have lingered through generations. I believe, therefore, that despite the incongruity and moments of tension produced by the use of these words in Matinauhkalli, studying the calendar and the Codices teaches students to view symbols of nature as an intellectual armor against contemporary colonial practices, racism, and forced assimilation in Mexico and the U.S.

The title of this chapter is inspired by Phil Macnaghten and John Urry's *Bodies of Nature* (2001). In their introduction, Urry explains that while practices such as walking, hiking, and climbing in the outdoors engage the body and create a "culture of nature" (Urry 1), they are ultimately social practices reproducing ideas of what nature is. *Bodies of Nature* emphasizes embodied practices in contemporary European countries. In this chapter, I shift the focus onto how these practices are embodied to show how nature is understood and encoded as

both external and internal to our bodies, something that is primarily a discourse involving reclamation of time, space, and the body (individual and communal body of practitioners). More specifically, nature connects Macehuales in Xicago to an idea of place: Mexico-Tenochtitlán (a place that is tied to ideas of time). In addition, ideas about nature reinforce the understanding and interpretation of the Codices (especially those containing the Tonalpohualli) as ancient and sacred texts whose symbols portray animals, plants, and natural phenomena as being in perfect balance.

5.2 Notes on Methodology

In this chapter I use the interviews and ethnographic material that I collected from June 2017 to April 2019. For this chapter I rely especially on the notes I collected as a Tonalpohualli student for over two years. Because Tonalpohualli classes were offered online and in person, I was able to remain part of this community even when I left Xicago to reside in California.

I also recovered two main questions from the interview process. While interviewing student-practitioners, these questions helped me realize that the word "religion" was being rejected and revealed which vocabulary was most used by practitioners around these issues. In general, practitioners did not react well to words like "religion" or "religious". They even pushed back against "spiritual," since they view the word as being rooted in Christian thought and connected to the Holy Spirit. Their general response was to describe their practices as "scientific."

In more colloquial conversations practitioners would also use the word "knowledge." Since this is an established word for describing a body of thought, actions and beliefs, it is the word I have privileged and used throughout this dissertation. Ultimately, practitioners'

answers to questions around “religion” challenged my preconceived ideas and my expectations as a researcher. I found myself trying to find a middle ground, because while I did not feel comfortable with the use of the word “science” myself, I did not want to describe what I was seeing and experiencing in the field with words that practitioners were rejecting. I decided to base the dissertation vocabulary on the practitioners’ vocabulary and to follow up with a historical and contextual explanation of why those linguistic choices reveal moments of historical ideology and colonization.

I also incorporate some of the internal literature that people in Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations use and produce. Although literature is vast and heterogenous, it encompasses basic genres such as historical accounts (Romero Vargas Yturbide, Guillermo Marin, and Rodolfo Nieva), ethnohistorical interpretations of symbols and Codices (maestros Arturo Meza and Akaxe Gomez) and fictional narrative (Carlos Castañeda and Antonio Velasco Piña). From this vast literature I took information around the calendar from the work of Arturo Meza and Akaxe Gomez. In some instances, I also make reference to the first book on Mexicayotl, written by Rodolfo Nieva, which contains the first published Mexicayotl understanding of science vs religion.[156]

Most of this internal literature is issued in small and ephemeral publications through independent presses. Locating these books required ethnographic methods of research. Interactions with Toltec and Aztec groups made it possible for me to find much of the literature, with the exception of those books that were available in digitized versions.

[156] Although the literature of the Mexicayotl movement comes in a variety of genres, there are common topics that can be found in all the writers, such as the open rejection and contestation of academic production of Mesoamerican history; the idealization ('utopiazation') of Mesoamerican culture (either through the Aztec or the Toltec civilization); and the rejection of religion as a category.

By using both the internal vocabulary of practitioners in Xicago, and the vocabulary that has been constructed historically since the 1940s, I have tried to create a dialogue around ideas of "science" and "religion" in order to understand the pushback against certain terms and the incorporation of some categories at the expense of others.

5.3 Tonalpohualli: The Science of Time and the Exception of Religion

During the Spanish conquest, one of the most difficult tasks for conquistadors, aside from that of religious conversion, was time conversion. Time, for Spanish and Indigenous peoples in the Americas, was something of great value; it guided both civilizations, from quotidian activities to larger feasts and ceremonies. Spaniards and Aztecs spent many resources defining time and place, and both civilizations were cartographers of their lands[157] and skies.[158] After colonization, most of the people living in Mexico adapted their interpretation and perception of time to the European system, in accordance with the Gregorian calendar. Most contemporary Indigenous communities adjusted their months, weeks, and days to European time, and their *veintena* celebrations aligned with the Catholic Calendar of Feast Saints. The Aztec understanding of time was almost lost and unrecognizable, although some towns and communities incorporated certain calendric celebrations within the new calendar imposed by Europeans.

Despite all odds, one of the most powerful trends of Toltec and Aztec Revitalization Movements is the use of the ancient calendar. Most participants in these groups know the

[157] Barbara Mundy's (2015) book on Aztec Tenochtitlan and Mexico City presents a set of cartographies of the transition of a fully indigenous city to a colonial one and the remnants of Aztec culture.
[158] Antony Aveni (2012) explores how the idea of presenting the Aztec calendar as circular is a European construction based on the Renaissance interpretation of time. In addition, Elizabeth Hill-Boone (2013), and Johanna Broda (1998), among other scholars, offer calendar interpretations of the Tonalpohualli and its relationship to Aztec views on nature.

Aztec calendar—sometimes referred to as Tonalpohualli or Tonalamatl—as the Aztec form of astrology. It is common for people to get their Tonalamatl made by a teacher, usually receiving a complex explanation of their main sign ("potential") assigned by day of birth, their *trecena* assigned by a combination of day and year of birth, and the Lords (divinities) who accompany their day of birth. There are, however, more complicated layers involved in the use of this calendar. The way student-practitioners used the calendar in Xicago goes beyond the introductory "knowing your Tonalamatl"; it altered and guided their everyday lives, behaviors, expectations, and perceptions of the world.

Arguing against the perception that the calendar was sacred and used for divinatory purposes, contemporary Toltec and Aztec Revitalization participants have reconstructed the idea of the calendar as a fundamental scientific way of understanding numbers (math), nature (biological science and a record of planetary movements)[159] and the self (psychology).

The Tonalpohualli governs the behaviors and actions of people in Matinauhkalli. It is through the study of the Tonalpohualli that practitioners create a complex vocabulary to express who they are, what their environment is, and what marks them out as different (from other groups in Mexicayotl and Mexicans not using the Tonalpohualli). In other words, the use of calendrics renders them exceptional. Practitioners can use the Tonalpohualli to extract and narrate stories of their lives before and after Matinauhkalli. Time in Matinauhkalli is lived through a dual experience: practitioners incorporate and live through Tonalpohualli time while maintaining the Gregorian calendar and chronological time in their schedules (e.g. work and class timetables).

[159] For example, a record of Venus, the Moon and the Sun.

Participants inside the Mexicayotl Movement initiated the conversation between science, math, and the creation of calendar systems in the 1940s. These ideas were present in the MCRA magazine *Izkalotl* and also in the 1969 book *Mexicayotl*. Both publications advance an ideology proudly focusing on what Indigenous people knew and not what they believed in (Nieva 1969).

Some contemporary scholars, like David Carrasco, have noted the importance that time planed in Aztec society as a way of measuring human and natural phenomena (Carrasco 1982). In addition, Ross Hassig (2001) reaffirms the importance of the Tonalpohualli when he states that the calendar is an embodiment of how a society interprets time. Meanwhile, Gerardo Aldana (2011) has provided an archeological perspective on Mayan society, which he notes recognizes mathematics as a science and helps to clarify Mesoamerican history.

However, this in-betweenness of ancient practices in contemporary times leaves us with a conundrum where the study of the Tonalpohualli is viewed as scientific by practitioners, but as a sort of self-help manual by spiritual seekers. As with Danza, the calendar is more than one thing: it can function in terms which contradict, but do not exclude the other.

