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Regenerating Mixtec Kinship and Identity

Through Cine Comunitario

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Master of Arts in American Indian Studies

by

Cynthia Rubi Haney

2024

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Regenerating Mixtec Kinship and Identity

Through Cine Comunitario

by

Cynthia Rubi Haney

Master of Arts in American Indian Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2024

Professor Ho'esta Mo'e'hahne, Co-Chair

Professor Randall K. Akee, Co-Chair

This thesis analyzes the ways that Mixtec women directors employ cine comunitario to center Mixtec communal representation and ownership of Native Oaxacan narratives as opposed to Indigenista commercial cinema. Utilizing methods and theories from Indigenous Film studies and decolonial queer and memory work scholars and creators, I draw on Mixtec cosmological concepts associated with the four cardinal directions in order to frame and interpret the ways that two Mixtec filmmakers, Ángeles Cruz and Itandehui Jansen, speak to Indigenous knowledges, understandings of community, space, and gender, as well as what I define as “Indigenous carework.” I also explore the ways Mixtec women’s films expand concepts of memory work and offer ways of re/membering which successfully foster Indigenous well-being and futurity.

The thesis of Cynthia Rubi Haney is approved.

Erin Katherine Debenport

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Ho'esta Mo'e'hahne, Committee Co-Chair

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University of California, Los Angeles

2024

DEDICATION

Para todos los narradores, guardianes de la memoria y cuidadores Buin Zaa y Ñuu Savi

For all the Buin Zaa and Ñuu Savi storytellers, memory keepers and caretakers

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Foreword

Centering relationality, I begin this thesis by introducing myself, my audience, intention and ethics. I was born on my ancestral homelands in Oaxaca, Mexico. My maternal family is Buin Zaa (Zapotec) from Santa Maria Roaló in the Valles Centrales (Central Valleys) region and my paternal family has mixed Hidalguense (Tlahuiltepa, Hidalgo) and Ñuu Savi (Mixtec) ancestry from Huajuapán de León in the Mixteca Baja (Mixtec Lowlands) region. My personal experiences with migration and fragmentation are reflected in the films I will engage with throughout this thesis, and as a result, I consider myself a Native Oaxacan migrant reconnecting to my Zapotec and Mixtec roots. My intention, then, is to apply my lived experiences to this film analysis and ponder, along with Mixtec film directors, migration and fragmentation and their implications on contemporary Mixtec and Zapotec peoples. I approach these themes as a migrant currently living on Tongva and Gabrieleno/Kizh lands (now called Los Angeles). The primary audience of this thesis is current and future Native Oaxacan creatives and students who aim to share and own our stories while denouncing and resisting continuous violence and oppression towards our peoples. I am responsible to my pueblos and relatives in Oaxaca and this obligation informs my research methods and ethics.

I left Oaxaca in 1991 at the age of four and returned to Oaxaca in 2003 as a teenager when I reconnected with my maternal family members who live in Santa Maria Roaló. Roaló is a Zapotec pueblo (town) of less than six hundred residents of which many are related. Its name means “large mouth” in Zapotec which refers to the large lake that once existed there (Cerero Martínez et al., 2012, p. 29). Roaló is governed by *usos y costumbres* (customs and traditions) also known as an Indigenous normative or governance system (Hernandez-Díaz & Robson, 2019, p. 30). Like many Native pueblos in Oaxaca, Roaló does not have running water or

sewage despite it being located within thirty minutes of Oaxaca City, where the privileged classes and tourists have access to clean running water and extensive infrastructure. My family reside in Barrio La Guadalupe, previously considered the second section of Roaló. Specifically, I come from a lineage of campesinos and guajoloteras (women who raise turkeys). My maternal great grandmothers, Petra Leon Cruz and Uviliada Lavariega Chavez, carried a lot of medicinal knowledge and would care for their relatives in this way. They also passed down traditional foodways which my relatives still carry on today. My male relatives carry on the milpa system, which is grounded in Zapotec agricultural knowledge that has been passed down for generations. The milpa system is a traditional Mesoamerican farming system which consists of intercropping (typically corn, squash, and beans) without the use of synthetic pesticides or fertilizers. During 2003, I participated in pueblo life by attending community celebrations and ceremonies, as well as, assisting with farming and cooking. I later returned in 2013, for a summer-long medical anthropology program which allowed me to spend more time with my relatives. Prior to writing this thesis, I returned to Oaxaca during the summer of 2021 eager to meet my nieces and nephews and to learn more about my pueblos of origin. Most recently, I returned in August of 2024 to reconnect with my paternal family members.

Throughout my educational journey in college and graduate programs, I occasionally searched for articles and books about my pueblos of origin curious about historical facts. Specifically, I never found anything written about Santa Maria Roaló, where most of my maternal relatives live. When I returned in 2021, I asked my maternal aunt and uncle about our pueblo's history and they relayed that while they did not know much about it, they knew a relative who was a knowledge keeper of our history. Thus, began my understanding of how pueblo history is kept and transmitted in Roaló.

My uncle Emilio arranged a meeting with our kin Flocelo Cosme Lavariega (Tío Celo) and on the agreed upon date and time, we paid him a visit. Tío Celo invited me onto his patio and began asking me questions to understand what I wanted to know about our pueblo. Once he surmised that I was interested in learning about the founding of the pueblo and our traditions, he went to retrieve what he called his archives. He returned with stacks of papers he had personally handwritten and typed, a will and testament, a book, and magazines. He explained the significance of each document. He detailed how he documented oral histories passed down intergenerationally onto paper and these contained our pueblo's origin story and cultural traditions. He shared with me the book entitled *Memoria Historica: Municipio Trinidad Zaachila, Oaxaca de Juarez* which was a collaborative project between the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and Tío Celo published in 2015. This book notes that the history of Roaló does not appear in any prior text. Tío Celo is cited as the historian of the pueblo of Roaló and his oral histories are incorporated throughout the book. Thus, this book demonstrates the power of narrating our own histories which are often historically erased and rendered insignificant.

On my paternal side, my relatives are from Huajuapán de León, Santa María Xochitlapilco, and Tlahuiltepa, Hidalgo. My paternal grandmother, Sofía Alavez Rojas, was a respected yerbera (herbal healer) in Huajuapán and some of my relatives still live there. I spent my early childhood with my paternal relatives and have fond memories of them and was recently able to reconnect with them. Thus, these are the places that my relatives and ancestors hold and held ties to and that I seek to learn more about in my ongoing efforts to honor my lineages and be involved in future familial and pueblo projects.

My experience as a graduate student in the American Indian Studies department has been a continuation of these efforts as well. It is throughout this experience that I began having intentional conversations with my mother and through my questions which prompt her recollections, we have been re/membering our ancestral practices further. In this way, my mother has been passing down medicinal and plant knowledge to me. My cousins and aunt have also shared traditional foodways, agricultural practices, and medicinal knowledge with me over the years. These are the parts of my family history and lived experience which contribute to my understanding of who I am. Through this, I have learned the power of sharing our own stories, collective knowledge, and language. This ongoing journey and experience, in some way, parallels the power of stories and self-representation that are articulated in the films and cosmologies I analyze in this project.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement and Research Question

I think when you are a filmmaker you should be the owner of your stories. I think that's important, no? To be part of the production of your stories so that you can own your stories, own your movies, right?

— Ángeles Cruz, “El reto de hacer cine en un país machista”

Tourist Oaxaca generates an aesthetic idea of the landscape, the fantasy shifts from the authentic to the exotic depriving us of any possibility of narrating ourselves outside of an increasingly impoverished magic realism.

— Editorial Ocho Trueno, *Desprecio, Despojo, Gentrificación y Turismo en Oaxaca*

The need to own one's stories, as articulated by Mixtec film director Ángeles Cruz, is at the center of this thesis which examines Mixtec women's visual media production as a means to strengthen community kinship and identity through visual storytelling. This form of communal representation and ownership of Native Oaxacan narratives opposes mass produced romanticized outsider narratives of Oaxaca. Furthermore, I interpret Mixtec films as visual memory keeping and an extension of historical Mixtec resistance. I argue the function of this kind of resistance is threefold in that it 1) positions Mixtec peoples as the owners of our histories/stories, 2) serves as a source of regenerative kinship between Mixtec peoples on their ancestral lands and Mixtec peoples across the diaspora, and 3) functions as a pedagogical tool whereby Mixtec peoples are in dialogue with one another across time and space. I also explore the ways Mixtec women's films expand concepts of memory work and offer ways of re/membering which successfully foster Indigenous well-being and futurity.

Cinematically, Native peoples have been mis/represented by outsiders, often members of the wealthy elite established in colonial times. Film scholar Garcia Blizzard (2022) examines historical racial categories and postrevolutionary racial discourses which influenced Mexican cinema production. In this way, Mexican commercial cinema has a history of being predominantly composed of white actors and narratives. This is reflected in my media exposure when I lived in Oaxaca from 2003 to 2004. Reflecting on my media consumption during this year, I only watched movies and telenovelas with white characters like *The Ring* (2002) on VHS and telenovelas like *Rubí* (2004), about a beautiful woman from an impoverished background who goes to great and disturbing lengths to acquire wealth, and *Mariana de la Noche* (2003-2004), about a woman from a small mining town who is believed to be cursed in love. Not only was there a lack of access to visual media, but there were also limited ways to access it. There were no movie theaters near my family's pueblos but some movies could be purchased from the weekly tianguis (market day) in nearby town squares or rented from the local tienda.

Streaming visual media was not accessible to me during that year either. The only way to connect to the internet was to visit internet cafes, but I only visited them about twice that entire year as they were a luxury I could not afford. Mobile phones were not common to own then so I did not have access to social media or the web through Wi-Fi or cellular data either. The radio, however, was always on in my aunt's house as it was much more reliable in Roaló where telephone reception would come and go.

I returned to the states in 2005 and did not see any films that reflected my experiences in the Pueblo or Costa Chica. When I returned to Oaxaca in 2013 for a summer study abroad program, mobile phones and streaming services were accessible in the cities, but still rare to see in the pueblos. My aunt still had no internet access, limited telephone reception, a cathode-ray

tube television, and relied heavily on her radio for media. This has changed in the last few years as my cousins now have mobile phones and communicate with me via WhatsApp. Wi-Fi is also now available in Roaló and my family now accesses social media platforms. I have also been able to attend virtual Zapotec language classes and participate in a Zapotec language group chat as more pueblos utilize cellular data and Wi-Fi to transmit knowledge and communicate with community members across the diaspora.

Through reflecting on these changes, I began to question visual media production and consumption in Oaxaca. Who is represented, by whom, and how? Are there films that represent Native Oaxacan and pueblo life? Why do Native Oaxacans seek to represent themselves cinematically? Through an analysis of Indigenista films of the silent, golden age, and mexploitation eras, I highlight the ways Mexican directors utilized commercial cinema to uphold hierarchies and nationalist master narratives. Hall (1993) argues that through the symbolic and dialogic nature of popular culture, those with more political power depend on the rejection and exclusion of the marginalized Other in order to construct their own subjectivity (Hall, 1993, p. 113). This demonstrates the ways the marginalized Other is symbolically central. I assert that Mixtec women directors contest cultural hegemony through employing the cultural strategies of cine comunitario (community cinema) and in doing so “shift the dispositions of power” embedded within popular culture (p. 107). Thus, Native Oaxacan visual media producers who dismantle hierarchical systems of cultural production, decenter dominant narratives, and illuminate the complexities of different Native subjectivities offer us cinematic modes of resistance.

The Native Oaxacan visual media producers whose work I will engage with and read include Ángeles Cruz and Itandehui Jansen. The feature films I will be interpreting include

Tiempo de lluvia (2018) and *Nudo Mixteco* (2021). Through the analysis of these films, I contend that these Mixtec women visual media producers employ the medium of film to express feminist queer politics which challenge cis-heteropatriarchy and demonstrate kinship with Indigenous femme and queer futurity in mind. Common themes which emerge in their films and which I will examine include liminal spaces, embodied knowledge, kinship, Indigenous care work, the Mixtec diaspora, cis-heteropatriarchal violence, transformation, and new beginnings.

Positionality and Project Background

While this thesis will draw upon Mixtec texts, written sources, and visual media to support my arguments, I must first articulate the importance of embodied generational knowledge and orality. I exist through my relationship to my relatives and ancestors as they do through the same source. That is to say, the source of all Mixtec and Zapotec knowledge is the ancestors which live on through current relatives and their relationship to the land and the cosmos. Wilson (2008) asserts that Indigenous epistemology is comprised of “our cultures, our worldviews, our times, our languages, our histories, our spiritualities and our places in the cosmos” (p. 74). Thus, my role as a researcher is to build upon collective knowledge and discourse.

My position as a Oaxacan researcher living in the diaspora presented me with ethical challenges in both the project I chose and the methods I used. My initial proposed project involved the analysis of *Dísè*, the Zapotec variant of *Gidxòn* (Ayoquezco)¹ and my heritage language, but as this thesis was written during a time when a global pandemic endangered the lives of Native knowledge keepers, it was an ethical choice to not travel to Oaxaca at this time.

¹ *Gidxòn* (Ayoquezco de Aldama) is a Zapotec pueblo located approximately 34 miles south of Oaxaca City. Presently, Zapotec speakers in *Gidxòn* are working to reclaim, teach, and learn *Dísè*, which is the Zapotec variant of the region.

On a personal note, I lost family members to COVID-19 related causes in Roaló which further encouraged my decision. I also made a conscious choice to pivot to primary sources in an effort to minimize the often extractive nature of anthropological research methods. While I considered virtual interviews as a method to mitigate harms, I concluded that elders might have emotional responses to discussing a history of language discrimination and that abruptly ending virtual conversations with no system of support in place for them afterwards was not reciprocal or ethical research. I also decided that a fast-paced master's thesis timeline did not allow for the time needed to carefully build respectful relationships and plan out this project. Therefore, I decided my place within language work was as a participant and not as a researcher.

I then began to consider what projects I could explore where a reliance on primary and secondary sources could mitigate the harms of research. I contemplated where to apply my relationships, lived experience and privileges. I considered incorporating my graduate degree in library sciences and professional experiences as a library worker into an extensive IRB approved project looking at secondary trauma within the archives of federal Indian boarding schools in the U.S. However, it was at this time that I underwent an emergency surgery and was diagnosed with a chronic illness. My health challenges, which included two additional surgeries, gravely impacted the realistic execution of such a project which necessitated recruitment and multiple interviews.

I returned to searching for a feasible thesis project and began reflecting on my work in the seminar "Indigenous Literatures and Speculation" which I took with Professor Mo'e'hahne in the Winter of 2022. For the research paper, I relied on primary and secondary sources of Zapotec oral stories, as well as my mother's knowledge of Zapotec cosmology and medicine. I enjoyed applying my own knowledge of *Dísè* and iconic femme subjects into a Zapotec feminist

reading of these stories. In considering a similar project, I remembered the impact *Nudo Mixteco* (2021) had on me when I watched it for the first time in 2021. This was the first film during which I saw my own experiences of living in a pueblo reflected back to me. It captured the grief felt within the experience of living in diaspora and the violences of cis-heteropatriarchy. I searched for other films which depicted pueblo life in Oaxaca and watched *Tiempo de Lluvia* (2018) next. I observed similar themes in this film but with an additional emphasis on the joys of pueblo life.

In this project I am able to incorporate my lived experiences as a reconnecting Native Oaxacan migrant living in the diaspora. My multiple experiences of migration from my birthplace and to the U.S. were ones centered on survival and necessity rather than choice. I relate to the painful experiences within the films such as not being able to say goodbye to a relative prior to their death, familial conflicts and dysfunction, and a feeling of not fully belonging to one place. I also relate to a fondness and nostalgia for a time spent with a grandparent and the lasting grief after their passing. My close connection to my maternal Zapotec family is the source from which my perspective comes from and for that reason, I read the films from a Buin Zaa (Zapotec) lens. While I recognize the vast distinctions in customs amongst Zapotec peoples and Mixtec peoples in Oaxaca, as a person who comes from families of the Valles Centrales and Mixteca Baja regions, I focus on the places of similarities to weave a perspective that honors our historic relatedness.