Day Sign Potencial (potential)	Regente Deity	Trecenas
Zipaktli (caiman)	Tonakatecutli	Ce Zipaktli
Ehekatl (wind)	Quetzalcoatl	Ce Ocelotl
Kalli (house)	Tepeyolohtli	Ce Mazatl
Kuetzpalli (lizard)	Huehuecoyotl	Ce Xochitl
Koatl (snake)	Chalchitlicue	Ce Akatl
Mikiztli (death)	Tonatiuh	Ce Mikiztli
Mazatl (deer)	Tonacatecutli	Ce Kiahuitl
Tochtli (rabit)	Mayahuel	Ce Malinalli
Atl (water)	Xiuhtecutli	Ce Koatl
Itzkuintli (dog)	Mictlantecutli	Ce Tekpatl
Ozomahtli (monkey)	Xochipilli	Ce Ozomatli
Malinalli (wild grass)	Pahtecatl	Ce Kuetzpalli
Akatl (reed)	Tezkatlipoka	Ce Ollin
Ozelotl (ocelot)	Tlazohteotl	Ce Itzkuintli
Kuauhtli (eagle)	Xipe-Totec	Ce Calli
Kozkakuauhtli (vulture)	Itzpapalotl	Ce Kozkakuauhtli
Ollin (movement)	Xolotl	Ce Atl
Tekpatl (flint)	Chalchiuh-totolin	Ce Ehekatl
Kiahuitl (rain)	Xolotl	Ce Kuauhtli
Xochitl (flower)	Xochiquetzalli	Ce Tochtli

Table 3. Tonalpohualli sings according to Revitalization interpretations. Some of the Deity companions change according to the calendric interpretation between historians and revitalizers.

5.4 A Brief Introduction to the Tonalpohualli – From the View of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations

One of the oldest texts compiled and written by a European and a colonizer in Mesoamerica is the *Florentine Codex* by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún.[160] Although the *Florentine Codex* is an encyclopedic attempt to describe the life and customs of Indigenous people in New Spain, one of the things that Sahagún writes about frequently is the use of calendars in Mesoamerica. Book IV of the *Florentine Codex* is a description of the Tonalpohualli Calendar, which he describes as follows: "La astrología judiciaria o arte de adivinar que estos mexicanos usaban para saber cuáles días eran bien afortunados y cuáles mal afortunados y qué condiciones tendrían los que nacían en los días atribuidos." (The judiciary astrology or divinatory art that these Mexicans used to find out which days were fortunate and which were not, and what conditions newborns born on certain days would experience.) (Sahagún, 1039). Following the chapter description, Sahagún explained his understanding of the 20-day signs as days of good or bad fortune. He states that whoever was born on a day of bad fortune would have a life determined by suffering and pessimistic faith. The tone Sahagún used to describe the calendar and time-practice has contributed to the idea of Aztecs being deterministic, credulous, and superstitious. Comparing the use of the calendar with European astrology, considered a science at the time, he wrote the following:

> Estos adivinos no se regían por los signos ni planetas del cielo, sino por una instrucción que según ellos dicen se la dejó Quetzalcoatl (…). Esta manera de adivinanza en ninguna manera puede ser lícita, porque ni se funda en la influencia de las estrellas, ni en cosa ninguna natural (…). Este

[160] The *Florentine Codex* is the name given by the texts compiled and glossed by Bernardino de Sahagún, who titled the collection *Historia General de las Cosas de Nueva España*. The Florentine Codex was written between 1540-1585 and depended upon the work and assistance of Indigenous people, who collected the information from elders. "Florentine" refers to where the text was save in the Laurentian Library in Florence, Italy.

> artificio de contar, o es arte de nigromántica o pacto y fábrica del demonio, lo cual con toda diligencia se debe desarraigar." (These soothsayers were not guided by the signs or by the planets of the sky, but by an instruction that they said came from Quetzalcoatl […]. This mode of divination cannot be licit, because it is not based on the influence of the stars or of anything natural. This artifice of storytelling is a necromantic art or pact with the devil, which must be diligently uprooted) (Sahagún, 215).

While many sixteenth century Europeans considered astrological knowledge part of their sciences, how the Aztecs and other Indigenous people counted "time" was classed as superstition and taken away from them because it was pagan.

In the colonial period, the Tonalpohualli was one of the most recorded subjects in both codex form (like the *Codex Borgia*, *Aubin* and *Borbonicus*) and Spanish chronicles (Sahagún, Durán, etc.) While some codices and chronicles were created to explain time and history before the Spanish conquest, Tonalpohualli documents are records of pre-Hispanic cosmovision. The Tonalpohualli was used to organize social life and also used to dictate personal "destiny."

Historians and archeologists have studied and reinterpreted the Tonalpohualli as a tool of the past used by people before colonization. However, adherents in Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations and Macehuales in Xicago learn and use the Tonalpohualli in their everyday lives, as a tool for understanding who they are and what they need to achieve in the process of becoming Macehuales. It is impossible to know how much of this calendric knowledge was influenced or "contaminated" by European thought. In *Circling the Square*, Anthony Aveni (2012) argues that the interpretation of Indigenous time as circular comes from a Renaissance visual representation of time in circles. For Ross Hassig (2001), Aztec interpretation of time was not circular but a "spiral," with long-term repetitions every 52 years, after which Xiuhtl (year) cycles would start over. As with Hassig's interpretation,

practitioners in Matinauhkalli view time as a spiral, allowing for repetition at the end of every 52-year cycle. These interpretations align with predictions and patterns at both social and individual levels, making the Tonalpohualli a calendar for prediction and prophesy as well.

What we called the Tonalpohualli is the study of the Aztec calendar of 260 days. Arturo Meza (2018) explains that Tonalpohualli comes from *tonalli*, meaning soul or destiny, and *pohualli*, meaning what can be counted.[161] Through this calendar, Mesoamerican societies (Toltec, Mixtec and Aztec) gather information that can be divided into two groups: 1) the day sign, given to each person at birth (also the assigned name in Aztec society, what practitioners at Matinauhkalli call the "potential"); and 2) the 13-day cycles that correlate with the potentials (marked as "weeks" and known as *trecenas*). According to Hassig (2001), the Tonalpohualli has been thought of as a 20-day count, but it is actually organized by a 13-day count. The trecenas hold more specialized information—like the type of regent (Lord of the Day), Lord of the Night, and the bird (*volátiles*)—that accompanies and complements the potential.

As in Aztec the era, when the Tonalpohualli was a separate calendar that worked alongside the solar calendar, both calendars interlock simultaneously in Matinauhkalli. The solar, or agricultural calendar, holds 20-day cycles that guide ceremonies and the 5-day period of the turning of the year (called the *Nemontemis,* and similar to New Year's Eve, but lasting 5 days). The annual cycle, called Xiutl, ran similarly as the Gregorian year, totaling 365 days: 18 months of 20 days (360 days), plus the 5 days of the Nemontemi. Students in

[161] Meza's translation and interpretation of the word tonalpohualli varies from its ethimological meaning which is: tonally (day), pohualli (count), count of days.

Mainauhkalli follow both calendars in their everyday life and study the Tonalpohualli calendar actively.

An introductory approach to the Tonalpohualli today involves learning the 20-day potentials to be assigned at birth. These symbols (*Cipactli*, *Ehekatl*, *Calli*, etc.) are combined with numbers from 1 to 13, meaning that each symbol can be complemented by numerological interpretation. For example, it is not the same to be "Ce Cipactli" (1 lizard) as it is to be "Matlahti-ome Cipactli" (12 lizard). According to Arturo Meza Gutierrez, numbers are important because they weave an energy or vital force. The combination of the number (13 with its Lords and Birds) with the potentials (20 signs) and the trecenas influenced humans and their environment (Meza 2018, 113). In sum, this calendar combines 20 potentials, with the numerical value of 13, giving a total of 260 different combinations.

While Macehuales from Xicago refer to the study of the Tonalpohualli as "scientific," I argue that their use of the word "science" to replace "religion" is an incongruent pushback against colonial categories. I lost count of how many times I heard student-practitioners say "This is science, not religion," as a way of defending their practice, differentiating and detaching it from Christian tradition, and justifying the study of time, the intellectual labor invested, and the logic applied to the concepts they were learning. In practitioners' studies of symbols, language, and ideas I detected more in common with what theologians do than with what scientists do. At the end of the day, rather than going through a process of empirical verification and refutation, practitioners were basing their knowledge on Codex interpretations, which were limited to the interpretations of their teachers (Akaxe Gomez and Arturo Meza).

It was also evident that ideas of "purity" and "authenticity" of Indigenous thought and practice before colonization were extremely important to students and teachers because—they argued—anthropologists, historians, and archeologists have not understood the "real" significance of the codices and their interpretations have been "contaminated" by Western (or Catholic) thought.

Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz, who challenged patriarchal Catholic theology and created a *mujerista* theology explains how the praxis of "Hispanic" women within their own historical context and agency to create actions for their own struggle and survival is at the center of of the theological project. Moreover, it is a "process of conscientization, a process of self-identification and self-definition for Latinas" (Díaz, Loc. 3020). Expanding on her research, we could argue that the study of the Tonalpohualli and the physical disciplines constitutes a cluster of knowledge and praxis that creates a sort of Macehual Theology (or Mexica Theology, depending on the group's affiliation). That is theology as a type of theorizing out of experience applies here. This theology, like any other, has a set of rules that shape behaviors, praxis, and thought. Because practitioners in Aztec and Toltec revitalization movements aspire to be like their ancestors before colonization they invest in principles and practices for self-identification. Seeing these movements as a form of theology may help understand ideology as institutionalized.