In many ways, I apply Zapotec medicinal and ancestral knowledge as passed on to me by my mother, who received her teachings from her grandmothers, to my analysis throughout this thesis. Following what Gonzales (2012) asserts in *Red Medicine: Traditional Indigenous Rites of Birthing and Healing* what I offer is not the “revealing of sacred knowledge, because prior

scholarship has been quite thorough in documenting Indigenous healing systems from Mexico” but instead an analysis grounded in lived experience and ancestral knowledge carried on into the present by my mother and relatives (p. 12). The purpose of this analysis is to bundle these elements in a way that regenerates Zapotec and Mixtec kinship and honors Zapotec and Mixtec memory work. Thus, this project incorporates the themes from previous proposed projects without the aforementioned ethical and timing dilemmas.

Methodologies

Past Anglophone studies of Mexican cinema have examined historical eras, genres, race and ethnicity, and women and gender representation (Antonio Paranaguá, 1995; Hershfield, 1996; Hershfield & Maciel, 1999; Mora, 2005). Hershfield (1996) concentrates on the Golden Age representation of the Mexican woman as a symbol of the “instability of social and sexual relations in Mexico in the 1940’s” (p. 3). Garcia Blizzard (2022) expands on the films of the Golden Age and focuses on the racial masquerade of Whiteness as Indigeneity. Rohrer (2017) assesses the Mexploitation films of María Elena Velasco, and in particular her India María (Maria the Indian) character who she describes as “a spirited and unforgettable character that Mexicans have loved for half a century” (p. 3). Tumbaga’s (2020) analysis of *La India Maria* is more critical and aligns her first film *Tonta, tonta pero no tanto* (1972) with Indigenista films which represent Native characters as intellectually inferior and coincide with Mexican nationalist ideologies (759). Gonzalez Rodriguez (2022) explores Indigenous representation in Latin America within contemporary film (2000-2020) with an emphasis on the construction of an imagined Other, as well as industry shifts within self-representational Native film.

Hispanophone scholarship include more in-depth context on self-representational cinema known as cine comunitario. Ávila Pietrasanta (2012) surveys Native peoples’ filmic

representation in Mexican cinema and focuses on the history of cine comunitario in Oaxaca and Chiapas. Likewise, García Torres and Roca Ortiz (2021) explore the contributions of the first cine comunitario pioneers in Oaxaca who were Ikoots women. Cueva Martínez (2022) expands on this history by interviewing one of these cine comunitario pioneers, Teófila Palafox Herranz. Mercader Martínez (2022) examines filmic representations of lesbians within Mexican cinema by female directors as a form of self-representation and empowerment. *Nudo Mixteco* (2021) is described as the first film to explore the topic of lesbianism within pueblos originarios (Native pueblos) and Ángeles Cruz explains the significance of not censoring her lesbian love making scenes for audiences stating that she feels “that lesbians in communities have remained in the dark, marginalized” (p. 142).

In the U.S. context, Deloria (1998) and Kilpatrick (1999) examine historical Native American representations and how competing stereotypes were part of the building of white American nationalism. Deloria (1998) argues that “eighteenth century colonists constructed Indian Others along two critical axes” which included the imagined noble savage and “the relative distance that Indian Others were situated from this Self-in-the making” (pp. 20-21). Likewise, Kilpatrick (1999) asserts the role of the juxtaposed negative Native Other as necessary to American self-definition and the construction of its national narrative. Marubbio (2006) expands understandings of this nationalist strategy by concentrating on the stereotypical representations of Native American women in film, often as sacrificial maidens. Marubbio (2006) argues that this sacrificial representation symbolized “the best way to assimilate Native Americans into mainstream culture” (p. 58). These nationalist filmic narratives and tropes also overlap with Indigenismo narratives and tropes within Mexican cinema.

In this thesis, I analyze Indigenista narratives and tropes within films of the silent, golden age, and mexploitation eras expanding on aforementioned Anglophone and Hispanophone scholarship on Native representation within Mexican Indigenista commercial films. Positioning these films as misrepresentations of Native peoples, I explore Native representation within Mexican cinema through an analysis of Native Oaxacan cine comunitario. I apply Estrada's Indigenous film methodology, coined *nahui ollin*, to examine two Mixtec films, *Tiempo de lluvia* (2018) and *Nudo Mixteco* (2021) through the four cardinal directions. I argue that these films center Native autonomy and *comunalidad*, which in turn fortifies and regenerates Mixtec kinship within Oaxaca and across the diaspora.

Theoretical Frameworks

Like my kin before me, I would argue that the project of Indigenous survivance is nothing, is inanimate, without an ethics of love and kinship as a guiding principle. True deliverance from settler colonial occupation finds its foundation in Indigenous knowledges that understand land, love, and life as one and the same.

— Lindsay Nixon, “Visual Cultures of Indigenous Futurism”

As a Native Oaxacan migrant researcher my approach to Indigenous research has evolved over time and is centered on critiquing systems of oppression, resisting dominant narratives and rhetorics which are fixated on discourses of loss and deficiency, and challenging colonial logics which seek to erase Indigenous agency and survivance. The primary principles I have been taught by my relatives and which ground my methodologies include *comunalidad*, *guelaguetza* and *tequio*.

Comunalidad is an Indigenous Oaxacan methodology based in Zapotec ideology and “rooted in a commitment to strengthening the future of communal lifeways” (Schwab-Cartas,

2018, p. 363). Comunalidad is comprised of daily relational practices of care which ensure communal survival. According to Hernandez-Diaz and Robson (2019), comunalidad is “expressed through the act of being communal, which in turn creates the conditions by which community belonging and identity are achieved” (p. 32). Altamirano-Jiménez (2021) contends that comunalidad, as proposed by Zapotec and Mixe theorists Jaime Martinez Luna and Floriberto Diaz, was a “critique of anthropological understandings of indigeneity” which limited Indigeneity to colonial criteria such as language and food (p. 341). Instead, Martinez Luna and Diaz argued that “autonomy, interdependence, reciprocity and people’s attitudes towards common life and the environment they live in is what constitutes Indigenous communities” (Altamirano-Jiménez, 2021, p. 342). In that way, they asserted that belonging was tied to actions and that “to be a member of an Indigenous community in Oaxaca, one must be willing to fulfill communal obligations” (Altamirano-Jiménez, 2021, p. 342).

Guelaguetza and tequio, as practiced by my relatives, can be understood as reciprocity and community service. Guelaguetza is an exchange of goods and labor typically for festivities such as weddings and patron saint celebrations. When one offers guelaguetza to a fellow community member/relative, it is returned to them at a later festivity as a form of kin-based obligation and exchange. Tequio is an obligatory collective form of labor which demonstrates one’s responsibility and relationship to their pueblo. This can include collective farming, cleaning, and maintenance of a place or communal lands and occurs on specific days. This type of work fortifies relation to one’s community and lands. Grounding my ethics in these Zapotec and Mixtec principles, I propose my thesis project as an extension of ongoing relationship-building among my fellow Zapotecs and Mixtecs and as contributing to collective modes of knowledge production and keeping.

Another framework I seek to incorporate is what Native scholar and artist, Tanaya Winder (2020), refers to as heartwork or one's purpose gifted by the Creator and which is a commitment to honor one's spirit through "empathy, compassion, respect, reciprocity, and love." Through this framework, I plan to not only practice my own heartwork through research, but to also understand Native Oaxacans' heartwork through film. For example, I seek to understand the ways Native Oaxacan cultural producers utilize storytelling to convey their politics and demonstrate kinship throughout their film narratives. I am most interested in the types of intimacy and relationality which emerge from this research project and the production and reception of Mixtec film narratives.

Furthermore, I apply a feminist decolonial queer framework when reading Mixtec films which contests "narratives of linear human and identity development, oppositional binary thinking, [and] competitive hierarchies" (Sifuentes, 2022, p. 2068). Pieri (2018) asserts that "while heteronormativity is founded on an idea of immutability, queer theories propound fluidity and changeability" (p. 562). Through these frameworks, I contest the stereotypical binaries employed in Indigenista films which equate Natives to rural spaces and traditional attributes. I also explore the horizontal structure of cine comunitario which is a Native Oaxacan filming process that dismantles the hierarchical nature of commercial film. Furthermore, I read the complexity of filmic themes and characters with queer fluidity, allowing for a spectrum of possibilities that may deviate from the director's intended purpose.

This project is also informed by my experiences with kin-based embodied memory work to re/member my people's historical and cultural narratives and traditions. In my research experience, my peoples' histories have been preserved through Zapotec and Mixtec community members' oral histories and embodied memory work. Chazon and Cole (2020) contend that by

reimagining and reclaiming memory work as opposed to “inserting Indigenous memories into existing settler archives,” Native scholars have the power to construct and reconstruct Indigenous ways of practicing memory and expand understandings of archival/memory work (p. 3). Million (2009) asserts that Native women scholars “feel our histories as well as think them” and conceptualized this as felt theory (p. 54). Million argues that academia functions as a gatekeeper of social discourses when academics denounce “Native authors who wrote of a felt subjective truth in their lived experiences” as bitter and biased (p. 62). Mithlo (2020) contends that not only is it “unethical and counter to Indigenous methodologies to prevent a researcher from engaging in work simply because there are social ties between the scholar and her subject” but that intimate subjective knowledge actually increases the accuracy of a study or narrative (p. 34).

This thesis project will therefore examine the ways Native Oaxacan cultural producers weave lived experience and storytelling within film narratives. Focusing on Mixtec women who write subjectively and intimately about Native lives within and outside pueblos originarios (Native towns), I argue these women are experts at “ground[ing] a present healing” through centering felt knowledge and agency to accurately document Native Oaxacan pueblo and urban life (Million, 2009, p. 73). As Native scholars have acknowledged the “limitations of conventional memory projects and dominant modes of archiving,” this thesis also examines how Native artists expand concepts of the archive and offer ways of re/membering which successfully foster Indigenous well-being and futurity (Chazan & Cole, 2020, p. 3).

Indigenous Remembering, Memory Work, and Visuality

As Bernardin (2015) argues, Native peoples have utilized visual and sequential storytelling practices for millennia (p. 480). In the Mixtec and Zapotec contexts, codices and

hieroglyphics are examples of what Bernardin calls “Indigenous visual ‘texts’” and languages (p. 480). Marcus (2020) analyzes the origin of writing and argues that Mesoamerican texts had the purpose of memorializing by labeling people and dating events. Thus, Marcus concludes that “the earliest Mesoamerican texts have ritual, social, and political content” (p. 16). Bellas (1997) and Pohl and Byland (1990) believed that the “codices actually demonstrate ‘kinship history’ and the ‘territorial relationships between royal estates’” (p. 116). Pohl and Byland also explain that “the places portrayed in the codices were ‘actual landforms visible to an observer located in a fixed position’ and explained Mixtec settlement shifts” (p. 115). Therefore, I argue Mixtecs have a history of visual memory keeping which is presently continued in new forms of media.

While Mixtecs created codices to memorialize, they also cultivated embodied archives. Taylor (2003) contends that early Mesoamerican texts “depended on embodied culture for transmission” and that writing was not valued over embodied knowledge nor meant to replace embodied praxis. (p. 17). Following Spanish invasion, it was Spanish colonizers who targeted the destruction of Mesoamerican texts because these texts recorded Native epistemologies and cosmologies. Taylor also argues that Spanish colonizers targeted writing because it was easier to control and destroy than embodied knowledge. They did this through censorship, punishing scribes, and burning of texts (p. 17). Jansen (1990) maintains that following the century of Spanish invasion, “the pictographic tradition slowly became extinct in the Mixtec region, partly because of the destructive zeal of Christian missionaries and partly because of replacement by alphabetic writing” (p. 99). As a result, Spanish colonizers demonstrated the value they assigned to texts and written records.

Through a decolonial framework, Smith (2012) critiques Western history and the writing of history by arguing that Indigenous peoples have been systematically excluded from “the

writing of history of our own lands” (p. 34). She also contends that Indigenous histories are often stored within genealogies, the landscape, weavings, carvings, and personal names *but* are often contested histories. Smith explains that many Indigenous systems of knowledge have been “reclassified as oral *traditions* rather than histories” (p. 34). Colonizers, then, created museums which “became the libraries of unwritten histories” (Stevens, 2016, p. 482).

Jansen (1990) asserts that of the few Mixtec texts that survived, all were “looted or taken out of the country by foreigners who wanted curiosities for their collections, or, more rarely, were stored in local archives” (p. 99). Schaeffer (2017) notes that “there are eight extant codices from the Postclassic era, seven that reside in libraries and museums in Europe, and only one that remains in Mexico” (p. 5). Jansen (1990) states that “most codices now have quite un-Mixtec names and designations” which are often named after the “donor” or by its new location such as *Codex Tulane* now held at Tulane University in New Orleans, which previously was named *Codex of San Pedro Cántaros* (p. 100).

Loyer (2021) critiques museums and their naming practices which decontextualizes and decenters Indigenous peoples. Through naming collections after donors, museums relegate Indigenous peoples to subjects instead of knowledge producers and holders. What is lost within many museum collections are the genealogies and situated knowledges of which the contents belong to. Instead, Loyer proposes recentering relationality in memory work. She emphasizes that Indigenous communities consider collections within cultural memory institutions to be living relatives. Chazon and Cole (2020) propose “an embodied archive that is dynamic, unfinished and created by active mediators of social memory” over colonial archives which prioritize written knowledge and are seen as “complete, static and objective” (p. 2). They argue

for resisting “dominant memory modes” as a way of “reclaiming sovereignty over both narrative and memory” (p. 2).

This theft, renaming, and decontextualizing of Mixtec texts can be seen as an example of what Smith (2012) calls “Trading the Other” which is a Western industry rooted in imperialism. Smith argues that “as a trade, it has no concern for the peoples who originally produced those ways of knowing” (p. 93). This type of trade applies colonial logics of imagined two-way transactions that render cultural items as commodities which could be sold. Smith asserts that the legacy of the so-called trade of “human beings, artefacts, curios, art works, specimens, and other cultural items has scattered our remains across the globe” (p. 92). Smith concludes that the legacy of “fragmentation and alienation of a cultural ‘estate’ over hundreds of years is that the material connection between people, their place, their languages, their beliefs and their practices has been torn apart” (p. 92).

This process of fragmentation has not been wholly successful, however, because of Mixtec peoples’ continual resistance which includes generational transmission of embodied knowledge and praxis despite their often lack of access to historical texts. In this way, Mixtec peoples continue to demonstrate the importance of orality, kinship, and ancestral lifeways. Therefore, visual memory keeping in the form of film can be viewed as an extension of this kind of Mixtec resistance. I argue the function of this kind of resistance is threefold in that it 1) positions Mixtec peoples as the owners of our histories/stories, 2) serves as a source of regenerative kinship between Mixtec peoples on their ancestral lands and Mixtec peoples across the diaspora, and 3) functions as a pedagogical tool whereby Mixtec peoples are in dialogue with one another across time and space.

Analyzing the power of Indigenous speculative storytelling and futurisms, Dillon (2012) argues for the application of *biskaabiiyang* or returning to ourselves, which “involves discovering how personally one is affected by colonization, discarding the emotional and psychological baggage carried from its impact, and recovering ancestral traditions in order to adapt in our post-Native Apocalypse world” to narratives (p. 9). Dillon adds that this process is also called decolonization. Mo’e’hahne (2021) contends that “the healing impetus articulated in femme-centered and queered Indigenous speculative futures might offer paths to healing through alternative forms of collectivity and solidarity” (p. 257). In this way, films created and produced by Mixtec women filmmakers which are femme and queer centered offer healing and are offerings of collective love, care, and memory work. Focusing on filmic representations of Indigenous carework, I define Indigenous carework as a practice of care built within a network of relationships which includes the four elements, human and nonhuman relatives, and the cosmos in order to restore balance to kin and communities. This definition is informed by femme Zapotec and Mixtec carework as it is preserved and carried out by *curanderas* and *yerberas*. Thus, when Zapotec and Mixtec healers enact Indigenous carework, they restore balance to their kin and communities. Given that Mixtecs and Zapotecs have always practiced carework and visual storytelling, their feature films can be interpreted as an extension of these practices into the present.

Codices, Calendars, and Cosmologies

Referring to codices and calendars as primary sources of Indigenous cosmologies, scholars have extensively studied and written about Mexica materials. While many scholars’ analyses focus on Mexica cosmology, codices, and calendars, Marcus (2020) warns against using “Nahua terms to explain lesser known calendars” since Mexica, Zapotec, and Mixtec calendars

are not identical, and that the Mexica calendar itself was not uniform (p. 24). Furthermore, Marcus (2020) adds that “the presence of tropical fauna in the Aztec calendar might simply reflect the adoption of aspects of earlier calendars” which includes the Zapotec calendar (p. 25). Considering that the Mexica civilization succeeded Zapotec and Mixtec civilizations, and then followed a period during which all three lived in closed proximity, I propose an interrelated analysis of their medicinal knowledge. This is not to minimize or erase any distinctions but to acknowledge the spectrum of co-existence and sharing of cosmological and medicinal knowledge across time as demonstrated by the adoption of Zapotec calendric elements within the Mexica calendars.

Codices follow an Indigenous history of visual art and knowledge production which “expresses specific historical and religious data” (Jansen & Pérez Jiménez, 2017, p. 53). The data can be interpreted to contain astronomical, agricultural, kinship, medicinal, biographical, geographical, and divine knowledge. Researchers of codices allege precolonial codices can be organized into two groups, the so-called Borgia Group and Vindobonensis Group. In 1949, Mexican archaeologist Caso observed that the latter group “originated in Ñuu Dzauui, the Nation of the Rain (the Mixtec Region) and was historical in nature” (Jansen & Pérez Jiménez, 2017, p. 55). The former, instead, focuses on religious knowledge through depicting the relationship between the calendars, divine powers, and sacred ceremonies. Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2017) contend that the calendar was more than “a chronometric or astronomical device” but also was the “paramount structuring principle of religious and social life” (p. 57). Each calendar day was associated with different divine forces and cosmological realms. In addition, a person was named after their calendar day, and in this way, there was a direct relationship between people and the natural and divine elements.

Of specific interest for this analysis, the Ñuu Dzau Group (previously categorized as the Vindobonesis Group) include the following Mixtec codices: *Codex Yuta Tnoho*, *Codex Ñuu Tnoo*, *Codex Tonindeye*, *Codex Iya Nacuaa*, and *Codex Añute*. Caso determined that this group of codices were historical narratives containing genealogies which connected different ruling dynasties during precolonial times (900-1521 A.D.), focusing on Lord 8 Deer, a warrior, and Lady 6 Monkey, a princess, who interacted with the Toltec empire. According to Caso and colonial sources, these codices also depict the sacred origin of the dynasties through the birth of the ancestors, who were “born from trees in specific ritually important towns” (Jansen & Pérez Jiménez, 2017, p. 63). Thus, this group includes codices which also contain Mixtec cosmology and calendar knowledge, and as such inform interpretations relevant to this analysis in regards to the cardinal directions.

Through the analysis of Ñuu Dzau codices, Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2017) propose the Mixtec directions as center, north, south, east and west which each have their own guardian. Directional guardians can be understood as divine beings which are named after calendar dates (for example, Lord 9 Wind). Lord and Lady (Señor and Señora) precede their calendar name as an honorific. The center is guarded by Lord 9 Wind, who according to the *Codex Yuta Tnoho*, brought the rains and kindled the first fire. Lord 9 Wind is understood as the one who keeps the cosmos in order and is known as Koo Sau (Rain Serpent) to contemporary Mixtec highland peoples. The north is guarded by Lord 2 Dog who represents the grandfather and keeper of ancestral knowledge. The south is guarded by Lady 9 Grass who presides over the Temple of Death and connects new generations to the ancestors. The east is guarded by Lord 7 Flower who presides over the Temple of Heaven and represents the first Sunrise. The west is guarded by Lady 1 Eagle also known as the Grandmother of the River associated with the temazcal (sweat

bath) and represents the moon. According to friar Francisco de Alvarado's 1593 dictionary of Dzaha Dzauí, the four directions are associated with their geographical contexts as Heaven/East, Dark Mountain/North, Ash River/West, and Place of Death/South.

These cardinal directions contain important cosmological data and can be employed as spaces for interpretation. However, rather than assuming the cardinal directions as fixed places, I will apply them as a fluid lens of analysis. Buenaflor (2019) argues that Mesoamericans' understanding of the cardinal directions "were multilayered and were not necessarily contained within a fixed space" (p. 5). Specifically, given my background as a researcher with Zapotec and Mixtec roots, I apply an overlapping bicultural analysis reflecting the historical alliance by both Zapotecs and Mixtecs. For example, Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2017) speaks of this "marital alliance" between "Ñuu Dzauí and Beni Zaa nobles" which merged political worlds as memorialized in Tomb 7, a burial site in Monte Alban (p. 558).

Indigenous Film Methodology

Estrada (2003) introduces an Indigenous film methodology which they call nahui ollin. Nahui ollin utilizes the four directions to analyze cinematic themes which correspond with each direction. Estrada's proposed Nahuatl four directions are "east/masculinity, west/femininity, north/elders and south/youth" (Introduction section, para. 1). Estrada's (2017) Indigenous film methodology expands to include Zapotec and Mixtec cosmologies, as well as, integrating "Chicana and Mexica queer spatial analysis" from the anthology *Fleshing the Spirit*. Estrada applies this expansive analysis to "trans-border queer Indigenous media that resist Eurocentric cis-heteropatriarchy" (Introduction section, para. 1). Building off Estrada's Indigenous film methodology, I will apply Mixtec cosmology of the four directions to Mixtec film analysis.

Specifically, this analysis is informed by Mixtec codices and what Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2017) have theorized about them. Each cardinal direction will be coupled by their guardian, theme, and medicinal purpose. While the cardinal directions can be understood as fluid and have various medicinal purposes across Mixtec, Zapotec, and Nahua pueblos, I am offering readings of the cardinal directions which are collective interpretations and as they apply to film analysis. The medicinal purposes utilized in this analysis derive from Nahua medicinal practices as published by Erika Buenaflor and do not include specific Mixtec or Zapotec medicinal knowledge connected to the cardinal directions since that information is kept and passed down generationally based on protocols and is not meant to be shared with outsiders.

For the purpose of film analysis, I read the Mixtec cardinal directions in the following ways. The North, or Yucu Naa/Dark Mountain, is guarded by Lord 2 Dog, the grandfather and ancestral keeper of sacred knowledge, whose theme pertains to embodied knowledge. Medicinally, Buenaflor interprets the North as the space of ancestral medicine and guidance. The West, or Yaa Yuta/River of Ashes, is guarded by Lady 1 Eagle, the Grandmother of the River and keeper of the temazcal, whose theme pertains to femme kinship and Indigenous carework. Medicinally, Buenaflor views the West as the space of death and releasing. The South, or Andaya, Huahi Cahi/Place of Death, is guarded by Lady 9 Grass, the lady of the Milky Way and connector between the ancestors and new generations, whose theme is liminal spaces. Medicinally, Buenaflor also reads the South as the space of discovery and understanding. The East, or Andevui/Heaven, is guarded by Lord 7 Flower, the First Sunrise and Sun Ñuhu, whose theme is rebirth and renewal. Additionally, Buenaflor views the East as the space of new beginnings. I omit the center direction in the film analysis because I interpret it as the underlying source of the films' creation and, thus, view it as the manifestation of cine comunitario itself.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I review the history of early mainstream Mexican cinema, Native representation in Mexican cinema (1921-1972), and Native Oaxacan cinema. The scholarship I will draw on in the first section examines proposed chronological eras of Mexican cinema starting from silent films and moving to sound films. After providing a brief overview of the history of early cinema during the silent film era and the emergence of movie salons, I will then examine the misrepresentations of Native peoples in national Mexican cinema followed by the shift towards self-representation of Native peoples of Oaxaca by Native Oaxacan filmmakers. In this section of the literature review, I examine the racial politics as well as the narrative elements of representing Indigenous peoples in Mexican cinema. The scholarship that I draw upon in this section is also comprised of English language surveys of Mexican cinema and Spanish language historical analysis of Mexican cinema.

Due to an absence of a national archive of Mexican silent films, film historian Luis Reyes de la Maza has reconstructed the history of the silent era through newspaper and magazine archives (Mora, 2005). In 1895, Edison's kinetoscope was introduced in Mexico City and press were invited to attend public showings (Mora, 2005; Pineda & Paranagua, 1995). In 1896, the first Mexican projector was set up in Mexico City following the Lumiere brothers' invention of the cinematographe and numerous movie salons opened throughout Mexico City as years followed (Mora, 2005). As the popularity of the cinema increased in the early 1900's, movie theaters opened in other Mexican states such as Guadalajara, Guanajuato, Chihuahua, and San Luis Potosi. The types of films shown at movie salons were short nonfiction films, typically depicting comedy routines, acrobatics, bullfights, natural disasters and political scenes and

events (Mora, 2005). The first full length scripted film, *El Grito de Dolores*, was released in 1908 and represented the 1810 uprising marking the Mexican War of Independence.

During the silent film period, nationalist fiction films about the Mexican Revolution emerged. The Mexican Revolution, which occurred from 1910 to 1920, was in essence an “agrarian revolution headed by Emiliano Zapata” (Boyer, 2015, p. 41) and did not necessarily originate as a “peasant uprising” (Boyer, 2015, p. 45). The Mexican Revolution had many factors including widespread commodification of the land and its resources which led to land dispossession under the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz. As industrialization of Mexico increased, Native peoples and pueblos were dispossessed of land by foreigners and the wealthy elite sought to invest and profit off emerging industries such as railroads and mining. Thus, many Native and rural pueblos joined the revolution to fight against the hacienda regime and in doing so, redefined their social category as campesinos, universally understood today as a peasant class comprised of “poor rural people who either own their own small parcels or who work as rural laborers” (Boyer, 2015, p. 41). Many nationalist films of the 1920’s reflected the tensions between Natives and hacienda owners/ranchers.



Figure 1. *De Raza Azteca* ad. (*El Universal*, 1922, 5).

Two Mexican silent films which represented this dynamic include *De Raza Azteca* (1921) and *El Indio Yaqui* (1926). *De Raza Azteca* (1921) is about Victor, a hacienda owner who is

depicted as benevolent and befriends Diego, a young Native man who represents the Aztec race as noble and valiant. Agrasánchez (2019) details Diego's storyline "as a noble and brave Indian who falls in love with a white girl and sacrifices himself for her sake and his best friend" (p. 136). While in the film the rancher is depicted as benevolent, in that he "defends his servants from the abuse of a foreman," its ultimate outcome is the death of Diego (Agrasánchez, 2010, p. 38). Furthermore, the film blurs the division between the two men by a plot twist in which Diego reveals to Victor that he wears the same ring as him and, therefore, is also a descendant of the Aztec race. Miquel (2017) refers to a 1922 newspaper ad for this movie (figure 1) as promoting two binary representatives of Mexican nationality: the Mexican charro (rancher) and the Indian (p. 95). Both of these figures represent the racial myth of mestizaje which was part of a national agenda to unify and assimilate citizens under Mexicanidad. Likewise, U.S. cinema reflected nationalist narratives in order to "develop a national mythology of historical origin" with the focus on "How the West Was Won" (Kilpatrick, 1999, p. 5).

Guillermo Calles, is a noteworthy actor and filmmaker in the history of Indigenous cinema in Mexico. Calles, a Mexican actor with Rarámuri ancestry, in fact played the role of Diego in *De Raza Azteca* (1921)—following his Native and Mexican roles in Hollywood Western films (Agrasánchez, 2019, pp. 135-6). He also co-wrote and directed *De Raza Azteca* (1921) with Miguel Contreras Torres. In 1926, Calles directed and acted in *El Indio Yaqui* (1926) alongside a mix of Hollywood, Mexican, and Native actors. *El Indio Yaqui* (1926) tells a story of rivalry between Ramon, a Native man, and Morgan, a wealthy rancher who desire the same white woman, Betty. Morgan threatened by Ramon kills his dog and then sexually assaults Betty who later takes her life. Ramon kills Morgan in response to these events. However, Ramon dies after sustaining wounds from the attack and is buried with Betty. Miquel (2017) and

Agrasánchez (2019) argue that Calles's depiction of the main Native/Mexican role as a hero upturned previous dominant stereotypes within Western films which depicted Native/Mexican characters as villains. However, Mexican film critics' reviews differed widely. Navarro (1926) viewed the film as "la primera piedra para nuestra reivindicación sobre la pantalla/the first step towards [Mexican] vindication onscreen" (p. 12). Vargas de la Maza (1926) asserted that Calles' script merely inverted Hollywood stereotypes which would encourage U.S. filmmakers to continue depicting Mexicans as "un pueblo salvaje/a wild society."

Later, Calles also directed and starred in *Raza de Bronce* (1927) which tells the story of a Native Mexican who through witnessing invasions on his homeland and joining its defense has a patriotic awakening. Calles' films were marked by nationalist themes present in Hollywood films in which American Indians were imagined as symbols of a nostalgic past, often depicted as "noble savages" doomed to disappear (Kilpatrick, 1999, p. 17). These representations served as a way to present audiences with "a distorted, shifting, polarized set of images that gave them a way to categorize and redefine the first residents of the continent" (Kilpatrick, 1999, p. 35). In the context of Mexico, these themes were also part of indigenismo discourse, which emerged in the 1920's. The Indigenista movement was led by "cosmopolitan nationalists inside and outside the government" (Sutherland, 2022, p. 76). Indigenista discourse glorified Natives as noble, atemporal, childlike characters, who represented the origin of the Mexican nation, but were in need of state intervention, typically via assimilation. Indigenista cinema, therefore, often depicted Natives as peoples of the past from bygone civilizations and rendered Native peoples as incapable of autonomy or self-representation. Following the silent film era, the Golden Age of Mexican cinema (1930's-50's), filmmakers continued to rely on nationalism and Indigenismo when representing Native peoples.

Tumbaga (2020) argues that ethnographic cinema such as Sergie Einstein's *Que Viva Mexico* (1932) "influenced much of Golden Age cinema" and that it relied on depictions which cosigned Indigenous peoples "to a national past that perpetuates the racist discourse of aboriginal inferiority" (p. 761). Tumbaga asserts that the categorization of ethnographic cinema can be extended to popular cinema and that its distinguishing feature is that it "confers a primitivistic otherness onto Native Mexicans markedly in contrast with Western-mestiza/o modernity" (762). Through cultural binaries, films function as tools for promoting nationalist and racist ideologies to audiences.

Garcia Blizzard (2022) contends that Mexican filmmakers, partaking in the colonial project of nation building, assimilation, and blanquitud, utilized film as a tool of white supremacy to construct a cinematic imagination of whiteness as ubiquity. They took this further by employing racial masquerade as a defining feature of their films whereby White Mexican actors played the roles of Native characters. This process emerged from and reinforced the Spanish colonial system during which a person's "access to political power, land, and wealth were greater depending on one's proximity to Spanishness" (p. 9). Garcia Blizzard further argues that filmic representations of "whiteness-as-indigeneity" sought to infuse "the racialized subject with the dignity and desirability that coloniality confers upon Whiteness" (p. 6).

Maria Candelaria (1944), directed by Emilio Fernandez and starring Dolores del Rio and Pedro Armendariz, was screened at the Cannes International Film Festival in 1946 and won film awards such as the Palme d'Or and the Ariel award for best cinematography. Tumbaga (2020) asserts that this Indigenista film depicts the cultural clash between "mestizo/white cultural superiors and their in many cases morally superior Native counterparts" and how this clash ends in tragedy (p. 763). In order to illustrate the complicated gendered and racial underpinnings of

filmic representations of Indigenous peoples during this period, I will now engage in critical analysis of the film. Readings of historical texts help demonstrate the decolonial ways that contemporary Indigenous femme filmmakers approach visual storytelling as well as resist racist and heteropatriarchal ideologies and practices. The film tells a complex story of multiple layers of discrimination and violence and centers a Native couple, Maria Candelaria and Lorenzo Rafael, in Xochimilco. Maria is ostracized and bullied by her community for being the daughter of a prostitute. Meanwhile, the entire community is oppressed by Don Damián, their cruel mestizo boss and shopkeeper. Don Damián, jealous of Maria and Lorenzo, holds a debt against the couple, refuses to give Lorenzo medicine when Maria is sick with malaria, and throws Lorenzo in jail after he steals the medicine to save Maria's life. Maria is ultimately killed by her community when they assume Maria has posed for a nude painting.