The calendar, therefore, is a tool that helps Macehuales understand themselves, others, and their world. It is a tool of interpretation and ceremonial guidance. Although knowing and understanding the Tonalpohualli is dependent on their teachers' interpretations, it also takes time. Student-practitioners diligently take classes in the form of lectures once a week; they also take complementary workshops, and purchase and read books by their teachers. As with

Danza, the study of the Tonalpohualli requires an investment of time and money by student-practitioners.

5.5 Pedagogies of Macehual Philosophy. How Tonalpohualli is Taught in Matinauhkalli

In this section I will explain how Tonalpohualli is taught today and how practitioners use it. Some of these descriptions may differ from professional archeologists' arguments and discoveries, but it is important to value the study of Toltec Aztec histories—and thus the study of the Tonalpohualli as an ongoing practice, which is different from the archeological and historical approximations of the calendar and its use in pre-Colombian Mexico. That is not to say that archeological inquiries are wrong; on the contrary, it is an invitation for scholars to consider alternative forms of history without negating or silencing them through judgment, and to see the codices not just as documents of the past, but also as living texts continuously generating tradition.

In Matinauhkalli and other Calpullis, like Maestro Arturo Meza's Calpulli Toltecayotl and the MCRA in Mexico City, the study of the Tonalpohualli is equated with the study of philosophy. Tonalpohualli classes are mainly about the calendar. Classes start with an explanation of the mathematical component involved in understanding the difference between the Gregorian calendar and the Tonalpohualli calendar, but quickly move on to the interpretation of each potential. Tonalpohualli also teaches practitioners how Aztec and Toltec societies viewed the world in order to model for them how they should interpret their reality and shape their behavior. In these classes there is also a heavy component making students "relearn" Mesoamerican and Mexica history and so "decolonize" their thinking.

On an introductory level, the first two things students relearn are that:

1) Teotls are not gods, but forces of nature or historical ranks.[162] For example, (Yayahuiki) Tezcatlipoka, labeled god of the night sky, is actually interpreted as "Nuestro pensamiento, como el principal aliado o el principal enemigo de nosotros mismos" (Our thinking, that is our main ally and also our main enemy) (Meza Gutierrez 2017: 72). It is also "nuestro subconsciente, al que pocos seres humanos llegan a acceder y muchos menos a dominar." (Our subconscious, which few people can access and even fewer can tame.) (Meza Gutierrez 2017: 179). As a rank, Tezcatlipoka is a person that "Ha despertado al máximo su potencial de sensibilidad logrando influir realmente en los demás" (Has awakened their potential for sensitivity to the maximum, managing to really influence others) (Meza Gutierrez 2017: 178). This explanation, in which teotls are part of oneself or ranks, is given with other concepts such as Quetzalcoatl, Huitzilopochtli, Coatlicue, Xipe-totec, and Tonantzin (just to mention a few of the most common). In these re-interpretations, the deification of these figures is deconstructed and placed into the realm of nature and society, instead of myth and the supernatural.

The process of resignification of Aztec symbols originated in the 1940s with the MCRA and has continued by different groups in Mexico and the U.S. Although this abstraction may seem like a process of secularization—and it is precisely the "end of the gods" idea that allows practitioners to say this is *not* a religion—a closer analysis may privilege the idea of resignification rather than secularization. In this case, Aztec gods stop being gods, but they do not stop being forces and symbols that explain and influence he human condition.

[162] Traditionally, "teotl" has been translated as "god". However, Molly Bassett (2015) ethimological analysis opens the discussion of "teotl" as being a complex concept in Aztec religion. For Bassett, the different layers of "teotl" may connect Aztec ritual with Aztec understanding of nature (earthly things). Although my work shifts to explore contemporary Revitalization practices, it seems that the way in which religion and nature are entangled is relevant in the study of both Mesoamerican and Revitalization beliefs.

2) The Tonalamatl (which is the specific use of Tonalpohualli to find a person's day sign according to their birth) is not like astrology. The day sign of a person does not correspond to the "fortune" a person will have in life, or to a set of personality traits. Instead, the day sign acts as a guide to the forces that are associated and accentuated within the specific day sign for that person. For example, according to Western astrology, I am a Capricorn. Being a Capricorn supplies me with certain defining personality traits, all stemming from the day and time I was born. But while the Tonalamatl has been considered the equivalent of astrological practices by some Mexicayotl groups, teachers like Arturo Meza and Akaxe stress that the birth sign is actually a *potential*: it is a reminder of who you *aspire* to be. For example, in the Tonalamatl my potential is Matlahtli (10) Cozcakuauhtli (vulture), which suggests an aptitude for pragmatism and hoarding. For Arturo Meza, people born into this potential are "Personas llenas de habilidades prácticas. Saben aprovechar al máximo lo que otros ya han desechado" (People full of practical abilities. They know how to take full advantage of things that others have thrown away) (Meza Gutierrez 2017: 189). For Akaxe, potentials are qualities that we have not yet unlocked, but which—through rigorous training, practice and discipline—we may achieve. Potentials are not a given.

In Akaxe's classes on Tonalpohualli in Xicago, the 20 "potenciales" of the Tonalpohualli, also have a distinctive pedagogy. All 20 potentials are believed to be inside us, but one may be dominant. In his classes, Akaxe, explains that during the gestation period we develop all 20 potentials. However, the potential that is assigned on our day of birth is the one that is implicit in our development for our first seven years of life. Akaxe also notes that there is no written destiny, and that as humans we receive stimuli from society and our families that partly determines our behavior (Fieldnotes, October 2018).

According to Akaxe's pedagogy, potentials represent three different areas of life. These are called "qualities" and can be interpreted individually or holistically. The three "qualities" within which potentials are studied are: universal, natural, and psychological. The universal qualities in the 20 potentials are those concepts that "are universal and abstract" (Gomez Ramirez 2015, 25). The natural qualities "encompass the sphere in which Life-Death as we know it on Tlaltikpak[163] manifests itself" (Gomez Ramirez 2015, 25) and include processes of biological evolution. Finally, the psychological qualities are the "thoughts and behaviors of the human being" (Gomez Ramirez 2015, 25). Potentials can also be divided into three major groups: 1) potentials with animal qualities (e.g. Cipactli/caiman, Kuetzpallin/lizard, Ozomatli/monkey, etc.); 2) potentials that are symbols of material objects (e.g. Kalli/house and Tekpatl/flint); and 3) potentials that are forms of nature (Ehekatl/wind, Atl/water, Kiahuitl/rain). There is also one symbol that is "intangible": Ollin/movement.

Most of the Tonalpohualli symbols/potentials are thought of as guides to human emotion and as natural symbols from which we can all learn. And, although Akaxe does explain the three qualities of the potentials, his classes mostly focus on teaching ways of modifying human behaviors and understanding human psychology. For example, the symbol Kiahuitl (rain), which we might assume to be a natural force, also has connotations of human behaviors. In a class dealing with Kiahuitl, we also learned that we need to moderate our passions and be balanced:

> Una persona que sabe llover, no va a bloquear, sino redirigirte. Pero, ¿cuáles son los riesgos de ser Kiahuitl? Cuando no se sabe, o las personas son muy débiles, o son demasiado atravancados, pasionales, viscerales. O muy fríos, insípidos, inmutables. Las personas que salen a la calle y que dicen que hacen la revolución son demasiado Kiahuitl, pero si se cree que no hay nada que vale en la vida, el 'para qué hacemos algo', entonces se

[163] Tlaltikpal refers to the Earth and the life we live on it.

> está frío; nada nos hace reaccionar, entonces ¿dónde está la voluntad propia? Riesgos de no saber cómo centrarse. Todos tenemos los extremos en nuestro caracter. Lo importante es saber mantenerse en medio. La lluvia puede ser destructiva, pero también puede ser insuficiente. (A person who knows how to rain [sic] is not going to obstruct you, but rather redirect you. But what is the risk of being Kiahuitl? When a person doesn't know, or is too weak, impulsive, passionate, or visceral. Or when a person is cold, insipid, immutable. A person who takes to the streets to start a revolution is *too* Kiahuitl. But if a person thinks there's nothing worthwhile in life, and is like "Why bother doing anything?" then that person is cold, and nothing will make that person react, so where is the self-will? The risk is not knowing how to focus. We all have extremes in our character. The important thing is knowing how to be in the middle. Rain can be destructive, but it can also be insufficient) (Fieldnotes, December 2, 2018).