Further illustrating the film's investment in colonial understandings of race, a criollo painter and priest, complete the social hierarchy demonstrated throughout the film, and fail to prevent Maria's death and Lorenzo's imprisonment. Earlier in the film, the priest defends Maria after her community seeks to exile her at a blessing for animals ceremony at the church and after Don Damián tries to get his debt from them at the same event. However, the priest does not interfere when Don Damián shows up to arrest Lorenzo at their wedding. Instead, he chastises Maria after she directs her anger over the injustice of Lorenzo's detainment towards the Virgin Mary. The painter, who opens up the film by telling the story, asks Maria to pose for a painting, tries to convince Maria with money he knows she needs, and obscures the fact that he wants her to pose nude until after she agrees to pose for him. Following Lorenzo's arrest, Maria poses for the painter after he offers to pay Lorenzo's bail, despite the jail refusing to let Lorenzo out until the judge returns from vacation and makes a decision. When Maria is frightened by the request

to pose nude after the painter has finished painting her head, she runs away. An Indigenous woman who is present steps in as her body double and the painter finishes his painting. Later, women from her pueblo see the painting, assume Maria posed nude for the painting, and bring together the townsfolk to punish Maria by burning her home and stoning her to death. Lorenzo looking on from his prison cell manages to escape and carries Maria's body away. The film ends with Maria's dead body resting in a canoe as Lorenzo paddles it down the Canal of the Dead and the priest rings the bell.

Garcia Blizzard (2020) argues that this film represents prerevolutionary Mexico and the chaos associated with its incompetent governing structure which lacked the ability to “rule or integrate different social sectors” (p. 139). She asserts that the painter and priest symbolize “an expiring criollo patriarchy” which share the blame for Maria's demise along with her hostile Native community (p. 141). In this way, Garcia Blizzard contends that the film advocates for “postrevolutionary corporativism” (p. 140). In this section, I will analyze how the film advocates for the assimilation of Natives through outsider (criollo) interventions and the church.



Figure 2. Priest hovers over Native characters. Screenshot of *Maria Candelaria* (1944).

Throughout the film, the power dynamics are evident between the criollo characters and the Native characters. The priest is often positioned above Native characters (figure 2) within a

frame or in low angle shots (figure 3) which demonstrates the ways he possesses power over and is symbolically superior to Native subjects. This power imbalance represents the oppressive function of the Catholic Church in Native peoples' lives, but as part of a cinematic nationalist building project, conveys the state's need to assimilate Natives who are considered inferior, meek, and submitting by their own volition. In figure 2, the priest reproaches a hostile Native pueblo for threatening and bullying Maria. He stands above Maria and the crowd, depicted as fighting children, who seemingly need the priest to bring order and decorum into their lives. His supposed voice of reason is the only one capable of quelling the dispute and solicits regret over the cruel behavior from a Native woman character. The priest is also utilized as a judge of good and noble character through signs of his approval when Maria and Lorenzo behave in ways which demonstrate loyalty and faith to the Church (figure 3).



Figure 3. Priest looks down on Native character. Screenshot of *Maria Candelaria* (1944).

The painter's and priest's scripted dialogue also convey the film's primary messages about Indigeneity. In the film, the painter is the ultimate judge on beauty and authenticity when he proclaims to the priest that Maria is "la esencia de la verdadera belleza Mexicana/the essence

of true Mexican beauty” (Fernández, 1944, 1:20:54). He exhibits his entitlement to painting her image when he repeatedly ignores her refusals and hesitancy. When talking to the priest about it, he explains “yo pinto indios como usted sabe y desde que la vi, sentí en ella lo que debía haber sido en el pasado, esta raza delicada y emotiva maravillosa./I paint Indians as you know and since I saw her I felt in her what it must have been in the past, this wonderful delicate and emotional race” (Fernández, 1944, 1:20:42). The painter communicates the aesthetic appeal of Indianness as a race of the past. The romanticized view of the Indian of the past, in this case symbolized by Maria, is juxtaposed with contemporary Native women in her pueblo who are depicted as cruel towards Maria except for the huesera.

The huesera, the pueblo’s healer, is summoned by Lorenzo to cure Maria. However, the huesera is insulted by a white doctor who is sent by the painter to check on Maria. The on-screen tension between outsider intervention (the doctor) and Native knowledge (the huesera) is evident in how the doctor dismisses the huesera’s expertise and how she defends herself. When the huesera refuses to assist Maria if the doctor tends to her first, the doctor utilizes the saying “de que la mula se amacha, no hay espuelas que la muevan./once the mule refuses, there are no spurs that can move it” to demonstrate his frustration with the huesera’s stubbornness before agreeing to let her treat Maria first (Fernández, 1944, 1:07:19). Even after the doctor agrees, the huesera refuses to begin her treatment with the doctor present and asks the men to exit the house while she works. I read this scene as the huesera expressing her agency and resisting the bullying of the doctor, but the film most likely employs these scenes to ridicule Native medicine and Natives’ stubbornness toward assimilation.

The painter and priest continue to be the main representations of outsider interventions. The painter persists to persuade Maria to pose for his painting. The painter and the priest work

together to attempt to convince Lorenzo, when he is in jail, to agree to the painting. First the painter acknowledges the fact that Natives have experienced many abuses and the aversion Natives have as a result to outsiders. Then he blames Lorenzo's and Maria's refusal to participate in the painting as the primary source for the troubles they are in. The painter indirectly insinuates that had they agreed, they would have gotten paid and would not owe Don Damian money and Lorenzo would not have had to take the medicine by force from the store. He turns to the priest for support, who agrees with him, and then the priest tries to sway Lorenzo by arguing that posing for the painting is honorable work. However, Lorenzo expresses that he is only ok with being painted himself but prefers that Maria is not painted. This is followed by the painter ignoring Lorenzo's wishes and painting Maria anyway.

This scene demonstrates numerous things about outsider interventions in Indigenous communities. The primary assumption it makes is that Native men can make decisions for Native women when interacting with outside forces and policies. When the painter first approaches the couple about the painting, he directs his request to Lorenzo and then later addresses Lorenzo about the matter when he is in jail. It also communicates that those attempting to enforce outsider interventions need to be persistent, cunning, and forceful. Those in power who are able to make those decisions are constructed in the filmic imagination as paternal and compelled by their good intentions and interest in Natives.

While the painter acknowledges at the beginning of the film, that the painting fills him with horror when he thinks about the tragedy it caused, he seemingly justifies it because it allowed him to find and capture something he claims is hard to find. The painter seems to convey that Native women's worth is only in the beauty observed by the outsider/colonizer gaze, as static objects, and as vestiges of the past, rather than as living humans deserving of agency.

His message also functions as a metaphor for the Mexican nationalist building project, which suggests that it was worthwhile as long as Natives assimilated and their cultural artifacts are preserved in museums. Further, it justifies the deaths of Natives in the process of achieving so-called Mexican progress and modernity.

Following the Golden Age of cinema, Rohrer (2017) argues that the type of cinema produced between the 1950's and 1980's could be classified as Mexploitation cinema. This categorization pertains to these films' low-budget and quality noted in their aesthetics, content, venues, and production. Rohrer (2017) analyzes the Mexploitation films of Maria Elena Velasco, who is described as "a mestiza with an indigenous father and a 'white' mother" and in which she stars as the character La India María (p. 24). According to Tumbaga (2020), Velasco's character relies on "the same ideological registers and conventions of the classic Indigenista melodrama" of the Golden Age (p. 760). La India Maria contains a lot of the characteristics associated with Indigenista Natives which include childlike, modest, noble, and atemporal attributes. However, Velasco's character, in contrast to the tragic Indians of the silent and Golden Age films, is comedic and "triumphs over her adversities despite her indigeneity" onscreen (Tumbaga, 2020, p. 760).

Velasco's first film and blockbuster hit, *Tonta, tonta, pero no tanto/Dumb, dumb, but not that dumb* (1972), focused on La India María leaving her pueblo to go live with her cousin and find work in Mexico City, but after several mishaps, finds herself lost and stranded. With the help of two taxi drivers and a television host, she finds her cousin. She also prevents a theft, solves an international crime, and eventually returns to her pueblo where she helps establish its first school. In this section I will analyze assimilation and stigmatized language themes. Like *Maria Candelaria* (1944), this film depicts tensions between opposing binaries such as rural/city

and Mestizo/Native. Therefore, I will also briefly examine those binaries in the context of *Tonta, tonta, pero no tanto* (1972).



Figure 4. The priest's blessing. Screenshot of *Tonta, tonta, pero no tanto* (1972).

At the beginning of the film, Maria and her parents go to church to seek the priest's blessing before Maria embarks on her journey to the capital or Mexico City (figure 4). It is in this scene that the audience finds out that Maria wishes to meet her cousin, Eufemia, in the capital and that Maria and her parents need the priest's assistance in reading Eufemia's letter since they are illiterate. The priest, then, serves as an intermediary for the Natives through his ability to read the letter. In the letter Eufemia states that through moving to the city, Maria will "better [her] filthy life/mejorar [su] mugrosa vida" (Cortés, 1972, 2:00). Maria is depicted as valuing the fact that her cousin has found work in the city and can help her do the same. This

scene sets up the ways Maria and Eufemia are juxtaposed throughout the film in order to promote Indigenista stereotypes and perspectives.

Eufemia represents social mobility by migrating and assimilating into urban life. Therefore, Eufemia is first juxtaposed to Maria as literate while Maria is positioned as illiterate. Furthermore, when Maria is reunited with Eufemia, there are more marked oppositions between the two. While Maria has two braids and wears a traditional satin blouse and skirt (associated with Mazahua women), a rebozo, and sandals, Eufemia is wearing casual clothing similar to the city women around her. As Maria speaks in what Tumbaga (2020) calls “movie indio language” which occasionally is mumbled and indiscernible, Eufemia speaks in fully discernible Spanish with occasional slang (p. 764). Similar to the letter scene, Maria and Eufemia are juxtaposed as opposites wherein Maria represents the traditional, rural Native while Eufemia represents assimilation and urban spaces. It is unclear if Eufemia grew up in the same pueblo as Maria speaking her Native language and later migrated to the city or if she grew up in the city and identifies as Mestiza.

Later, when Eufemia and her boyfriend try to convince Maria to steal from her rich boss, Doña Julia, in order to make quick money. Maria exhibits her moral superiority by refusing to steal Doña Julia’s jewelry. When Eufemia tries to persuade her by telling her not to be afraid, Maria responds that she is not refusing out of fear. She proclaims, “I may be very Indian, very poor, but [I’m also] very honorable” (Cortés, 1972, 41:40). Eufemia’s boyfriend, in frustration, responds to her yelling “So you’re very content to keep working like an ass all your life?” (Cortés, 1972, 41:47). Thus, the film utilizes the Indigenista trope of the noble Indian and opposes this with the moral inferiority of city folk/Mestizos. Despite this, Maria’s lack of

intelligence is at the center of this scene as she speaks in movie Indio speech and is branded a burra (donkey/dummy) for not wanting to partake in a seemingly easy ploy.

After other characters in the film try to steal Doña Julia's jewelry and incite an investigation, Maria recognizes the detective, Crescencio or "Chencho," as her fellow pueblo paisano. Chencho feigns his connection to Maria and dons a falsetto voice in an effort to disguise himself further. When Maria tries to remind him of their pueblo, San Jose de los Burros (San Jose of the Donkeys), Chencho refutes any knowledge of it and uses his power as an authority figure to silence her and later to have her detained in a jail cell. Once alone with Maria in her jail cell, Chencho then attempts to persuade a confession from Maria by approaching her as his cuate (close friend). When Maria reproaches his hypocrisy, Chencho explains that his career would be jeopardized if he publicly admitted his affiliation to Maria and their pueblo. While the audience knows Maria is innocent, in the film Chencho's logic of recommending Maria confess is aligned with his belief that she is guilty based on his sparse investigation. Chencho represents the colonial carceral system in which marginalized people are often persuaded into confessing, whether guilty or not, under the pressure of acquiring lesser jail time. Chencho demonstrates migration and assimilation into urban life which enables him to wield power over someone like Maria, a Native migrant woman falsely accused of a crime. Throughout the rest of the film, Chencho continues to exert his power over her by silencing and mocking her but Maria outwits him every time.

Similarly, much to the dismay of white characters throughout the film, who are actually guilty of the crimes Maria is accused of, Maria outwits them as well by preventing the theft of Doña Julia's jewelry and solving an international crime of insurance fraud. These white characters hurl slurs at her and amongst themselves when speaking of her. They demonstrate

their incredulousness at her outwitting their supposed intellectual superiority but is aligned with Indigenista cinema by highlighting their moral inferiority.



Figure 5. The first school in San Jose. Screenshot of *Tonta, tonta, pero no tanto* (1972).

In contrast, moral white characters represent state interventions of assimilation: the Catholic church and education system. The priest, represents the Catholic church, as a central intermediary for Native peoples and Paco, a television host, represents education because he helps Maria attend school to learn to read and write. Paco also advises Maria to return to her pueblo and upon her return, she declares that in order to “fight the devil, she cannot remain an ignorant Indian” to the priest and her parents” (Cortés, 1972, 1:21:14). In the final scene, Maria establishes the first school in her pueblo with money given to her by Paco for solving the international crime (figure 5). On the sign, the pueblo’s name is shortened to San Jose with de los Burros/of the Donkeys omitted. These final scenes promote the idea that Natives are intellectually inferior and culturally backward (i.e. donkeys) and can only be redeemed by education and assimilation.

Tonta, tonta, pero no tanto (1972) relies on the notion that La India Maria does not belong in Mexico City, and that her position as a traditional Native woman who struggles to speak Spanish coherently binds her to her rural pueblo while her cousin, Eufemia, and paisano, Chencho represent assimilation and belonging to Mexico City. These binaries and logics are absurd and engage in nationalist historical revisionism because they erase the historical presence of Tenochtitlan, the largest city in Mesoamerica ruled by the Mexica empire prior to Spanish invasion, which rests underneath present-day Mexico City. Furthermore, Native peoples continue to live in and around Mexico City and its surrounding neighborhoods and defy the binaries of native/rural and native/traditional. As a non-monolithic group, Natives represent a full range of experiences that cannot be contained in the Indigenista films of the silent, golden age, and mexploitation eras of cinema.

Cine Comunitario and Native Oaxacan Cinema

Gumucio Dagron (2012) distinguishes Latin American and Caribbean cine comunitario from cine comercial (commercial cinema) in that it is made by nonprofessional filmmakers whose films focus on specific communities and who involve all its community members in the process (p. 17). He argues that cine comunitario arises “from the need to communicate without intermediaries” in one’s own language and aims to “fulfill the function of politically representing marginalized, underrepresented or ignored communities in society” (p. 18). In this way, cine comunitario contains a horizontal structure which is guided by community consensus and participation while commercial film has a vertical structure controlled by a hierarchy which includes the government, production companies, and directors who often solicit participation from actors and crew members not related to film locations. Indigenista films examined in the

previous sections fit the characteristics of commercial film. In this section, I will explore the origins of cine comunitario, its process, and significance.

The Ikoods pueblo of San Mateo del Mar was the first Native pueblo to cultivate cine comunitario in 1985 when the First Indigenous Film Workshop occurred, a project proposed by documentary filmmaker Luis Lupone to the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (National Indigenist Institute/INI) (Garcia Torres & Roca Ortiz, 2021, p. 122). In a 2008 interview, Lupone stated that INI members responded to his proposal by calling him crazy (Ávila Pietrasanta, 2012, p. 378). Despite the INI's initial rejection of his proposal, Lupone attended an artesano meeting in Oaxaca which hosted twenty-five Native communities to gauge interest in a film workshop. He screened classic movies with "Indigenous protagonists" such as *Maria Calendaria* (1944) and *La Perla* (1947) and asked Native participants if they felt reflected in these movies to which they responded "Que es eso? Esos no son indigenas, son actores vestidos, hablando como indigenas/What is this? These people are not Indigenous. They are actors dressed and speaking like Indigenous people" (p. 378).

According to Garcia Torres and Roca Ortiz (2021), this workshop was a delayed response to demeaning institutional representations of Indigenous peoples in Mexico. They argue that the representational cinematic models occupied up until this point were ones which depicted Native peoples as backward, infantile, third-class citizens who had to be helped, changed, and assimilated for the sake of the Mexican nation state's emerging status as a modern country. Later in 1989, the INI also launched the project *Transferencia de Medios Audiovisuales a Organizaciones y Comunidades* (Audiovisual Media Transfer to Indigenous Organizations and Communities). Garcia Torres and Roca Ortiz (2021) assert that out of the "48 productions grouped in the El Cine Indigenista Series and of the 10 works corresponding to the Indigenous

Peoples of Mexico Series, recognized by the Audiovisual Ethnographic Archive (AEA), only three were made by women” (p. 125). These works pertain to the films produced by INI between 1956 through 2010.

The First Indigenous Film Workshop in San Mateo del Mar was documented through *Tejiendo mar y viento* (1987) directed by Luis Lupone. It captured various stages of the workshop including the selection of the weaving collective who participated, workshop activities, and the filming of final workshop exercises. The Ikoots weaving collective that was selected was called Organización Artesanal San Mateo del Mar (the San Mateo del Mar Artisanal Organization) and was led by President Teófila Palafox Herranz (Ikood). Palafox Herranz and the weaving collective later participated in the Audiovisual Media Transfer to Indigenous Organizations and Communities Project and produced the documentary films *Leaw amangoch tinden nop ikoods* (*La vida de una familia Ikoods/The life of an Ikoods family*) (1987) and *Ollas de San Marco* (*San Marcos’ Cooking Pots*) (1992). Additionally, Teófila’s sister, Elvira directed the films *Angoch tonomb* (*Una boda antigua/An ancient wedding*) and *Teat Monteok* (*El cuento del Dios Rayo/The story of the Lightning God*) along with other members of the weaving collective. However, only Teófila’s film was post-produced and shown in the central plaza of San Mateo del Mar in February of 1988, along with *Tejiendo mar y viento* at the Cineteca Nacional later in June of the same year. Elvira’s films were not post-produced until 2012 and 2013 with showings in 2021 at the Filminlatino Mexico. As a result, Teófila Palafox Herranz is considered the first Indigenous filmmaker of Ikoots origin and a pioneer of cine comunitario in Mexico.

More recent iterations of cine comunitario include the films of Mixtec directors Ángeles Cruz and Itandehui Jansen. In a 2022 interview, Ángeles Cruz indicated she is “trying to make a

more community-based cinema, to include the entire community in a more horizontal, less vertical scheme” (*El País Mexico*, 2022). In a 2024 interview, she describes her filming process as:

In my pueblo, we plant corn and every year the best seed is chosen for the new harvest. The seed is blessed. I think that for us in cinema, the story is that. It is that seed. How are we going to plant that seed? How are we going to take care of and cultivate it? For me, the script is that part. It is finding that seed of what I want to talk about and also with whom I want to make the film. With whom is like the land where I’m going to plant it. And with whom, until now, I have always decided to do it with my community. (MULLU *Historias en Resistencia*, 2024)

This description is akin to the process of cultivating the milpa and incorporates aspects of cine comunitario within it.

In a 2022 interview, Itandehui Jansen explains that for her “cinema is defined by emotional relationships” and that her films “speak of affection and love for the family, for the community, for the ancestors, for the future generations and for the land and the landscape” (FICM, 2022, 0:24). In her dissertation, Jansen (2015) highlights the importance of employing “modes of production involving family members and community structures for the realization of [her] films” (p. 126). She further expands on how cine comunitario “embeds the films in the community and turns the films into a communitarian expression” (p. 126). Jansen argues that it is through communal modes of production, themes, and structures, that bond filmmakers to their communities and regenerates their identity.

CHAPTER III: FILM ANALYSIS

Angela Cruz's *Nudo Mixteco* (2021) tells the overlapping stories of three Mixtec people returning to their pueblo to confront unsettling circumstances during the annual patron saint celebration. Maria returns to attend her mother's funeral, reunites with her first love, Piedad, and confronts her homophobic father, Julian. Maria invites Piedad to move to the city with her but after Piedad agrees, Maria discretely leaves for the city in the early morning without Piedad. Toña returns for her daughter, Rosa, after Toña learns her uncle, Fermín, is sexually abusing Rosa like he abused Toña. Toña's mother, Felipa, denies the abuse and tries to stop Toña from reporting Fermín, but in spite of this Toña reports Fermín to the pueblo authorities. Esteban returns to reunite with his wife, Chabela, but is enraged when he discovers she has chosen a new partner after not hearing from Esteban for three years. Esteban reports this to the pueblo authorities, who settle the matter through a pueblo assembly. The pueblo votes for Esteban to keep their house and for Chabela to be released from the marriage. However, Esteban does not abide by this decision and attempts to murder Chabela. In the final scene, Esteban sets his house on fire while his mother cries by his side. The title *Nudo Mixteco* (Mixtec Knot) gestures to the region in the Sierra Mixteca where the film is shot, but could also imply the metaphorical ways Mixtec peoples are bound together, through kinship and traditions, but can also find themselves bound in a world that is especially violent towards Native women.

Also following narratives of migration and kinship within pueblo communities, Itandehui Jansen's *Tiempo de lluvia* (2018) focuses on a Mixtec family separated and impacted by migration and transitions between pueblo and urban life. The title *Tiempo de lluvia* (*In times of rain*) refers to the rainy season during which the film unfolds and the life sustaining force of rain in pueblo life. Jansen describes *Tiempo de la lluvia* (2018) as a "film in which the relationship

between generations and in particular between mother and daughter are central and once again addresses the issue of migration” (FICM, 2022, 3:19). Throughout the film, Doña Soledad and Adela as mother and daughter mirror each other and assert their opinions about pueblo and urban life as well as their values and sense of purpose as Native women.

Cardinal Directions, Communal Customs, and Filmic Kinship

This chapter will examine, through the Mixtec cardinal directions, the way Cruz and Jansen highlight liminal spaces, embodied knowledge, femme kinship and carework, and new beginnings in their films. In particular, both films emphasize the liminal space migrant characters occupy with an intersectional lens and the narratives warn of the ways imbalances impact Mixtec peoples through conflicts with other community members and through illness. Through a queer Indigenous feminist reading of these films, I argue that cis-heteropatriarchy drives the many harms that femme migrant characters encounter. Specifically, they experience ostracization, violence, and family dysfunction within and outside their pueblos. These representations, I argue, thus highlight Native women’s inability to escape cis-heteropatriarchy and gendered violence regardless of the geographies that they inhabit. In crafting these analyses, I draw on Mixtec cosmological concepts associated with the four cardinal directions in order to frame and interpret the ways that the filmmakers speak to Indigenous knowledges, understandings of community, space, and gender, as well as what I define as Indigenous carework. In the following section, I approach each of the respective films through a queer Indigenous feminist lens that is attuned to the four cardinal directions as they are understood in Mixtec cosmologies.

South: Lady 9 Grass/Liminal Spaces

The South is guarded by Lady 9 Grass, the lady of the Milky way. Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2017) consider her to be a complex deity who is associated with “earth and sky as well as life and death” (pp. 110-111). In this way, Lady 9 Grass occupies the space of duality and is, therefore a liminal character. Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2017) also contend that, as the female principle in the cosmos, she is also presided over the Place of Death or Andaya, Huahi Cahi. In this analysis, South/Lady 9 Grass represents liminal spaces based on interpretations of codices. Applying Buenaflor’s interpretation of the cardinal directions as they pertain to cleansing rituals, the south also represents the space of discovery and understanding.

The film, *Nudo Mixteco* (2021), written and directed by Ángeles Cruz begins with the opening quote:

I felt that I did not belong to this world, I fantasized that I was flying, that one day I was going to disappear and become Rain, but as time went by, I realized that I could not escape. (Cruz, 2021, 0:44)

This quote appears in Mixtec in the upper right corner with the Spanish translation in the left corner. This is followed by an opening scene of a chain-link fence (figure 6). The viewer is on one side of the fence looking out through it. On the other side we see five birds who upon hearing a car honk, take off in flight. This scene captures a type of freedom, in the ability to take off in flight, which the viewer on the other side of the fence cannot partake in. Therefore, this

scene visually represents the sentiment of the opening quote.



Figure 6. Fenced in looking at birds take flight. Screenshot of *Nudo Mixteco* (2021).

Throughout the film, Cruz seems to employ lighting to compliment her storytelling. Many of the characters are given minimal lighting at the beginning of the film often situated in dark and shadowy scenes. Darkness and shadows seem to gesture to the circumstances that femme characters navigate and process in a repressed, silent, and controlled way. The spectrum of lighting also represents the spectrum of belonging within the pueblo. As the narrative progresses, the characters transition into brighter lighting as they experience transformation, closure, and move towards new beginnings.

After the opening scene of the fence, one of the main characters in the film, Maria, is introduced. Maria is a liminal character who feels trapped and contained. This is represented symbolically throughout the opening scenes in which Maria is situated farther away from the camera's focal point in a series of wide shots where she is sometimes framed by structures. For example, in the opening scenes she is depicted as framed in, or confined, by a wide shot of a line of sinks where she is positioned at the far end. She is figured as smaller in comparison. Then, she is later framed in the middle of a wide shot by the walls in her apartment. This is followed by the image of her face in a small circular mirror which she peers into while getting ready. Later in

the city, she is shown walking down the street, getting into a van, disembarking, and going down the metro steps, and taking the trash out in wide shots. It is not until Maria's phone starts vibrating, that a close shot is employed to focus on her emotional reaction to hearing news about her mother's death.

Aside from cinematography, Maria is represented as a liminal character through her status within her pueblo as a queer woman. Most members of the community seem neutral or indifferent towards her and do not advocate for her when her father lashes out at her at public events. This is juxtaposed with her relationship with Piedad, who is her first love. Maria and Piedad have an intimate connection during which they are both vulnerable with one another. In the scene after Maria is kicked out of the wake, Piedad and Maria exchange a series of intimate moments in the darkness, partially illuminated by moonlight. Maria confides in her, "The day that I left, I believed it was the saddest day of my life" (Cruz, 2021, 08:48). In this statement, Maria conveys her grief in leaving *and* returning. Piedad, concerned, offers Maria refuge from the cold, both literal coldness and the metaphoric cold of ostracization and isolation.

Maria and Piedad leave the darkness and return to Piedad's home where soft yellow light and shadows envelop them as the two rekindle their love in a series of close shots. During this love making scene, Maria and Piedad exchange a level of tenderness and passion for one another that seems to represent a mutual creation of a home within each other. They seem fully comfortable and familiar with one another as they exchange vulnerable moments of pleasure together. Viewers are made aware of Maria and Piedad's long-lasting love for each other, which preceded Maria's departure from the pueblo, through Piedad keeping the first gift that Maria gave her, a bunch of flowers. The fact that Piedad tells Maria that she kept them because it was her first gift signals to the viewers that they are long-term lovers.

Thus, queerness is one liminal space addressed in *Nudo Mixteco* (2021). Maria's father labels her queerness as "pendejadas" (bullshit) and blames them for her mother's death. Categorizing her queerness as *pendejadas* indicates judgment and ridicule towards her sexuality. Yet what is so striking about Maria's character is that she is unapologetic about her queerness. There is no sign of shame or a desire to be approved by her homophobic father. She never sways away nor hides her queerness. For example, Maria and Piedad openly hold each other's hands at the burial albeit briefly. Furthermore, the love making scenes between Maria and Piedad capture queer erotic pleasure in a way that does not hide nor deny their sexuality. They demonstrate the agency both women possess in those moments to own their sexuality and their expressions of it in a place that ostracizes them for it.

Migration is the central underlying liminal space addressed in *Nudo Mixteco* (2021) which ties all the characters together. For example, Maria returns to the pueblo but experiences further evidence of her non-belonging which is demonstrated by her inability to return home to her mother or father as a loved and accepted family member. Maria occupies the liminal space where she neither belongs to the city nor her pueblo but chooses to leave her pueblo and return to the city alone. Her narrative highlights her intersectional positionality within her Mixtec pueblo whereby as a queer woman, she is not safe nor accepted. Likewise, in the city, she is depicted as working class and, in this space, presumably experiences other forms of discrimination based on her gender and Indigenous pueblo background.

Toña is another liminal character that navigates this relationship between her pueblo and the city. It is clear in her narrative, that Toña is neither safe in the city where she experiences sexual harassment or the pueblo where she and her daughter experienced sexual abuse. As a vendor, Toña is approached by her boyfriend, a corrupt police officer who intimidates other

vendors by requesting a payment. It is unclear how safe Toña feels within the relationship, but she displays a desire for distance. For example, she does not let her boyfriend spend the night with her or accompany her to her pueblo. It is possible that her relationship is out of convenience and represents another relationship of unequal power dynamics. While Toña seems unhappy in a loveless relationship with an unlikeable partner in the city, she is given closure through the process of accountability she demands of her abuser and mother in the pueblo assembly.



Figure 7. Doña Sole looks away at the river. Screenshot of *Tiempo de lluvia* (2018).



Figure 8. Adela looks away on a bus. Screenshot of *Tiempo de lluvia* (2018).

The film, *Tiempo de lluvia* (2018), written and directed by Itandehui Jansen begins with an aerial shot of the mountains and the pueblos within la Mixteca. Jansen states that her “work is really about fragmentation” and this film focuses on family fragmentation via migration

(Universiteit Leiden, 2015). After the opening landscape scenery, Doña Sole is seen sitting by the river looking pensive (figure 7). The title screen separates her from her daughter, Adela, in the next scene, where she is sitting on a city bus looking equally pensive (figure 8). The pueblo landscape is replaced by the city landscape with particular places being depicted so as to signal to the viewers that Adela is in Mexico City. For example, Adela is clearly located in Mexico City as she is shown making her way to work at a hotel.

Demonstrating further patterns of liminality, the liminal spaces featured in *Tiempo de lluvia* (2018) are the spaces between life and death, sickness and health, and migration between the pueblo and the city. For instance, the character Juan, who is terminally ill, is represented oscillating between sickness and death. Juan is able to eventually die peacefully after his brother, Camiro, carries him home and forgives him. Through this final exchange, Juan is able to transcend fully into the afterlife, completing his journey. Maria also navigates the liminal spaces between life and death and sickness and health. Maria, who is pregnant, but lost her first child to illness, literally connects her lineage to new generations by healing from her fears and *tristeza* (grief) and giving birth to her baby. Teo, Maria's husband, also connects with the liminal space between the ancestors and new generations when he hears a trapped *nahual*, is able to locate it, and releases it. A *nahual* has distinct meanings pertaining to different pueblos, but a general understanding is a natural entity of which a person can transform into which is often confused with a *tona* which is a person's animal counterpart connected at birth (López Castro, 2019, p. 18). Those who follow this tradition, which is taught intergenerationally, can also be understood as shapeshifters. While it is unclear whose *nahual* is released, both Juan and Adela are freed from painful circumstances following its release.

The implications that migration has on identity and cultural memory is also at the center of Jansen's feature film. Jansen asserts "I believe that migration at this time is part of the history and experience of many Indigenous communities, either because people migrate by choice or because they are forced by circumstances to seek more opportunities outside their community" (Reyes Mejía, 2018). Beyond this, Jansen's cinematography seeks to "make the audience feel the effect of distance, fragmentation, and estrangement from the place of origin" (Reyes Mejía, 2018). Adela can also be read a liminal character as a Mixtec migrant living in Mexico City and her relationships speak to distance, fragmentation, and estrangement the most.