In addition to the 20 potentials in Tonalpohualli classes, we also learned about the *regentes* (regents), which are forces that accompany the potential. The symbols represented as regents have been interpreted as gods and goddesses in Mesoamerican studies. However, since Mexicayotl moves away from ideas of gods, regents are better viewed as forces that complement the teachings of behavior through nature. For example, the regent of Cipactli (the first potential) is Tonakatekutli. According to Akaxe, Cipactli represents the first step of biological evolution—what humans were *before* they were humans—and therefore its regent, Tonakatekutli, represents the vital energy that we all need to live: the tonal. For Akaxe and his students, Tonalpohualli is proof why these symbols are not gods:

> Una más de las pruebas que permiten mantener el argumento de que estos no eran dioses, sino conceptos de estudio de la naturaleza. Por que aquí vemos como son constantes dualidades. El regente de Atl es Xiuhtecutli, y de Kiahuitl es Tonatiuh. Estas personas sabían de las aguas que se encuentran, de la creación de tormentas, etc., fenómenos atmosféricos que hacen que las cosas pasen. Sabían qué era lo que se necesitaba para que lloviera, y sabían que no era una danza o un sacrificio, sino que era la fuerza del sol." (Another of the proofs that allow us to argue that these are not gods, but concepts of the study of nature, is that we can see their constant dualities. The regent of Atl [water] is Xiuhtecutli [celestial rays of sun], and the regent of Kiahuitl [rain] is Tonatiuh [sun]. These people [those who created the Tonalpohualli] knew about water, storms, and so on: atmospheric phenomena that make things happen. They knew what

> they needed to have rain, and they knew it was not a dance or a sacrifice but the force of the sun) (Fieldnotes December 2, 2018).

Although Matinauhkalli made every effort to connect each symbol to nature and the human psyche, regents would sometimes veer towards aspects of life that were neither material nor emotional, opening a window to a mystical world that students could only access theoretically. Although there interest in metaphysical experiences, there was little connection with praxis. For example, in one class we learned about the regent for Cozcakuauhtli, Izpapalotl:

> Fuerza natural que se emana en la tierra, es implícita en la tierra. Se emana más fuertemente bajo la noche, con la influencia de la luna. Solo unas personas pueden percibir la Izpapalotl, porque es una fuerza tan sutil que solo algunos la perciben. Cuando se activa la Izpapalotl, se perciben cosas sin verlas. Todo en el entorno está implícito, como si fuera una segunda vista. Percibir las cosas en forma esencial. También está en la esfera universal, natural y humana (A natural force that emanates from the earth, that is implicit on the earth. It emanates more strongly at night because of the influence of the moon. Only a few people can perceive the Izpapalotl, because it is a subtle force that only a few can perceive. When the Izpapalotl is activated, one can perceive things without seeing them. All the surroundings are implicit like a second sight. One can perceive things in their essence. [Izpapalotl] is also in the universal, natural and human sphere) (November 4, 2018).

After this explanation several students wanted to know more. They asked questions such as: How can we access the Izpapalotl? How can we know if we have accessed it? Questions and conversations about metaphysical experiences were not uncommon in Matinauhkalli. Akaxe did not permit a full dialogue on this topic, however. Only very advanced individuals can access the Izpapalotl, he concluded, and brought the conversation to a close.

It was in this same class, on November 4, 2018, that Akaxe reminded students that study of the Tonalpohualli was scientific. This was right after teaching how a symbol has implicit forces that help some people "perceive things that cannot be seen." It is common for

practitioners beginning their journey in Matinauhkalli to describe it as a "spiritual" experience, but these conversations soon come up against a language that privileges the use of the word "science" over "religion," "spirituality," or "sacredness," and this ends up silencing students' experiences in the classroom. Students are taught to speak and to behave in accordance with Akaxe's interpretation of the Macehual. In line with Huehuetlatolli discourse, during naming ceremonies, Akaxe refers to his students as "piedritas de obsidiana" (obsidian stones), who are being carved into gemstones from their raw form.

Students who have been at Matinauhkalli for several years or more, but who have not been given the status of "advanced students," have an interesting take on "religion." They have been indoctrinated to describe what they have learned as "science" and to avoid words like "religion," "spiritual," "the spirit," and "sacred." More generally, they use the word "knowledge" for everyday descriptions of their belief system. However, students with an advanced status and with access to more information on Tonalpohualli are better at mediating and accepting the "non-scientific" world. When speaking with Zitlaltokan about knowledge having a sacred quality in itself, this dichotomy was evident:

> That's a good question because it is easy for me to call it a spirituality but it's not, it is science, what we are learning and Maestro Meza says, you know, *todo tiene su fundamento, todo tiene su por qué y cuando preguntamos las preguntas siempre hay un recurso donde hallar la respuesta* [everything has its foundation/essence, everything has its reason why. And every time you have questions there are resources for finding the answers]. The other thing is that… there are two things, there are things that have a foundation, but they're also saying that… like when we talk about the *chanequitos*, no? Or *los chalmas densos*, that really doesn't have a foundation, there is nothing kind of solid that we could say is scientifically proven, so I guess there has to be a certain degree of belief with what we're doing, because a lot of it—I want to say 95% or 99% of it—is scientific, and then there's this other percent that comes a few times, in a few classes, in a few conversations that might not have that scientific proof, so… *especialmente cuando hacemos ceremonias* when someone passed away… *me toco ver dos*… and I have never seen anything like it

> […]. Physically, I can think about all the books of Maestro Meza and say, yes, this is science, but then there is just a small percentage that I cannot say I know why, but that I believe to be true. I believe *chaneques densos* are true and that is why I do not pray, that is what I do not ask, that is why I am just grateful and that is why I only do offerings (Zitlaltokatzin, interviewed April 10, 2020).

Zitlaltokan's discussion of "science" and the things he cannot explain reflects the struggle that many Indigenous peoples and belief systems undergo when grappling with the idea of the scientific as something that is incorporated in their worldview. In *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants,* Robin Wall Kimmerer narrates her struggles as a young biology student in a world where Western and Indigenous worldviews of plants and nature collide. She shares a story of a professor asking her if she would rather study art than science, since otherwise she would focus "too much" on the beauty of plants. For many Indigenous peoples the conceptual separations of "art," "science," and "religion" can be categories that correspond more to Western thought than to Indigenous thinking. In my experience at Matinauhkalli these three categories seemed to be interwoven in the thoughts and actions of student-practitioners in their everyday lives.

The word "science" is sometimes used to describe the *imaginaire* of symbols, the biological process, and other experiences that may fall otherwise into categories of "art" and "religion". For example, in some Tonalpohualli classes, Akaxe explained "la ciencia de la Makuilxochitl" (literally: the five-flower science) as a science that encompassed forms of art and "sports," like the *juego de pelota* or Danza but, according to Akaxe, these sciences have an internal philosophy beyond bodily movement. For him, ancestral philosophy and physical discipline were not separate, so he works to reproduce this thought and praxis connection in his classes.

The discourse around "science" is also a way of replacing the vocabulary produced by Catholicism. As mentioned earlier, instead of using the word "gods" or "teotl," people in Toltec and Aztec Revitalization Movements, including Matinauhkalli, frequently refer to such entities as "sciences." For example, I heard Akaxe say that Xipe-Totec, Tlazohteotl, Quetzalcoatl, and Tezcatlipoka were all sciences, each describing a type of knowledge (e.g. the movement of the stars and Venus; the cycles of life and death, the cycles of childbirth, etc.)

Student-practitioners are trained to accept the term "science." I noticed, however, that less experienced students were more accepting of the word "religion." New students communicated in a more intuitive way, and were bolder about describing their experiences without using linguistic filters. Ana, for example, had a clear idea of how this path was a spiritual one for her. Similarly, Crystal would joke about the community being a cult: "Like, I call fraternities 'cults.' Whether this is a cult or not, I see it as such as well […] I mean, people have left and come back [from Matinauhkalli] and nothing has happened to them, *pero* I don't know… if I'm in a cult, I'm ok being in a cult, hahaha." (Crystal, interviewed March 15, 2019).

There were several instances when the word "religion" was renegotiated by Akaxe, resulting in a temporary acceptance of it by everyone. In one class Akaxe explained that if we were to use "religion" in its etymological sense then we *could* say that we were practicing a religion, but since the word has acquired other connotations, it is better not to use it:

> Religión, viene de re-ligar, volver a unir. En principio una religión debería reconectarte con algo, lo que te creó, la fuente de la creación. En el sentido estricto esto te está reconectando, sin embargo, no hay dioses, la forma en la que nos reconectamos es lo que tenemos dentro, la memoria ancestral y la naturaleza. Una religion no es algo necesariamente físico, sino algo mental (…). Entonces cuando decimos religión, hay que explicar todo, es

> mejor no usamos esa palabra y mejor decir que esto es una raíz, que es moral y filosófica. No es un rescate de las raíces, sino un rescate de las sociedades que están alejadas de esa raíz para encontrar orden y armonía (Religion comes from *re-ligare*, to re-link. In principle, a religion should reconnect you with something, the source of creation. In a strict sense this is reconnecting you, but there are no gods, what we reconnect to is what we have inside us: our ancestral memory and nature. Religion is not necessarily physical, it is mental. So when we say "religion," we have to explain all of this, so it's better not to use the word. It's better to say that this is a root, because this is moral and philosophical. It is not about rescuing roots, it is about rescuing societies that have strayed from their roots, so that they can find order and harmony) (July 29, 2018).