Adela is shown constantly working, always attempting to save up money, and centering the value of money in all things. In this way Adela can be read as internalizing the values of capitalism where she believes acquiring money is more important than her presence in her family's life. Her mother doubts her ability to properly care for son, Jose, in the city where she is always working and does not understand that motherhood is not always about money. Despite Adela hiding her abusive relationship from her mother, Doña Sole seems to suspect something negative is happening and has feelings of mistrust, as reflected in her bad dreams of her daughter and the corn kernel reading. Adela only confides in her coworker about her struggles and in doing so communicates her views about pueblo life. Adela tells her coworker: "You know how it is there. There's no work, no people. There is nothing there" (Jansen, 2018, 59:54). Adela's extreme view makes no room for a spectrum of experiences in the pueblo and negates a sense of purpose for the people living there. She is depicted onscreen as oblivious to the harshness of urban life which is visually represented by transitions between peaceful pueblo scenery to fast paced urban public transit scenery.

Adela also conveys her views on Mixtec language when she overhears Rosa speaking a different language on the phone. She asks Rosa about this and Rosa tells her she speaks Nahuatl. She asks if Adela also speaks another language and Adela shares that her mother speaks another language. When Rosa asks if she speaks it too, Adela replies, “No...well, yes but I do not have anyone to speak it with. Then people look at me funny when they hear me speak it on the phone” (Jansen, 2018, 01:09:34). Rosa responds with humor by asking her how to say, “What are you looking at?” in Mixtec (Jansen, 2018, 01:09:40). When Adela tells her, Rosa suggests saying that to the people who judge her for speaking her native language. Through this exchange, Rosa suggests a different strategy for navigating life as a Native woman from a pueblo in Mexico City.

Adela, therefore, can be read as a character who experiences separation and fragmentation from her pueblo of origin. Throughout the film, there is a tension between Adela and her mother. It is possible to view Adela’s experiences as representing migration and globalization and Soledad’s experiences as being rooted in Mixtec life and traditions. In this way the tensions within their relationship speaks to the greater forces at play in the lives of many Native peoples in pueblos. It seems that after Adela’s interactions with Rosa, during which she connected with and accepted help from another Native woman, that Adela experiences safety and comfort in a way that almost invites the possibility for her to reexamine her relationship to her mother, her language, and son.

When she returns to the pueblo to reunite with her son, she speaks Mixtec with her mother. Then, in their city apartment, she sings the Mixtec song that her mother taught them to her son. Therefore, It is possible to view Adela’s journey as moving through liminal spaces of not belonging to a space of belonging through reclamation of ancestral practices including

language. Adela's movement between these spaces can also be interpreted as her experiencing an imbalance of which she is later healed of and restored to balance.

Although the film ends with Adela sharing cultural knowledge with Jose, the audience is not shown just how much of their Mixtec culture Adela will continue to teach and share with her son or how often Adela will maintain contact with her mother. Likewise, the future role that Doña Sole will play in the lives of her daughter and grandson in the city is unclear. Perhaps Jansen is leaving this question open to the audience and using this as an opportunity to dialogue with the audience. It is plausible Jansen is asking her audience to consider for themselves what their role is in cultural continuity and intergenerational sharing of knowledge after migration.

The only context we receive about Doña Sole's thoughts of their migration is when she confides in her comadre about Adela's plan to take Jose to the city. Soledad's comadre asks Soledad why she does not go with them. Soledad replies, "No. I am useful here. I cure the people, prepare my herbs. I have my plot of land, my corn. I would not have anything to do in the city" (Jansen, 2018, 38:38). In this scene, Soledad expresses her agency through her decision to stay and upholds her valued role in her community. She understands the value of kinship and Indigenous carework in her life and has the opposite viewpoint of Adela. For Soledad, the pueblo has work, people, and everything one could need. She does not see the value of participating in globalization, or capitalism, or migrant urban life and has a fulfilling life and role in her pueblo. Soledad's experiences can therefore be seen as "storied acts of Biskaabiiyang" or turning to our ancestral traditions as the way to "flourish in the post-Native Apocalypse" of globalization and settler colonial violence (Dillon, 2016, p. 9).

North: Lord 2 Dog/Grandfather/Embodied Knowledge

The North is guarded by Lord 2 Dog, the grandfather who carries the gourd and is the holder of sacred knowledge. Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2017) assert that in the *Selden Roll* “four Toltec priests pay him their respects, offer him precious feathers, and receive his instructions” before continuing their spiritual journey (p. 317). This depiction denotes that Lord 2 Dog was highly respected on a spiritual level by spiritual leaders. Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2017) also contend that in the *Codex Yuta Tnoho*, Lord 2 Dog “appears in a huge and complex landscape primarily associated with the Mountain of the Rain God” and that in the *Lienzo of Tlapiltepec* his name is associated with the Checkerboard or Split Mountain (Yuca Naa) (p. 317). In this analysis, North/Lord 2 Dog represents elders and embodied knowledge/archives based on what is observed within various codices. Applying Buenaflor’s interpretation of the cardinal directions as they pertain to cleansing rituals, the north also represents ancestral guidance and cosmic wisdom. In this section, I will discuss how these themes emerge in *Nudo Mixteco* (2021) and *Tiempo de lluvia* (2018).

In *Nudo Mixteco* (2021), director Ángeles Cruz utilizes the film to memorialize embodied knowledge/archives through the depiction of ancestral traditions and kinship. The film records key features of pueblo life which include wake and funeral rituals, the annual pueblo festivity, and the pueblo assembly. Within these ancestral traditions, kinship is interwoven throughout these practices.



Figure 9. Tortilla turning at a wake. Screenshot of *Nudo Mixteco* (2021).



Figure 10. Taco filling at a wake. Screenshot of *Nudo Mixteco* (2021).



Figure 11. Mezcal drinking at a wake. Screenshot of *Nudo Mixteco* (2021).

The first scene after the title screen depicts the communal cooking tradition that occurs outdoors during a wake. It is a common practice for community members to form a chain when cooking together at such events. Each person is responsible for a part of the cooking such as making tortillas (figure 9) and filling the tortillas (figure 10). Communal cooking is a form of Indigenous carework for the grieving family and community members in the pueblo who wish to pay their respects, whether or not they knew the deceased. In addition to food, mezcal is also shared and an integral part of pueblo wakes, funerals, festivities, and medicinal care (figure 11).



Figure 12. Gathering at a wake. Screenshot of *Nudo Mixteco* (2021).

Indoors, family and community members sit around the body, lay out offerings, sing, and pray together (figure 12). The body of the deceased is on the floor and wrapped in, most likely, a cotton sheet. Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2017), analyzing the funeral rites of Lord 12 Movement, a member of the Ñuu Dzaui dynasty, from the codices *Tonindye* and *Iya Nacuaa*, relay that his body was wrapped as a bundle followed by a period when people would come “to pay tribute to the deceased, offering a quail, chocolate, a ceremonial robe, pulque and garlands of flowers” (p. 120). Both the wrapped remains and the offerings were considered sacred bundles. In colonial times, sacred bundles shifted from wrapped cloth to packed boxes or baskets. In

many Zapotec and Mixtec pueblos, boxes and baskets (canastas) are utilized and contain items necessary and requested for various pueblo rituals. When Piedad arrives to the wake, she offers an elder a canasta containing flowers and other items, most likely, candles, mezcal, copal and food. Therefore, the wrapped deceased body and the basket offered are filmic representations of sacred bundles still in use as a 21st century technology which demonstrates the importance of honoring the deceased, and thus, the divine, through kinship-based exchange.



Figure 13. Distant funeral procession with band. Screenshot of *Nudo Mixteco* (2021).



Figure 14. Nearby funeral procession with band. Screenshot of *Nudo Mixteco* (2021).

During the funeral procession, family and community members join, cry, sing, carry the

casket to the cemetery, and play live music (figures 13 and 14). Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2017) convey a similar scene as recorded in the aforementioned funeral rites of Lord 12 Movement during which it included “processions of armed people to the sound of an orchestra playing drums, gourd trumpets, rattles and beating turtle shells with deer antlers” (p. 120). The filmic representation of the procession and orchestra demonstrate how this funeral rite has been maintained with modern instruments, but also as an integral part of Mixtec pueblo life and kinship. Hernández-Díaz and Robson (2019) assert that the *usos y costumbres* framework is a native Oaxacan governance system which is comprised of “the cargo, tequio, and assembly” (p. 32). The cargo, tequio, and assembly are collective institutions of labor and communal service. Musicians, such as the ones participating in the funeral procession, take on a cargo, often for life.



Figure 15. Mezcal at the burial. Screenshot of *Nudo Mixteco* (2021).



Figure 16. Burial at the cemetery. Screenshot of *Nudo Mixteco* (2021).

During the burial, community members hold baskets full of flowers and mezcal is passed

around to cleanse and fortify the attendees (figure 15 and 16) while a prayer is sung. Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2017) along with codices, examine Tomb 7, a sacred burial site located in Monte Alban and affirm that burial sites functioned as a space “for offerings with the corresponding invocations and prayers” (p. 547). The passing around of mezcal, aside from its medicinal and protective purposes, could also be seen as a present-day manifestation of historically sharing pulque, also fermented from the same maguey plant, present at funeral rites.



Figure 17. Patron saint festivity with band. Screenshot of *Nudo Mixteco* (2021).



Figure 18. Sharing food at patron saint festivity. Screenshot of *Nudo Mixteco* (2021).

During the annual patron saint festivity, the community dances, shares food, plays music,

and drinks alcohol together (figures 17 and 18). These scenes represent embodied kinship through the celebration and organization of the festivity. Hernández-Díaz and Robson (2019) contend that in addition to the cargo of being a musician at a community event, mayordomías comprise of a group of community members who are “given the responsibility to organize and oversee their villages’ patron saint celebrations” (p. 28). Although not explicitly discussed in the film, the roles of the musicians and mayordomos in pueblo ceremonies and festivities represent the ongoing importance of pueblo governance.



Figure 19. The pueblo assembly. Screenshot of *Nudo Mixteco* (2021).

The pueblo assembly demonstrates pueblo politics and governance through the *cabildo*, or the pueblo’s council (figure 19). Most pueblos in Oaxaca are “self-governed by customary practices, legislated by a general community assembly and enforced by” pueblo authorities (Hernández-Díaz & Robson, 2019, p. 26). The cargo system is the way these authoritative positions are selected and organized. The positions are, therefore, called cargos, are set for a certain period of time, and are traditionally unpaid. Cargos are considered a responsibility owed to one’s pueblo, can increase in responsibility over time and reflect the level of participation and level of respect earned over time.



Figure 20. Esteban demands justice. Screenshot of *Nudo Mixteco* (2021).



Figure 21. Toña and Rosa report Fermín. Screenshot of *Nudo Mixteco* (2021).

In the film, Esteban and Toña both approach the cabildo to file their complaints but only Esteban's case is shown (figure 20 and 21) onscreen. In Esteban's case, the leaders call for an assembly to the pueblo by announcing over a loudspeaker the time for everyone to gather. The assembly begins after the town's people gather and the authorities start the assembly and introduce each side. Each person explains their side of the conflict and receive feedback from the pueblo. Community members in attendance discuss the issue amongst themselves and then

the leaders facilitate voting. In Esteban's case the people voted for Esteban to keep the house and for Chabela to be freed from her marriage to live her life as she pleases (figure 22).



Figure 22. The assembly votes in Esteban's case. Screenshot of *Nudo Mixteco* (2021).

The particular aspects of these traditions are immediately recognizable to Mixtec and Zapotec viewers who have attended similar events. The capturing of these traditions on film not only memorializes the embodied practices between kin, but also connects the traditions to Mixtecs across Oaxaca and the diaspora. For those who have memories of their pueblo(s) of origin, this film also fosters a sensation of familiarity and kinship with other pueblos.



Figure 23. Intergenerational knowledge exchange. Screenshot of *Nudo Mixteco* (2021).

In *Tiempo de lluvia* (2018), Itandehui Jansen also memorializes ancestral traditions and kinship. Doña Soledad is the character through which she does this type of memory work, but

the film itself can be seen as a mechanism of archiving. At the 2018 Guanajuato International Film Festival, Nicolás Rojas, the film's assistant director, specified that *Tiempo de lluvia* (2018) was shot in Apoala, the sacred site of the birth of the Mixtec dynasties as recorded in the codices, due to its significance in Mixtec life and culture (Tiempo de Lluvia GIFF, 2018). Rojas also emphasized the collaborative nature with fellow Mixtec directors, Jansen and Cruz, in the making of the film. Rojas, thus, demonstrates the ongoing relationship Mixtec peoples sustain between each other, their lands, and cosmology in the making of the film itself.

Doña Sole, as the pueblo's curandera, carries embodied medicinal and ancestral knowledge. Throughout the film, Doña Sole passes on teachings to her grandson, Jose, about plant medicine, fire divination, and Mixtec language, song, and stories (figure 23).



Figure 24. Doña Sole reads an egg. Screenshot of *Nudo Mixteco* (2021).



Figure 25. Doña Sole interprets a corn kernel reading. Screenshot of *Nudo Mixteco* (2021).

Doña Sole’s embodied knowledge is also displayed when she carries out *limpias* for fellow pueblo community members, offers teachings, and interprets dreams and egg and corn kernel readings (figure 24 and 25). According to Marcus (1998) divination practices were widespread throughout Mesoamerica through “interpreting the stars or dreams, by sacrificing animals, or by casting stones, beans, or kernels of corn” (p. 11). Fray Juan de Córdova translated and documented the various forms of divination he observed during the sixteenth century. He noted that Zapotec women’s divination was “oriented toward the affairs of the family” (Marcus, 1998, p. 12). Parsons, an anthropologist, observed corn divination in 1930 and observed that women would “cast corn kernels onto a mat” and would blow air on the kernels they cupped before casting them as Doña Sole does in figure 25 (Marcus, 1998, p. 12). Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2017) examine the Piedras de los Reyes at Yautepec and contend that Oxomoco, the calendar midwife in Nahua cosmology, is depicted moving her hands in the same fashion as a corn kernel diviner (figure 26). They argue she is the Mixtec counterpart of Lady 1 Eagle. In the *Codex Tudela*, Nahua corn kernel divination is also depicted in a similar manner (figure 27) as figure 25 and 26. In this way, Doña Sole’s divinatory practices demonstrate Mixtec embodied knowledges

carried into the 21st century as an act of resistance and survival.



Figure 26. Oxomoco: Piedra de Coatlán. (Robelo, 1910).



Figure 27. Drawing of corn kernel divination in *Codex Tudela*. (Rojas, 2016).

Doña Sole is a respected member of her pueblo and she expresses her own acknowledgement of the important role she plays when talking to her comadre. Her title as Doña Sole indicates this respect but it is also evident in the way various community members confide in her their deepest secrets and fears. She, in turn, views herself as useful in the pueblo because

she cures people and regenerates kinship between the community through her healing work. For example, while caring for Juan, who is terminally ill, she learns of his regret of abandoning his brother at the border. Juan asks Doña Sole to visit his brother, Camiro, in hopes of convincing Camiro to forgive him. Camiro is not on speaking terms with Juan due to Juan abandoning him at the border when they were younger. Doña Sole visits Camiro twice urging him to visit his dying brother. When Camiro continues to express his anger at Juan and refuses to visit him, she shares an important component of Mixtec and Zapotec medicine in the form of a warning. She tells Camiro, “El coraje y el rincor nunca trae nada bueno. Deberias soltarlo. Es mas facil para usted./Anger and resentment never bring anything good. You should let it go. It’s easier for you” (Jansen, 2018, 56:16). In this case, Doña Sole offers Camiro a medicinal and moral teaching. According to Mixtec and Zapotec medicine, coraje and rincor are types of muina, which is understood as the anger a person harbors for another, which can cause illness to the angry person (Kearney, 1968, p. 68).