All the students nodded approval at this. Everyone understood and accepted that what they were practicing was reconnection to their roots, a *re-ligare* to the time and place of their ancestors, a *re-ligare* to their own memory. After this instance of full acceptance, the teacher and student-practitioners refrained from using the word "religion" again. Maybe the explanation was not worth it; maybe "science" was a safer word. And then the time for ceremony came.

5.6 *Veintenas* and Ceremony. A Psychological Connection to the Cycles of Nature

In Matinauhkalli, ideas about time, ceremony and nature are intimately connected. For Macehuales "nature" dictates the ceremonial calendar. And, although they follow the system of *veintenas* used in pre-Hispanic Mexico, ceremonies and symbols are adjusted and re-signified to life in Xicago, where the changing of seasons is more drastic and obvious than in Central Mexico.

After seeing how people in Matinauhkalli use the words "science" and "religion," one might think that student-practitioners would use the word "religion" for the practice of the 20-day cycle veintenas and the ceremonies held at Matinauhkalli. However this is not the

case. All use of the word "religion" is avoided, even in ceremonial contexts. Instead students use either the word "ceremony" (not ritual) or they talk about the specific veintena they are entering (e.g. Toxcatl).

Despite the fact that ceremony (or ritual) is usually linked to ideas of religion, people in Matinauhkalli have rejected and dismissed this term on almost every occasion. J.Z. Smith and other scholars of religion have contextualized religion as part of Western tradition, as something used mainly in academia to create categories and describe a human experience that is purportedly unique and different from other human experiences (Smith, 2004). In the United States, religion has a history of legality that has pushed Native American communities to adopt it and embrace it in order to practice their ceremonies, dances, and community gatherings freely (Wenger, 2009). Religion has also helped Native Americans in U.S. territory to enter history and make claims of sovereignty over their lands and bodies (Johnson 2007; McMillen 2007).

However, in contrast to the U.S., religion in Mexico became synonymous with both colonial and institutional practices dominated by the Catholic Church during the colonial period, expanding to include Christian denominations after the nineteenth century. Therefore, in everyday life in Mexico, the word "religion," is typically used for European monotheistic religions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism). For this reason there is often a general bias against the word, even amongst movements that could be considered religions. For example, *curanderismo* is considered a type of religious practice by U.S. academics (Hendrickson 2014), but in Mexico, not only is it not considered so, but the word "curanderismo" does not exist as such. In Mexico, especially in the State of Veracruz where I have lived, curanderismo is defined through the practitioner (*curandera/curandero*) rather than the

practice. Curanderos are common among families and are easy to find in markets and public spaces where they offer healing, but the practice is not considered a religious activity.

For groups in the Toltec and Aztec revitalization movements, Danza is seen as ceremony (Collin 2-14, Luna 2011). In Matinauhkalli however, Danza has a ritualistic aspect to it (see Chapter 4), although it is not quite a ceremony. Ceremonial activity occurs around the veintenas. These ceremonies are an intimate encounter and performative act student-practitioners share with their teacher and that reflects how they understand their relationship with "nature" and one another. As with many Toltec and Aztec Revitalization groups there is a generalized view of the Western world as doomed. This pessimistic vision of the world—and more precisely of capitalist society—relies on a rejection of colonialism and, with it, an assumption that Western/colonial thought separates the human body from its natural environment. Thus, ceremonies are a way to reconnect humans who have been separated from nature. To allow this union to happen, practitioners rely on the act of offering. Akaxe instructs how offerings and ceremonies are not for "nature" *per se*, but for the people who need to reconnect to it:

> The whole point of doing ceremonies is not for nature. There is no force in nature that punishes you if there is no offering, but your body does. We don't do ceremonies to please forces of nature, because they just are what they are: an exchange of energy. We do the ceremonies for us. For our ancestral memory. To be able to create bonds and express ourselves in the way other people did and to be able to transmit to future generations how we take care of ourselves (Akaxe, Fieldnotes, August 5, 2018).

In Matinauhkalli ceremonies have a symbolic and psychological *reason de être* and student-practitioners are indoctrinated to understand ceremony as such. In several classes, and especially in lectures presented before ceremonies, Akaxe provides an introduction

explaining that ceremonies are a psychological way to connect with nature. This is also reflected in how student-practitioners treat the calendar.

In 2018, when I participated in the ceremony for the Nemontemi (the shift of the year), I was surprised that the first ceremony was on Tuesday at 11 am. I wondered how this inconvenient time may affected people's lives and schedules. When I mentioned this to Ikiltezi, however, she responded "Nature doesn't obey time," implying that we had to adjust to how nature was reflecting itself, how the planets were aligning, etc. However, in one of the Nemontemi ceremonies, Akaxe said the opposite, positioning the notion of time as central to the ceremony. I noted in my diary that "at 12:45 Maestro asked everyone to sit in a circle and explained that we were at the astronomical moment of the shift of the year. He said that, unlike Gregorian New Year's Eve, this shift of the year should be a moment of reflection and perception of our senses and nature" (Fieldnotes, March 13, 2019). Nature does not obey Western time, but there we were, attaching time to nature, or better said, connecting our perceptions of time to nature. 12:45 pm was the moment we shifted from one year to the next.

Veintenas marked the changes of nature every 20 days. The calendar was constructed in Central Mexico, a region with very different weather from Xicago, but Akaxe explained that the veintenas are somewhat flexible and that you can adapt them to the place you are living. Some veintenas, then, make more sense in Mexico City, while others make more sense in Xicago. For example, in Xicago, the Ochpaniztli veintena (September 28-October 17) has taken on greater significance, since it marks the transition to fall and the start of cold weather.

Although Matinauhkalli does not celebrate every veintena, the veintenas Akaxe chooses to celebrate with student-practitioners are prepared over time and with intentionality. Since the ceremonies of the veintenas are one of the moments when Matinauhkalli opens to the public student-practitioners and Akaxe present themselves in their best gowns and in their best behavior. Before the ceremony, students of the physical discipline classes rehearse what they will offer in the ceremony (danzas, chants, Yaotiliztli moves, and sometimes archery presentation). The time for preparing ceremony is also a time for cleaning and decorating the space. Ceremonial activity is considered to be a showcase and an act of renewal itself.

For new student-practitioners the first ceremony is often a moment of intense recognition. They get nervous and excited at the same time. I also noticed that other student-practitioners would express nervousness or stress when ceremony time came. In Akaxe's teachings ceremony is not "a performance" but an offering and a psychological way for people to acknowledge nature's changes. Students understand that they are not expected to "perform" for guests, but ceremony is, nonetheless, a time for them to prove themselves to their teacher. This teacher-student relationship is a non-verbal one and reveals a power relationship based on expectations and approval-seeking.

Although a ceremony is not a "performance," it is usually attended by guests who watch and participate to some extent when permitted. People invited to Matinauhkalli during ceremony are not usually being recruited as future students. Most individuals attending ceremonies either have a personal invitation from a student-practitioner or are for former students who had stopped taking classes but were still accepted in the space.

As mentioned above, the ultimate goal of ceremony is to create a psychological connection. Ceremonies are also an occasion when "sacred time" is reproduced, when the

psychological connection to nature may be extended to a mythical time and space. In ceremony, the reproduction of the practices, clothing, and even some of the speech form Aztec sources recreates Mesoamerican society as a utopian place and time of perfection. Ceremony reproduces an idealization of Aztec society as one that is perfect, in total synchrony with nature, and with an ideal social balance among its inhabitants.

However, because we were all shut inside a room with no windows, nature was, ironically, not present during the ceremony. Nature was a symbol, something that we could not physically observe, like the movement of the planets, the cold winter air of Xicago, the falling snow, and the gardens and forests that we knew existed outside those walls that momentarily contained us.

Shift of the year Complementary 5-day period. First week of March.	**Nemontemi**
Month 1	**Atlacahualo**
Month 2	**Tlacaxipehualiztli**
Month 3	**Tozoztontli**
Month 4	**Ueitozoztli**
Month 5	**Toxcatl**
Month 6	**Etzalcualiztli**
Month 7	**Tecuilhuitontli**
Month 8	**Ueitecuilhuitl**
Month 9	**Tlaxochimaco**
Month 10	**Xocotlhuetzi**
Month 11	**Ochpaniztli**
Month 12	**Teotlehco**
Month 13	**Tepeilhuitl**
Month 14	**Quecholli**
Month 15	**Panquetzaliztli**
Month 16	**Atemoztli**
Month 17	**Tititl**
Month 18	**Izcalli**

Table 4. Veintena calendar. Each month holds approximately 20-day period, as its name in Spanish suggests. The days are mobile and its calculation is made every year by the maestros to determine the shift of the year and the beginning and end of each month.

5.7 Everyday Incorporation of Calendric Practices

Except for the houseplants at the entrance, nature was not present in Matinauhkalli, a space constructed in the middle of an industrial city.[164] Nonetheless, student-practitioners used what they learned during ceremony and from the Tonalpohualli as tools in their everyday lives. Students employ the intellectual exercises they practiced in Matinauhkalli in their interactions with friends, family members, and the world in general. Depending on each student's level of study, incorporating Tonalpohualli symbols into their everyday lives would range from recognizing the symbols of the day and knowing their own Tonalamatl to creating narratives that explained life events through such symbols.

Tonalpohualli knowledge impacted the everyday lives of practitioners, resulting in their living what I consider to be "dualistic time." Stefan Tanaka has explained (2019) how time in modern/Western societies has been defined in Newtonian terms, which is abstract and chronological. Tanaka contrasts this chronological time with that used by "archaic"/non-Western societies. By this logic, the two types of time in human history are: 1) linear, mathematical, chronological, external time, which is Western; and 2) circular and internal time, which is non-Western. To add to Tanaka's conception of time I would argue that there are two more alternatives for seeing and living time: 1) spiral time, which, in contraposition to circular time, does not repeat itself but is neither linear nor teleological (i.e. Aztec time); and 2) dualistic time, which is what many in colonized societies experience when negotiating more than one calendar system, and is what I observed in Matinauhkalli.

[164] Although Chicago has natural spaces, and people from Matinauhkalli sometimes use these spaces to perform ceremony, Matinauhkalli is in a very urban area with little in the way of nature.

Practitioners in Matinauhkalli live in dualistic time because they obey linear time as an external force imposed by colonialism and modernity, while simultaneously incorporating spiral time through the practice of ceremony and the study of the calendar. In some cases, the Tonalpohualli is not only incorporated into their everyday lives, but even prioritized over the Gregorian calendar. Many student-practitioners organize their days, months, and years according to the Tonalpohualli, and use everyday symbols to bring intentionality to their daily activities. On one occasion Tlayolotl explained to me how she used the Tonalpohualli:

> I like to do gardening, so I will pick a day when I want to germinate my seeds on a water elements day, or my dreams as well… However, my dreams currently relate to the veintenas. For example, I will register the days of the Tonalpohualli instead of the Gregorian calendar, so it's interesting how my life is influenced by this 'cuz also the ceremonies have a big psychological impact on you and that is the whole purpose, for you to transition (Tlayolotl interviewed October 23, 2018).

As with Tlayolotl, who uses the Tonalpohualli to plan the day she germinates seeds or to analyze her dreams, I found other student-practitioners making life decisions based on their Tonalpohualli knowledge. Once after class, two student-practitioners were talking about where to go out that night. One of them noted that it was an Ozomatli day and so "we should not go drinking." Ozomatli—the symbol of the monkey—signifies playfulness, but also messiness and the possibility of losing control. The pair joked about what might happen if we went drinking on an Ozomatli day and so, instead of grabbing a beer, we decided to have dinner at a sushi bar. Sushi was a safer bet that night.

Besides using the Tonalpohualli to plan their days, as in the example above, student-practitioners use the calendar to understand themselves, analyze others, and build alliances between symbols. This has two main repercussions for practitioners. On the one hand, they become more aware of personality traits, while on the other, they understand the "potential"

as a symbol of becoming, something they have to "unlock" by working on their own discipline. Thus, the Tonalamatl potential becomes both a part of students' identity and a way of building relationships. More advanced students of Tonalpohualli shared with me that they take into consideration the Tonalamatl of friends and family to "understand them better."

The Tonalamatl therefore becomes a tool that students use outside their classes in Matinauhkalli and that permeates their relationships and influences how they understand the people around them. On one occasion Tlayolotl showed me a Google doc she had created to record the birthdays of family and friends and their assigned signs. Ikiltezi also expressed how important this was for her: "I want to see them primarily because of their potentials and I want to understand how I can *llevarme con ellos* (get along with them) better, so I oftentimes ask people for their birthdays. I make sure that's one of the first things I know about them. Also, in political figures… I look at their birthdays online and I'm like 'hold on!'" (Ikiltezi, interviewed October 24, 2018). Knowing the potential of someone helps students create a preconceived idea, which becomes a tool for relationships and a way of knowing what to expect from others.

It is also common to see student-practitioners creating "alliances" inside Matinauhkalli according to their potential or their trecena. At one point Ixpahuatzin told me that she had never had an alliance because she was a Tochtli (rabbit), a symbol that was less popular. By an alliance Ixpahuatzin was referring to a type of relationship of mutual understanding, even comradery, without being a friendship. Similarly, after I arrived at Matinauhkalli and got my Tonalamatl done by Akaxe, Ikiltezi become closer to me because we were both Cozcakuauhtli. Although Akaxe has been critical of this practice, and does not approve of

students using the calendar to create alliances, I saw that this was a way in which students created relationships of affinity with one another.

The Tonalpohualli is the most employed tool for student-practitioners and the main guide to ceremony. However, there are other sets of guides that help student-practitioners incorporate the knowledge into their everyday lives. The two main tools used by student-practitioners to regulate their behaviors and be "better" in society are the "20 Consejos" (the 20 pieces of advice) and the Four Principles of the Macehual.

The "20 Consejos" are prescriptive proverbs created by Maestro Arturo Meza Gutierrez, Akaxe's Tonalpohualli teacher. According to Meza, the Consejos were compiled by him from different Indigenous sources and are a reflection of Indigenous thought and behavior. The proverbs follow a rhetoric similar to that used in Nahuatl, where metaphors are presented without explanation. In his classes, Akaxe would refer to and explain the proverbs in a non-systematic way. That is to say, these proverbs are not taught by Akaxe (or Maestro Meza) in a single class or organized manner; instead, they are used and taught within other practices. For example Akaxe explained Consejo 5 in several Danza and Tonalpohualli classes while I was part of Matinauhkalli: "El frío y el calor pueden romper la piedra sola" (Cold and heat can break the stone) (Fieldnotes July 22, 2018). Akaxe explained that this consejo does not simply address the art of stone carving—it also refers to how Macehuales must learn to regulate their emotions: too much heat in the heart means there is a risk of acting impulsively, while too much cold in the heart means that people take no action at all.

Over time I heard student-practitioners use the Consejos to explain their lives and relationships, and even to make sense of how Akaxe related to them. One time a practitioner wondered why, if Akaxe could give consejos, he could not himself use them with his

students. The student recited from memory: “Me duele tu cabeza, tú eres yo, yo soy tu, déjame conocerte” (Your head hurts me, you are me, I am you, let me know you). The student then explained to me that this consejo was saying that knowing another person was also a way of knowing oneself and vice versa. The student felt misunderstood by Akaxe who was not allowing himself to be known, or to get to know the students in a deeper and more reciprocal manner.

Although the 20 Consejos were originally published in one of Arturo Meza’s books (which is very hard to find today) students referred either to the Matinauhkalli website (INASCA) or to their own memory, treating these sayings as oral tradition. The Consejos function as a body of literature that Macehuales can recur to in troubled times, especially when they need answers. However, rather than dictate how practitioners should behave, the Consejos are reflexive moments that allow practitioners to regulate their reactions towards the outside world. They are used in times of need and are usually corrected by Akaxe and his students as if they have been learned by heart.

Consejos also have material and practical uses, as when students commit to cleaning and “leaving their space [Matinauhkalli] in a better and more beautiful state than they had found it.” This follows Consejo 2: “Everything around you is moldable, with your thoughts and your actions, make them more beautiful than when you found them” (INASCA https://www.inasca.org/the-twenty-advices.html, retrieved July 12, 2021). When I first came to Matinauhkalli asking permission to do my research, some practitioners responded to my request by paraphrasing a set of consejos: “We are all stars and we have to shine by letting other stars shine with us” (Fieldnotes, June 2018). With their answer, they were not only

allowing me to work with them but incorporating their own thought into my experience as a researcher.

In addition to the Consejos, students also follow the Four Principles of the Macehual. Created by Akaxe, the principles synthetize how pre-Hispanic ancestors behaved. Unlike the Consejos, which can provide answers to existential questions or problems, the Principles are behavioral expectations.

1. Be always Grateful
2. Be always Respectful
3. Be always Honest
4. Be always of Service

These Four Principles of the Macehual are usually presented in Matinauhkalli by Akaxe in classes or public lectures. For some students, like Ahuehuetzin, the principles of the Macehual are the most basic level of knowledge and the first step in the process of becoming a Macehual. As she has explained, it is easy to get lost with all the information presented in Matinauhkalli, and it is also easy to fall into the "trap" of the knowledge, wanting to learn more without applying it in real life. However, she also observed that when one is in the outside world, basing one's life on potenciales, veintenas, trecenas, and Consejos can be as impossible as it is overwhelming. Ahuehuetzin's view is that if everyone followed the principles, we would see a real difference in the world. If everyone was grateful, respectful, honest, and of service, then life would look very different (Ahuehuetzin, interviewed September 28, 2019).