West: Lady 1 Eagle/Grandmother/Femme Kinship and Carework

The West is guarded by Lady 1 Eagle, the grandmother who tends to the temazcal (sweat bath). Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2017) refer to her as the goddess of fertility and procreation because in the *Codex Tonindeye* she is depicted offering a “jewel to Lady 3 Flint as a sign that she will have a daughter” (p. 240). Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2017) also contend that in “historical sources she is *Sitna Yuta*, Grandmother of the River” and that the West direction represented “the River of Ashes *Yaa Yuta*” (p. 101). In this analysis, West/Lady 1 Eagle represents femme kinship and Indigenous carework based on interpretations of codices. Applying Buenaflor’s interpretation of the cardinal directions as they pertain to cleansing rituals,

the west also represents the space for death and releasing. In this section, I will discuss how these themes emerge in *Nudo Mixteco* (2021) and *Tiempo de lluvia* (2018).

Rosell and Ojeda Diaz (2003) analyze the role of women and feminine deities within Mixtec oral tradition and codices. They share the Mixtec oral story of the first humans, who were birthed in “the form of a cocoon between the leaves of the white ceiba tree” with the woman being birthed first (pp. 107-108). During this birth, “five gods were present: Black Wind, the God of Wisdom, the Sun, Lightning, and the God of Rain” as observed in the *Codex Yuta Tnoho* (p. 108). Rosell and Ojeda Diaz argue that each deity gave the first humans power in equal parts. Therefore, they argue that Mixtec cosmology viewed humans as capable of the same capabilities on earth and the spiritual world regardless of gender.

In *Nudo Mixteco* (2021), there are various demonstrations of femme kinship and Indigenous carework. This includes Maria’s return for her mother’s wake and funeral and Piedad’s attendance at both. It also includes Chabela’s relationship with her mother-in-law and Piedad’s concern for Chabela’s safety following Esteban’s return. Further, it includes Toña’s protectiveness towards her daughter and removal from generational patterns of abuse. All three women, Maria, Toña, and Chabela, are strong characters who seek closure, justice, and a sense of safety throughout the film. Maria is a queer woman who confronts homophobia and ostracization directed at her by her family upon her return. Toña faces her past experiences with sexual abuse by her uncle, Fermín, when it is revealed that her daughter is now experiencing the same abuse. Chabela fiercely defends herself from Esteban’s anger over her infidelity and attempted murder after Esteban rejects the ruling of the pueblo’s assembly.

The film begins with Maria receiving news of her mother’s death and is followed by Maria’s return to attend her wake and funeral. Despite the fact that Maria is kicked out of her

mother's wake by her father, Don Julian, who accuses her of causing her mother's death through her "pendejadas/bullshit," Maria attends her funeral. By this, Don Julian is referring to Maria's queerness and love for Piedad. While Maria's father is comforted during his outbursts of grief at the wake and funeral, Maria does not receive the same support. Upon arriving at the wake, she is given a brief hug by Fermín and is comforted by Piedad at the burial. Maria and Piedad's defiant display of companionship in the face of cis-heteropatriarchal violence, in the form of homophobia, is a testament to Mixtec queer strength and resistance.

Likewise, Chabela contends with cis-heteropatriarchal violence in the form of Esteban. Despite this, Chabela expresses her concern for her mother-in-law and demonstrates a bond to her through her ongoing concern and care for her. After Piedad crosses paths with Chabela at night, she offers Chabela her home as a place of safety to flee Esteban. Chabela decides to flee to her current partner's home instead. Chabela expresses her concern for her mother-in-law, who she had been caring for in the Esteban's absence. Chabela and Piedad hug each other before parting ways demonstrating their close bond and care for each others' well-being. This scene offers viewers a glimpse at the collective ways Native women survive widespread hostility and violence in pueblos.

Similarly, Toña faces cis-heteropatriarchal violence both inside and outside the pueblo. Her narrative commences with her encounters with sexual harassment as a city vendor. In the pueblo, she returns as a survivor of sexual abuse, who never experienced justice. Toña confronts the hard truth that her uncle, Fermín, who abused her, is now abusing her daughter, Rosa. Toña's mother, Felipa, is the person who contacts her to urge her return to address her daughter's well-being. However, Felipa also denies the abuse when Toña tries to discuss both Toña's past experiences and her daughter's experiences of abuse. Toña ultimately places Fermín's fate in the

hands of the local authorities when she reports the rape. However, right before Toña walks over to submit her accusation, her mother tries to prevent her from doing so. Toña responds to Felipa by imploring “Stop, mother. Don’t harm us anymore” (Cruz, 2021, 01:22:20).

It is possible to read these demonstrations of femme kinship and Indigenous carework as lessons embedded within the narratives. When femme characters extend kinship to each other, they are able to leverage their kinship in order to survive cis-heteropatriarchal violence. At the same time, each character expresses a duality which raises further questions of morality. For instance, Toña dates the corrupt police officer who harasses women vendors at the city market. He gives her bills that he pretends to coerce from her in an earlier scene while actually coercing money from the other vendors. It is clear that her history of sexual abuse has taken a toll on Toña’s ability to foster closeness in her relationship and she is never shown questioning her boyfriend’s violent behaviors. In a cold sex scene with her boyfriend, Toña is visibly dissociating and it is unclear if she is dating him because she loves him or because she needs his protection. Maria leaves Piedad without notice after asking her to move to the city with her. This decision seems to weigh heavily on Maria and causes Piedad deep sorrow. The decision can be interpreted as one out of love or pride. On the one hand, it is possible that Maria recognizes that Piedad’s entire family and support system are in the pueblo and to remove her from her home would be selfish and isolating. It is also plausible that Maria leaves because she does not want Maria to see her quality of life in the city where she has even less power.

Chabela defies male entitlement and machismo but the pueblo is somewhat divided on their opinions of her morality even if she wins the majority vote which releases her from her marriage to Esteban. Some people express their disdain for her infidelity and lustfulness. This is prompted by Chabela asserting that Esteban was gone for three years with no contact and that her

body had its needs. Toña's mother, Felipa, chastises Chabela at the assembly by stating "Chabela, you were wrong. You stayed to take care of the home not to mess around. Your husband went to work and as a lustful person, you searched for a new man" (Cruz, 2021, 45:54). Felipa is direct and public about her disapproval of Chabela's behavior but does not extend this same critique to Fermín, her brother. In fact, Felipa repeatedly denies and reproaches Toña when she repeatedly asks to speak to both of them about the abuse. For example, Felipa responds to Toña's requests by stating "You only bring problems. It's best if you leave," (Cruz, 2021, 01:11:10) and "Stop moving the dirt around" (01:13:44). In her final attempt at protecting Fermín, Felipa tries to stop Toña from reporting her daughter's rape.

Felipa is a complex character because while she is the one who called Toña to warn her about her daughter's condition, she denies Fermín abused Toña and Rosa. Despite this, Felipa cleanses Toña with mezcal to treat Toña's *susto* (fright) due to seeing Fermín with her daughter for the first time since leaving the pueblo. The fact that Felipa tends to Toña's *susto* implies that she takes her emotional, mental, and physical well-being seriously. Perhaps that is the only safe way Felipa can communicate her understanding to Toña where Felipa otherwise cannot confront his abuse because to do so would be to admit she is a survivor of abuse herself. Thus, Felipa's dismissal and defense of Fermín most likely indicates that she is a survivor of abuse as well and has internalized denial and victim blaming. However, in her way, she is acting within the constraints of her perceived agency. Therefore, all the femme characters in *Nudo Mixteco* (2021) can be interpreted as pedagogical devices who are employed to ask the audience in what ways they see themselves within the different women and are therefore complicit in furthering patterns of abuse and harm even while fighting against oppression in their own lives.

Femme kinship is expressed throughout *Tiempo de lluvia* (2018) both within and outside the pueblo. In the pueblo, femme kinship and Indigenous carework is demonstrated through Doña Sole's relationships to other people in the pueblo, for instance, the ways she cares for Maria, Teo, Juan, Camiro, Jose, Adela, and her comadre. Doña Sole's relationship to these characters are centered in communal and familial connections. As the pueblo's curandera (healer), her relationships also highlight sacred bonds enacted through medicinal rituals. Since Maria, Teo, Juan, and Camiro confide in Doña Sole and acquire ancestral and medicinal knowledge/healing, they strengthen their kinship through these processes. Jose, her grandson, and Adela, her daughter, also strengthen their relationship with Doña Sole as direct relatives who receive her ancestral and medicinal wisdom and knowledge.

Doña Sole cares for her daughter's son, Jose, who was left in her care while Adela works in Mexico City. Adela left the pueblo for Mexico City and much of her storyline centers around her work and trying to save up money to return to the pueblo for her son who she wishes to raise in Mexico City. Doña Sole teaches Jose many traditions. She sings him a Mixtec song and teaches him about medicinal plants and fire divination. Throughout the film, Jose asserts that he wants to live with his grandmother and stay in their pueblo. Despite his desires, he is forced to leave with his mother, Adela, at the end of the film. Viewers are not shown the long-term impact this has on Jose but shortly after his migration to Mexico City, he is depicted seemingly sad and lonely and draws pictures of his grandmother and their pueblo.

Doña Sole also cares for Juan who is terminally ill by feeding him, bathing him, and listening to him. Juan confides in her about the guilt and regret he carries for abandoning his younger brother, Camiro at the border after they both crossed it. Soledad encourages Camiro to forgive Juan which occurs shortly after Camiro encounters Juan walking on the road. Upon

carrying him to his bed, he is able to accept Juan's apology and offer his forgiveness in return. Doña Sole demonstrates her role in reestablishing balance in the pueblo by restoring this relationship and assisting Juan towards a more peaceful death. The film, thus, emphasizes the circles of Indigenous carework that extend throughout the pueblo through Doña Sole's actions.

Soledad also cares for Maria when she notices she is suffering from *tristeza*. Maria's husband, Teo, is unable to help her and becomes frustrated with her condition. Maria even avoids Soledad's help at first but eventually confides in Soledad during a *limpia* that she is afraid her soon to be born child may also die like her first child. Maria is then able to grieve and talk to Teo about her guilt about her first child's death. During a rainy night, she reveals to Teo that she blames herself for their baby's death and Teo comforts her. Maria is seen noticeably lighter and happier as the story progresses.

Doña Sole also cares for Teo after he is frightened by the sounds of cries in the forest through a *limpia*. She reads the egg yolk and tells Teo a story she was told by her grandfather when she was a young girl. In this story, a tree trapped a lightning bolt inside it which was the *nahual* of a person. This ray of lightning suffered in its trapped form and was heard moaning throughout the pueblo. Teo, realizing what this must imply, later locates the tree and releases the *nahual* when he chops the tree down. This is followed by the sound of thunder. It is unclear whether the *nahual* belongs to Juan or Adela as both seem to experience release along with the chopping of tree; Juan dies just before the *nahual* is released and Adela is abandoned by her abusive partner Chucho after the *nahual* is released.

In the city, Adela also experiences *femme* kinship through her friendship with Rosa, a Nahua woman, who takes her in after she is abandoned by Chucho. Rosa finds Adela on the street after Chucho beats her and kicks her out of their apartment. Rosa takes Adela in, nurses

her back to health, and finds her a new job. Rosa also offers Adela a lesson about embracing her native language by not caring what others think. Therefore, Rosa's care for Adela can also be read as another example of Indigenous carework. Through these relationships, Adela is able to survive the violence of cis-heteropatriarchy away from her pueblo of origin and to return to her pueblo with a different mindset.

East: Lord 7 Flower/Sunrise/New Beginnings

The East, is guarded by Lord 7 Flower, the First Sunrise and Sun Ñuhu, whose theme is rebirth and renewal. Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2017) postulate that Lord 7 Flower was birthed by the Primordial Mother and Father who emerged from the tree of origin in Apoala as recorded in the *Codex Yuta Tnoho*. In this way, Lord 7 Flower is viewed as “a precious prince, a solar deity” who appears during “the founding ceremony of a kingdom” in the aforementioned Codex (p. 172). Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2017) also contend that Lord 7 Flower also presided over Heaven or Andevui. In this analysis, North/Lord 7 Flower represents transformation based on interpretations of codices. Applying Buenaflor's interpretation of the cardinal directions as they pertain to cleansing rituals, the north also represents the space of new beginnings.



Figure 28. Maria stares at her father. Screenshot of *Nudo Mixteco* (2021).

In *Nudo Mixteco* (2021), characters undergo transformative experiences and demonstrate their agency in choosing what new beginnings look like. Maria returns to grieve the death of her mother and also contemplates her disconnection from her father. She expresses her grief at the wake, the funeral process, and the burial and in the latter two defies her father's blame and rejection. Maria does not turn to the assembly for assistance which seemingly demonstrates that she has less access to justice in a pueblo of people who never seem to defend her in comparison to Toña and Chabela. Instead, she finds her own way to establish peace and closure in her life by visiting her father's home to say goodbye to him. In a series of close shots, she displays calm strength as her father stands before her in his doorway while she states, "I came to say goodbye. I only want you to know that I forgive you" (Cruz, 2021, 21:22). This powerful statement grants Maria agency yet again whereby she decides when to say goodbye and has the power to forgive. In this brief statement, she defies cis-heteropatriarchal power and renegotiates the confines of forgiveness, most commonly employed in Christianity towards the queer subject to denote their "sin."

Her father quickly notices this reversal of power and responds with, "Idiot, what do you have to forgive me for? Like the way you look at the women?" (Cruz, 2021, 21:29). Maria slightly nods as if disagreeing before stating "You (formal) still do not understand anything" (Cruz, 2021, 21:37). The camera remains on her powerful gaze, which she holds for three seconds, before walking away (figure 28). The use of *usted* (you formal) in this statement conveys estrangement and Maria's agency to choose her own kin. Rather than emphasizing Don Julian's rejection of Maria, Cruz reverses this power imbalance by positioning Maria as the one who does the forgiving, judges the limits of his understanding and compassion, gazes, and walks away. Additionally, in this close up, her face is partially lit and when she walks away, she walks

towards the light. Lighting is used in this way to represent Maria walking toward new beginnings.



Figure 29. Don Julian watches Maria walk away. Screenshot of *Nudo Mixteco* (2021)..

The method of focusing on Maria's powerful final glare and giving her the final say renders Don Julian less powerful. While he might have felt powerful earlier in the film with his ability to reject, condemn, and remove her from her own mother's wake, here he is left in the frame staring with nothing to say, vulnerable and alone (figure 29). His homophobic anger has no power over Maria and instead strips him of his relationship with his daughter. It is unclear whether Don Julian's final stare conveys a shift of emotion, but following Maria's powerful statement and glare, there is a sense of powerlessness he now is left with, and the audience is left pondering this as his narrative ends there. Maria leaves with a sense of closure which highlights her agency in her choice to forgive her father and leave her pueblo and Piedad behind.

Toña's transformative journey is similarly challenging but in another way. Toña's mother rejects and mistreats her because Toña speaks out about her sexual abuse. Felipa becomes visibly upset and hostile at the mention of Toña's and Rosa's abuse. She resorts to silencing and invalidating Toña. Yet Toña finds the strength and courage to overcome her manipulation in order to end the cycle of abuse for her daughter. This transpires after Rosa

confronts Toña's inability to name the abuse when she asks Rosa why she is not eating. Rosa first accomplishes this by claiming her mother does not know her since she left her there and then by calling her questions an attempt to act "dumb." In this way, Rosa plays a catalytic role in Toña's transformation and healing which turns the rescue narrative on its head. Following this, Toña is able to heal for her daughter's sake and intervene in a generational pattern of violence. Toña and Rosa's last scene depict them walking together through the mountains after cleansing each other in the pueblo's river.

Chabela's transformative experience differs in that she has more support from women in the pueblo who empathize with her experience as a wife left behind by her migrant husband. Chabela stands her ground against Esteban in her home and in the pueblo assembly, but this is not the end of her fight. Although an elder at the pueblo assembly urges Esteban to respect the decision of the assembly after the voting, Esteban does not abide by this. Esteban turns to destructiveness and violence through attempting to murder Chabela at her new home and then later through the burning of his home. Chabela survives the attack by striking Esteban in the head with a stone while being strangled. In her final close up, and through a point of view shot from her perspective, Chabela stares down the barrel of a rifle that Esteban aims at her face. Esteban hovers over Chabela until he puts the gun down. This unequal visual positioning demonstrates the ways Esteban, and generally Native men, have more power than Native women in pueblos.