Students take the Tonalpohualli, the 20 Consejos, and the Principles of the Macehual as guides to their behavior and as a core of literature that encompasses what they usually refer to as "the knowledge." This knowledge is not only transformative, but also essential to the

process of becoming a Macehual. Ikiltezi told me: “I don't know… you’re just transformed when you’re presented with the 20 Consejos or even just one potential, you are being the leader of yourself, you are being an independent thinker, like we don’t need a huge body of knowledge to transform ourselves” (Ikiltezi).

5.8 Category Battles. A Historical Approximation and Understanding of Why Macehuales Resist the Word “Religion”

For Macehuales in Xicago, nature is understood through pedagogies around the calendar and Mesoamerican symbols. The study of the calendar, the Tonalpohualli, encompasses beliefs around forces of nature (symbols like water and rain, or eagle, dog and vulture); the human psyche (interpretation of symbols as revealing human emotions); and non-empirical forces that they experience or believe in (the symbol of *Ollin*: movement). Research on metaphysical experiences and teachings has questioned the use of “science” and opened a dialogue to new understandings of the word “religion.” However, “religion” is only a peripheral word that can cause trouble and discomfort to practitioners. Practitioners prefer the generic use of the term “the knowledge.”

One of the main reasons practitioners in Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations reject the use of the word “religion” is its association with of Aztec human sacrifice. Spanish explanations of Aztec society placed religion and human sacrifice hand in hand, therefore when practitioners reject one idea (sacrifice) they also reject the other (religion). It is because of how sacrifice has historically been understood and interpreted that people in these movements feel the need to recreate a history of honor and pride in which sacrifice, and therefore religion, is eliminated from the discourse and the memory of these contemporary practitioners. I propose that human sacrifice can be seen as the missing link for understanding why these

communities reject the word “religion.” On several occasions I heard maestros express defiance towards academics in regard to the idea of sacrifice.

> Eduardo Matos Moctezuma fue el que empezó el sensacionalismo sobre los sacrificios y con esa mentira se hizo famoso. Siempre o casi siempre, en construcciones coloniales o pre-colombinas, hay cosas escondidas. La sangre representa muchas veces a los ancestros, por que nuestros ancestros están en nuestro ADN. Cuando se ven [en los Códices] muchos puntitos de sangre, era por que se hacían ofrendas a nuestros ancestros, y sí eran ofrendas de sangre, pero no era un sacrificio humano. (Eduardo Matos Moctezuma was the one who started sacrificial sensationalism and he became famous with that lie. Always, or almost always, behind colonial and pre-colonial constructions lie hidden things. Blood represents our ancestors, because they live through our DNA. When you see lots of blood spots [in the Codices] it is because they were making an offering to our ancestors. And yes, it was a blood offering, but it was not human sacrifice) (Fieldnotes March 31, 2019).

Rejecting the history of human sacrifice may be counterproductive. Aztec sacrifice could also open the possibility to studying Aztec science, medicine, and social organization. Like other topics in this dissertation, the idea of human sacrifice exists in a state of incongruency between religion and ideals of nature. For example, blood in the Codices is reinterpreted in Matinuahkalli as something that does not represent blood itself but the ancestors and ideas of genetics. In this abstraction, blood is shown as a way to portray lineages. When nature is connected to ideas of sacrifice it shifts into non-material ideas representing a belief system, instead of material representations. In Matinauhkalli, conversations and silences around human sacrifice are also part of the pedagogies of the knowledge.

Although students would use “the knowledge” as a catch-all term to refer to their ideas and practices, “science” (rooted in ideas of nature) is the word that more advanced or committed students prefer to use because they are trained through certain vocabulary (as previously explained with Zitlaltokatizin). One example, from the INASCA website, can be seen in the class descriptions taught in Matinauhkalli.

> The ancient people of the Americas not only created precise sciences of astronomy and mathematics, but of holistic health as well. They created ingenious systems incorporating their knowledge of bioenergy, electro-magnetism, physiology and mental health, allowing them to create disciplines that ensured the health of individuals and their society (Retrieved from http://www.inasca.org/meditations--ehekapahtinime.html April 23, 2019).

Science weaves in other concepts that help explain the outcomes of practicing such disciplines at Matinauhkalli. This knowledge is seen as ancient and systematic (organized, proven) with the possibility of healing individuals and societies on different levels. Thus, people in Matinauhkalli position themselves at the same level of expertise and seriousness as academics and reinterpret the Codices and Mesoamerican history in order to create a lived practice sustained by the use of the calendar.

As a result of this ideological battle around the existence of human sacrifice, practitioners of Aztec and Toltec Revitalizations construct a framework to protect themselves from Western judgment. However, there is an incongruency in their logic. The replacement of one Western category (religion) with another (science) can be seen as problematic, especially when there are no new frameworks and/or vocabulary to better explain the living practices and experiences of Macehuales.

Although it may seem particular to Matinauhkalli in Xicago, the rejection of "religion" is historically rooted in the Movimiento Confederado Restaurador de la Cultura de Anahuac (MCRA) and is also present in the early literature of the movement. The discourse around these movements being "scientific" can also be found in the earlier work of Ignacio Romero

Vargas Yturbide and later in Arturo Meza's publications.[165] An example from the MCRA is when Maria del Carmen Nieva wrote.

> Pero los mexicanos, desde los principio de la Raza, penetraron en los secretos de la Naturaleza y, por consiguiente, descubrieron que esa Naturaleza fue la creadora del Cosmos y de los humanos, y aprendieron fundamentalmente que éste podía bastarse a él mismo, sin tener necesidad de requerir ayuda sobrenatural (But the Mexican people, from the beginning of the Race, penetrated the secrets of Nature, and therefore discovered that Nature was the creator of the Cosmos and of human beings, and they learned, fundamentally, that they could sustain themselves without requiring the supernatural) (Nieva 1969, 51).

In addition, calling a body of knowledge "science" instead of "religion" is not unique to Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations. In the U.S. there were religious movements as early as 1840 adopting the idea of science instead of religion. Spiritualists, Theosophists, the Christian Science Movement, the Church of Latter-Day Saints, and even the Church of Scientology have all argued that their practices are sustained by "science." Catherine Albanese explains how Spiritualists reformed their movement through a "rhetoric of denial" (Albanese 2007: 261) of their intellectual lineage (as many spiritualists rejected white and black magic, Rosicrucianism, among other movements that contributed to their thinking) to adopt a language of progress and superiority to scientific rhetoric.[166]

For Albanese this "rhetoric of denial" is usually used in processes of religious reformation. Groups and religious movements that undergo reformations do so by rejecting

[165] Despite the movement's rejection of religion, "Mexicanidad" has been typified as a religion in Mexico's INEGI (2005) census. The newest census (INEGI 2020) does not include "Mexicanidad"; instead the INEGI has changed this category to "Nativistic" religions, as an alternative for Indigenous peoples in Mexico and people practicing Toltec and Aztec revitalizations to identify themselves in the census.

[166] Some of these movements also had a significant presence in Mexico and Latin America. Spiritism and Rosicrucianism in the late 19th century helped Latin American elites formulate a new political idea of progress. There are no direct connections between Toltec and Aztec revitalization movements and Spiritism or Rosicrucianism however. Jean-Pierre Bastian (1991) explores Jacobinism as one of the ideas behind the rupture with the *Porfiriato* regime. Jacobinism usually formed part of political groups that held religious ideas or club membership such as Rosicrucianism. Although we can assume an exchange of ideas and a perseverant Jacobinism as influences, science, progress, and nativism were part of the post-revolutionary motto.

and breaking from old genealogies to create "new" ones. In the case of Mexicayotl, the biggest obstacle to the entrance of "science" was that fact that the Nahua word "teotl" was translated as "god" or "sacred." "Teotl" has been retranslated as "creación" (creation) (Nieva 2009, 54), or "fuerza generadora" (generating force) (Nieva 1969, 54). Explaining this "creation" exclusively through biology and negating how this word can also be connected with ideas of the sacred for pre-Hispanic Mexicans could obscure the force that religion had for these communities in the past and may still have for their descents in the present.

The negation and resignification of teotl is not a coincidence, it is a reaction to a colonial framework in which Indigenous peoples were (and still are) categorized as "savage," "uneducated/illogical," and "fanatics" because of their belief system and practices.