In fact, Esteban's experience throughout the film is one of ease, freedom, and entitlement. He returns to the pueblo on his terms and with no heavy feelings. He is depicted as excited on the bus ride into the pueblo and is welcomed with open arms by his compadre, Nato. Nato protects Esteban from finding out too soon about Chabela's infidelity by convincing

Esteban to join in the pueblo's band performance at the patron saint festival. Then, he gets Esteban drunk until he passes out in the plaza so he does not return home until the next morning.

Juxtaposed with Maria's and Toña's return, Esteban establishes a different reality for Mixtec men. Rather than returning with feelings of grief, dread, and unease, Esteban is allowed to be carefree, reckless, and celebratory. He instantly has a recognized role in pueblo life as he participates in the band performance upon his return. He knows the songs and seamlessly joins with no signs of tension or ostracization. For Esteban, it's as if he has never left at all. In fact, when he walks past Toña in the street at night, supported by Nato as they drunkenly stumble, he emphatically declares, "This damn pueblo never changes" (Cruz, 2021, 31:40). This is, at least, what Esteban expects and when it is not the reality, he acts in violent and destructive ways.

Esteban's final act is reserved for the last scene in the film where he decides to light his house on fire after stating, "So much house. Such a fool" (Cruz, 2021, 53:09). Despite being awarded the house by the pueblo assembly in his case, he does not seem to value it or consider what it may mean to his elderly mother who now depends on him as they both watch it burn (figure 31).



Figure 30. View from inside of burning house. Screenshot of *Nudo Mixteco* (2021).



Figure 31. View from outside of burning house. Screenshot of *Nudo Mixteco* (2021).

Esteban's mother looks on in tears as Esteban plays the clarinet through an enclosed frame of the house's window (figure 30). This framing visually represents the ways machista violence traps the perpetrator and those they harm. Esteban does not display much respect for his mother who he previously scolds for not safeguarding Chabela and does not seem to care about her sadness in destroying their home. Thus, Esteban's destructive and violent acts demonstrate the ways some Native men abuse power in the pueblo and harm others. In the end, Cruz seems to imply that cis-heteropatriarchal violence leaves everyone with nothing but needless destruction.

All the characters in *Tiempo de lluvia* (2018) experience a transformation which leads them to new beginnings. After Juan, Camiro, Maria, Teo, Adela, and Jose experience healing in a myriad of ways, they are able to embark on new beginnings. Juan is able to transition into the afterlife. Camiro is freed from the ills of harboring muina. Maria and Teo peacefully embark on their journey as a new parents to a newborn. Adela is released from a physically abusive marriage and is able to return to her pueblo to heal her relationship with her mother and reunite with her son. Moreover, Adela starts anew in the city with her son. Doña Sole chooses to stay in her pueblo where she is fulfilled through her role as a curandera where she is last seen performing a protection prayer for Adela and Jose.

Thus, reading *Tiempo de lluvia* (2018) and *Nudo Mixteca* (2021) through a fluid Mixtec cardinal directional lens, I have explored the ways these films represent embodied knowledge, femme kinship and Indigenous carework, rebirth and transformation, and liminal space. At the same time, I have considered the medicinal and spiritual values of each of these themes. In a broader context, I have also examined how narratives of migration and fragmentation are represented within pueblo life and impact those across the diaspora. Cruz and Jansen have also discussed their intended purposes of their narratives and the ways community is embedded within every aspect of the film process. In this way, I have argued how these films regenerate kinship and belonging within the communities they are filmed and with the Native Oaxacan audiences that view them.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

“Despite dystopic realities, the possibilities of love and kinship as survivance in the face of ecological disaster are a visceral narrative for Indigenous peoples. Indigenous women, and gender variant and sexually diverse Indigenous peoples, have consistently employed kinship and love within their communities in order to positively transform contemporary colonial realities for their kin.”

— Lindsay Nixon, “Visual Cultures of Indigenous Futurism”

Nixon (2020) remarks on the transformative and life sustaining force of Native love and kinship in the face of the dystopic realities of today. I have examined how Mixtec women directors tell stories of migration and fragmentation while highlighting femme kinship and Indigenous carework as a way to survive cis-heteropatriarchy. Although the cinematic narratives I analyzed focus on the ways that pueblos and migrants are impacted on a social level, the films do not overtly discuss the oppressive systems which lead to migration. In *Nudo Mixteco* (2021),

Esteban, while addressing his neighbors during a pueblo assembly, explains his migration story. He states “You all know that in the pueblo, we experience a lot of poverty and that this has forced us to go to work in the U.S. For this reason, I left like many in the pueblo leave” (Cruz, 2021, 42:38). He continues: “For necessity I left. For the need to earn a few dollars” (Cruz, 2021, 42:48). In *Tiempo de lluvia* (2018), Adela’s migration story also centers on leaving her pueblo to find work so she can earn some money and reunite with her son. Adela describes the pueblo as having “no work, no people. There is nothing there” (Jansen, 2018, 59:54). Both Esteban and Adela provide the context of the economic factors of forced migration but not the systemic causes.

Spanish settler colonialism of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries marked a time of widespread Native land dispossession and displacement along with forced labor. Following this period, Mexican politicians put forth policies which amplified commodification of the land and its resources which led to further land dispossession by foreigners and the wealthy elite who sought to invest and profit off emerging industries such as railroads and mining. Currently in Oaxaca, industrialization and globalization continue to expand into industries such as overtourism, logging, and mezcal production, which create the dynamics for forced migration.

While Cruz and Jansen do not explicitly articulate the systemic causes of migration and fragmentation, they utilize film as a pedagogical and dialogical tool to address the harms caused by migration and fragmentation. They invite audiences to engage with film narratives in a reflective way in which they ponder where they see themselves through the characters and narratives. In this way, the filmmakers, actors, and audience members engage in a relational experience of film and partake in a filmic dialogue. Thus, Mixtec women filmmakers employ

film as a form of resistance that is threefold in that it 1) positions Mixtec peoples as the owners of our histories/stories, 2) serves as a source of regenerative kinship between Mixtec peoples on their ancestral lands and Mixtec peoples across the diaspora, and 3) functions as a pedagogical tool whereby Mixtec peoples are in dialogue with one another across time and space.

In this conclusion, I share a story of the systemic issues my family are facing in their pueblo, broad systemic issues faced by other pueblos in Oaxaca, and close by discussing how Native Oaxacans in Oaxaca and across the diaspora organize and mobilize to care for each other during present precarious times.

Oaxaca Resiste/Oaxaca Resists

I visited Oaxaca in the summer of 2021. I recall distinctly on one occasion when returning to my Aunt Engracia's home with handmade tortillas retrieved from around the corner that my aunt noted the limited number of tortillas that I brought back with me. My aunt then began telling me about the devastating impacts of the drought on the year's corn harvest. There simply was not a big enough corn harvest to yield more tortillas like years prior. For as long as I had visited my aunt in Roaló over the years, she always offered me tortillas, beans, and eggs to me but I could see the concern on her face that time in the summer of 2021. For many campesinos, the relentless drought is rightfully concerning as it threatens communal livelihood.

That same week, my aunt asked me if I wanted to accompany her and my uncle to the reunion de comuneros (community assembly meeting). Although I did not know what that entailed, I agreed. At the palacio municipal (town hall), chairs were set up and everyone gathered around a table with speakers. A representative for the Libramiento Sur de Oaxaca project was there with a large map and a clipboard for signatures. The Libramiento Sur de Oaxaca project proposes a lengthy highway which would infringe upon communally owned

lands across eighteen municipios (municipalities) and is connected to mining concessions granted in 2006.

While it was not entirely transparent at first what the representative was there to do, it soon turned into a space of debate. She claimed she was there to notify each person on her list whether their terrenos (land plots) and ejidos (communally owned lands) would be impacted by the highway project. She requested everyone's signature after having viewed the map to confirm they understood the information on it. After a few people went up to review the map, a person from a nearby pueblo began addressing everyone in attendance. He issued a warning to us all that a representative from the same project had approached his pueblo in the same manner and that it was a trap to feign pueblo approval for the project. He informed us that other pueblos encountered many issues with the project and strongly advised us to not sign anything or have any interaction with the representative present at the meeting. A vote was proposed on whether to interact with the representative and the majority voted to end all interactions with her.

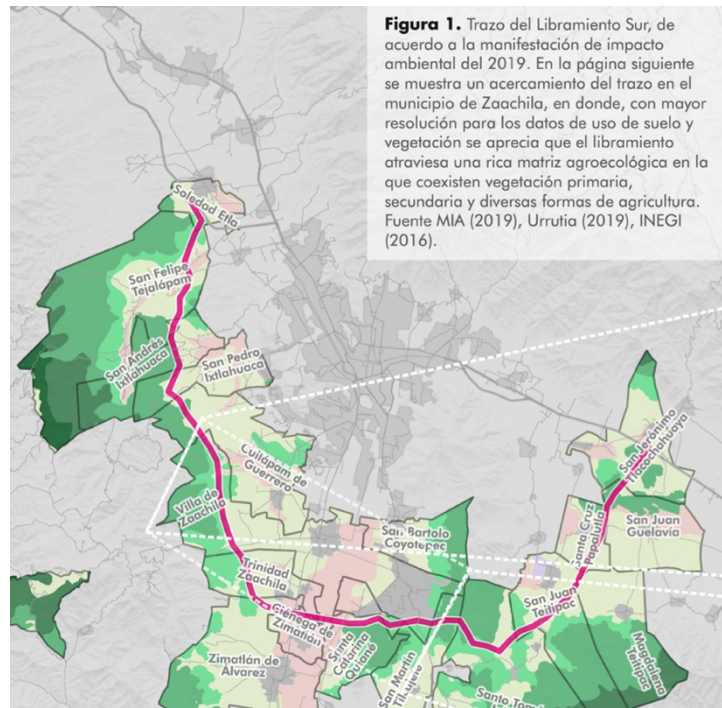


Figure 32. Libramiento Sur route on map. (Consejo de Pueblos en Defensa de la Tierra y el Territorio, 2021).

The Libramiento Sur de Oaxaca project has faced ongoing resistance since it was first introduced in 2010 and has resulted in the formation of el Consejo de Pueblos en Defensa de la Tierra y el Territorio (Council of Peoples in Defense of the Land and Territory). In 2021, the Council of Peoples in Defense of the Land and Territory published a critical analysis of the project which examined its true purpose and deep social, economic, and ecological impacts.

On the map (figure 32), the municipio Trinidad Zaachila, where Roaló is located, is described as being impacted by the project because the highway would pass through “a rich agroecological matrix in which primary and secondary vegetation and various forms of agriculture coexist” (p. 4). According to the Secretaría del Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (SEMARNAT) (2020), as of 2018 there are 427 mining concessions in Oaxaca. The ongoing fight against extractive industries such as mining, which in essence is the defense of land and water, is a highly dangerous one in Oaxaca. According to a 2023 report published by Global Witness, Mexico is one of the deadliest countries for environmental defenders with 185 recorded murders which occurred between 2012 and 2022.

Yet mining is not the only extractive industry in Oaxaca. Mezcal, a medicinal and culturally important spirit to Native peoples in Oaxaca traditionally produced by local families, is being appropriated and mass produced by and for foreign consumers. Fausto Zapata, co-owner of the Silencio brand of mezcal and the Casa Silencio hotel boutique and distillery located in Oaxaca, stated “We don’t just sell mezcal, we sell Oaxaca in a bottle” (Rojo, 2023). Indeed, the repercussions of trying to sell someone else’s culture on a mass scale has been widely felt throughout Oaxaca. Rojo (2023) asserts that mezcal production has grown by 700% in the past ten years and has increased deforestation due to extensive monoculture plantations. Since mezcal production relies on wild agave which can take up to seven years to mature, over-

harvesting is rendering certain species of agave vulnerable and impacting ecosystems more broadly.



Figure 33. Tu comodidad es nuestro desplazamiento. (Editorial Ocho Trueno, 2022).

These issues are exacerbated when Oaxaca is publicly heralded as the “mole and mezcal capital” and wins travel destination awards for being the best city in the world to visit (Kachroo-Levin, 2023). Oaxacan responses to this tourism boom is evident in the local art (figure 33) with captions like “Your comfort is our displacement” (Miranda, 2024). *Desprecio, despojo, gentrificación y turismo en Oaxaca (Disdain, dispossession, gentrification and tourism in Oaxaca)*, a zine distributed in 2022, connects extractive economies of tourism to dispossession and gentrification. The zine examines the consumptive and disruptive nature of tourism at the cost of Oaxacan life and traditions. What transpires is a prioritization of development for tourists and tourist spaces as the state invests in infrastructure and beautification projects while ignoring peripheral neighborhoods. This state endorsed “blanqueamiento urbano/urban whitening” project extends into the policing of street merchants who are evicted from the public streets despite their important role in longstanding local market economies (Editorial Ocho Trueno, 2022, p. 13). Similarly, the state also violently represses mobilized movements of resistance through threats, incarceration, torture, physical and sexual assault, murders, and disappearances.

On January 27, 2024, Oaxacan collectives including the Campamenta, Colectiva Jurídica por la Dignidad Disidente (COJUDIDI), and Comedora Comunitaria organized a march against gentrification in Oaxaca City. Six activists were arrested, mistreated and tortured before being released (EDUCA, 2024a). At the same time, in the Isthmus region of Oaxaca, nine activists were arrested for protesting the Polo de Desarrollo del Corredor Interoceánico (Development Pole of the Interoceanic Corridor) which is a government approved megaproject set to construct an industrial park in the area. The activists experienced violence during their arrests and are currently being held in pretrial detention (as of May 2024) (EDUCA, 2024b). Many activists view overtourism, gentrification, and megaprojects as escalating drivers of climate change.

The most recent effect of climate change has been the increasing number of wildfires throughout Oaxaca, which affect Native pueblos disproportionately. For example, at the end of February of 2024, the people of San Lucas Quiaviní endured a massive wildfire which destroyed more than 1,700 acres. Native Oaxacans shared photos and videos of this and other wildfires across social media platforms in an effort to alert people nearby and among the diaspora. Oaxacan governor, Salomon Jara Cruz was repeatedly tagged in a plea for state assistance as many Native pueblos do not have access to firefighting equipment or vehicles. Due to the negligence of the Oaxacan state to act in due time, the fire spread to San Pablo Guila, San Dionisio Ocotepéc, Santiago Matatlan, and San Felipe Güilá. However, it was not the state who arrived, but volunteers, many campesinos, along with women carrying containers of water on their heads, who worked together to fight the fire. Five Zapotec men lost their lives to the fire and relatives in Oaxaca and across the diaspora utilized social media to raise awareness about the wildfires and to organize mutual aid fundraisers. Community organizations like Comité Oaxacali planned a press conference, grieving space, and donation drives for firefighting

equipment and for funeral expenses. LA based Oaxacan businesses organized their own fundraisers to contribute to the aid. Connected community members in Oaxaca then delivered the aid and firefighting equipment to the pueblos affected. These community members shared videos and photos of this exchange and further updates. Mainstream US news did not report about these wildfires. As of August 2024, CONAFOR (Comisión Nacional Forestal/National Forestry Commission) has reported that Oaxaca was the Mexican state with the third most land affected by fires in 2024.

As the Mexican government moves forward with numerous megaprojects without community approval, globalization continues to drive migration from and fragmentation between families and pueblos. At the heart of such dysfunction lies systems which the Mexican state tries to impose on Native peoples in Oaxaca. Yet Native pueblos have a system in place that is inherently anti-capitalist and functions when we care for one another. While Native pueblo life is not a site of utopia, as demonstrated by the films I analyzed, we can examine the roles we play in our pueblos for the better or the worse. We can choose to be better relatives when we center our cosmologies, which inform our ways of life and have at their core our collective well-being in mind. We can always return to our communal practices which further reinforce our obligations to the cosmos, land, water, and each other, and further demonstrate our ability to care for each other. And as the *Desprecio, despojo, gentrificación y turismo en Oaxaca* zine illustrates, Indigenous Oaxacan artists and activists continue to use visual culture to enact forms of resistance and critique while also practicing Indigenous carework. Oaxaca has a long history of resistance, and as Native peoples continue to organize and mobilize against relentless state violence, we need each other now more than ever.

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