In sum, the two main axes that these groups use to justify the idea of science are: 1) the use of mathematics and an advanced calendric system, and 2) the knowledge and interpretation of nature. Although neither of these points is refutable, we can also ask how these axes contribute to an experience of the "religious" in conjunction with ideas of science. Many societies, including the Aztec, did not separate the secular from the religious. Their knowledge was woven together to explain the order of their universe and social life. Thus, the interpretation of nature went hand in hand with the creation of scientific knowledge, like math and biology, while also contributing to religious practices and ceremonies. Ironically, it was also nature that assisted conversion practices in the colonial world, as Rudy Busto indicates: "The Europeans were successful in selling the [Genesis] story to the Mexicans because of parallels between the Hebraic and ancient Nahuatl sacred stories about the disposition of the natural world" (Busto 1994: 122). Stories and symbols about nature were ways to relate and tell what the sacred was for both Spanish and Indigenous Nahuas.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have explored how study of the Tonalpohualli generates an idea of "scientific knowledge" while also providing practitioners with moments where the category of religion is temporarily accepted and used to explain metaphysical experiences. While "science" may not be the perfect frame, it aims to solve anxieties about an inferiority complex and focus more towards ideas of lived practices and ceremonies. Practitioners in Xicago use intellectual disciplines to create a set of principles that they usually call "the knowledge." These ideas are closely connected with what they codify as "nature." To this end they use the Aztec calendar system, its symbols, and other sets of metaphors which allow them to connect with themselves and their surroundings.

"Nature," or at least how "nature" is imagined, becomes the link that connects these practitioners to ideas of "religion." We see how the word "religion" gets replaced by "science" as a rejection of both Western thought and of the Catholic discourse which is still prevalent in Mexico and Mexican communities in the U.S. However, this replacement is insufficient to explain all the experiences that students have. Replacing "science" for "religion" is also a process of training and indoctrination that takes time. This explains why we see that both new and more advanced students have a tendency to accept the idea of religion, at least at first, either as a temporary solution to metaphysical inquiries, or as a quick, unapologetic response to lived experience in Matinauhkalli.

"Nature" is, however, what allows student-practitioners to share a consensus of why they use the word "science" to describe what they are doing and studying. According to Akaxe and his students it was by observing and interpreting nature—and comparing interpretations of who we are with interpretations of plants, animals, and natural phenomena—that their

ancestors were able to create a calendar to celebrate weather transitions and understand the human psyche.

Conclusions. The Future for Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations: A Macehual Theology?

This dissertation investigated Toltec and Aztec Revitalization Movements in the United Stated in a transnational comparison with Mexico. In the U.S. the common name to refer to this type of Movement is "Mexicayotl." However in this study I have move away from the labels "Mexicayotl" and its Mexican version "Mexicanidad." The umbrella term of Toltec and Aztec Revitalization allows to study and integrate groups that follow similar ideologies and practices from the groups above but that do not identify as "Mexicayotl". As a consequence the study of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations is much more inclusive and incorporates the usual division between Danzantes and people studying the Tonalpohualli (exclusively). Thus the Conchero Movement, Aztec (or Mexica) Dancers, Macehuales and intellectuals re-interpreting Mesoamerican history and the use of the Calendar and the Codices are all seen as part of the historical trend and anthropological need to redefine Indigenous identities and religious practices.

The case study this dissertation explores illustrates how racial and religious categories are being negotiated through the learning and teaching of embodied knowledge in contexts of human mobility. I chose to focus my study in Matinauhkalli, an institute for the learning of Toltec and Aztec practices in Xicago. Matinauhkalli was created and run by a teacher from Mexico and his Mexican-American wife. Located in the historical Mexican neighborhood of Xicago, Matinauhkalli can be consider a cultural cradle for understanding Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations that positions their emergence within a transnational context.

In this research I deployed my own body as a research tool that helped me learn and experience first-hand most of the disciplines that student/practitioners were learning. I

danced and learned the basics of archery and the warrior discipline practiced in Matinuahkalli. I sat in different classes and listened to Akaxe, the teacher in Matinauhkalli, explaining Codex interpretations and Mesoamerican history. In addition, I used primary and specialized secondary sources of Mesoamerican literature and internal literature from Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations to analyze the that they created and used to mediate and communicate about their practices and objectives.

I started this dissertation project with the assumption that Indigenous and *mestizo* identities are fluid and changing, and decided to focus on the changes that occur through performative actions (dress, language, religion). Thus, I asked how indigeneity is performed in Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations and how do these performances draw practitioners closer to the category of religion, even as they themselves reject the category.

After a year and a half of research and collecting data I found that performing an identity is not only through the markers of dress and language, but through the active learning of embodied knowledges, where mind and body create new ways of understanding the self and other. This process occurs through bodily practices and a new vocabulary Macehuales learn and use to explain their worlds, emotions, and ancestry.

My experience in Matinauhkalli, as a student and researcher demonstrates that practitioners engage with the knowledge in ways that impact their everyday life and developing a sense of who they are. Danza and the study of the Tonalpohualli were where students found a sense of identity that defined them in opposition to others who do not practice Danza or incorporate the Macehual revision of time.

In Matinauhkalli there was a discourse and embodied practice around difference. First, what and how they were performing their practices was significantly different from what I

have seen in other Calpullis and practitioners in Mexico City and public plazas in Los Angeles. Second, Akaxe drew explicit comparisons and a separation between what Chicanos, referred as Mexicayotl. I had many questions about what Matinauhkalli was and what student/practitioners were doing, but one thing was evident: they were not a Calpulli and they were not part of Mexicayotl. The ways Akaxe taught and the way students learned, danced, and spoke were truly different. I wonder if this "new" way of doing things was part of a patter created in the U.S., that sees a transformation in imported religious systems. Although Akaxe is Mexican, they are all living and developing their own version in Xicago. I also wonder if what I was seeing was the beginning of a reformation. Mexicayotl and the formation of Calpullis began in the 1940s in Mexico City and it is a model that has expanded all over Mexico and the U.S. Calpullis create communities and a way to connect with Indigenous identities through Aztec practices and aesthetics. By contrast, I saw people in Matinauhkalli referring to their language as Toltec (not Aztec) and prioritizing individual development over a communal one.

The dissertation chapters were organized chronologically. From a historical point of view, chapters 1 and 2 encapsulated the historical processes in which Revitalizations occurred in Mexico from the 1920s to the 1990s. Chapters 3, 4, 5 focused a specific case study to understand how Revitalizations are practiced not just in Mexico but in the U.S. Additionally, chapters 4 and 5 demonstrated a progression within the practices at Matinauhkalli and how practices and engagement to the knowledge can vary according to individual commitment.

While research around Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations is different in Mexico and the U.S., both scholarships have in common Danza as the main research subject. Danza is

accessible to researchers because it is usually a public performance. However, my research demonstrates that Danza is not the only way in which practitioners learn and negotiate embodied knowledges. In fact, some practitioners may choose not to dance at all. The use of the calendar and the interpretation of Codices is the less visible part of these Revitalizations. Without the reinterpretation of Codices and the Tonalpohualli Danza can be also interpreted as isolated from intellectual traditions that have survived along with bodily movements. In my research Danza is also accompanied by philosophical teachings that go beyond movement. Both Danza and Tonalpohualli create a set of knowledge that helps student/practitioners connect with a pan-Indigenous identity with Aztec aesthetics.

It is possible that this dissertation will be read by student/practitioners and specialized academics of Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations. In aiming to help practitioners grow and build their own history I suggest reading this analysis with a critical perspective on how academia frames and historicized Revitalizations. This analysis may also help teachers and practitioners consider internal changes in their organizations to help those who want to approach these disciplines feel included and safe. Future research may also want to consider the claims of abusive behavior from leaders and teachers in Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations. In November 2020, former students from Matinauhkalli published a letter revealing trauma claiming physical and psychological abuse from Akaxe. Around this same time, other groups in the U.S. and a group of feminist practitioners in Mexico also revealed abuses from people in position of power in these type of Revitalizations. This research also revealed how confusing and difficult it is to adapt to new definitions in commonly used vocabulary. When new definitions are created, communities and those in positions of power.

In terms of scholarship, this research has focused its analysis on embodied knowledge, from bodily movement to intellectual activities. Future research may want to consider how religious discourse in indigenous revitalizations might become a systemic belief system, or a Macehual Theology as suggested in the last chapter. As groups practicing Toltec and Aztec Revitalizations increase on both sides of the border, and as there is also an increasing practice and performance of pan-Indigenous identities worldwide, more studies on the changing social composition of these groups will benefit in our understanding of social categories and the human experience. Research that uncovers Danza and other Aztec practices and resistance between the 1800s and 1900s will help clarify historically how these movements are similar or different from racio-religious groups forming between the 1920s and 1940s.

In sum, this research has drawn from previous models and case studies to bridge Mexican and U.S. scholarship. It has also intended to bridge the insider/outsider divide. While acknowledging the importance of dance and physical disciplines it also adds new nuances for understanding embodied knowledge through discursive methods. In this case, the use of the calendar Tonalpohualli and its symbols become the intellectual activity that unites the mind and body into a whole set of knowledges for student/practitioners.

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