Summer 7-21-2020

Danzantes Aztecas Y Promotoras Tradicionales: The Ritual Performances And Identity Politics Of A Mexican American Danzantes Aztecas Y Promotoras Tradicionales: The Ritual Performances And Identity Politics Of A Mexican American Ceremonial Community

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DANZANTES AZTECAS Y PROMOTORAS TRADICIONALES: THE RITUAL PERFORMANCES AND IDENTITY POLITICS OF A MEXICAN AMERICAN CEREMONIAL COMMUNITY

By

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

American Studies

The University of New México

Albuquerque, New México

July 2020

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my nana, tata, mom, dad and all of my ancestors and spirit guides. It was with their knowledge, wisdom, hard work, *consejos*, guidance and belief in me that motivated me to dream of and complete this dissertation. “They can never take it from me” nana, and now I’ll “never have to work a hard day” in my life. I love you all very much.

Acknowledgments

Thank you nana for always telling me to “get your education, because they can never take it from you.” And, “If you don’t get your education you will always work hard. If you get your education, you won’t have to work a hard day in your life.” Nana, your love and *consejos* has been my strongest motivation. Thank you tata for your love. Mom thank you for being the best mom ever! And, for being a strong role model by attaining your bachelor’s and master’s degrees while taking care of your family and working. Dad thank you for being my dad, and for your hard work ethic of working two to three jobs at a time to take care of us. I love you. And, thanks mom and dad for your strong conviction in social justice and pride in our *cultura*! I Love you both very much! Tia Bebe thank you for being my ninnie and for being another super woman like my mom by getting your education while taking care of your family and working. Tio Alex thank you for being a great tio and strong male figure who also attained his higher education while taking care of his family and working full-time. And, I greatly appreciate the support you have given me toward my education, from providing feedback toward my personal statements to your *consejos* and belief in me throughout this journey. Thank you my sister Eileen for your support, tough love, and all the fun times we’ve had—I never forget where I came from or who I am with you, love you! My brother Laurence, thank you for being the fun and loving brother you are. And, thanks taking that folklore class with me at Citrus College years ago and for the many fun times we’ve had together and with our friends! Love you. My brother Adrian thank you for being the loving and supportive brother that you are, I love you. Thank you grandma Juanita for love and support. Nina Mary thank you for the love and support you have always given me. Thank you my best friend Teresita for your love and support. You also remind me of where I came from and of who I am. Love you. Liza Soto thank you for being a very good friend, you

were there with me and supported me from the beginning—best roommate ever! Love you! Thank you my committee members Dr. Michael Trujillo, my committee chair, thank you for your *consejos* and for trusting me with this important work. Dr. Kathleen Holscher thank you for your expertise in Religious, and Southwest Studies, and for your support and feedback. Dr. Patrisia Gonzales I greatly appreciate your many *consejos*, y *mucho carino y ayudas* you have given me throughout my graduate studies. *Mil gracias*! Love you. Dr. Manley Begay Jr., thank you for inspiring me to focus my scholarship on my and others interculturally mixed Indigenous and Mexican American heritage, and for the support and guidance you have given me since the inception of my graduate studies. I appreciate you as one of my dearest elders and mentors. Thank you my dissertation writing coach Dr. Stephanie Sanchez. You have been greatly instrumental in this important work. Thank you *mucho*! Dr. Roberto Rodríguez you have been extremely inspiring and instrumental in my masters and PhD scholarship, and in my dissertation. I appreciate you as a mentor, *gracias*. Thank you Dr. Emory Sekaquaptewa, *descanse en paz*. You were instrumental as my committee chair in American Indian Studies at the University of Arizona. And, you were integral in making me feel welcomed and encouraging me to create community on Hopi land. You will always be one of my most respected elders and mentors, thank you. Dr. Melinda Garcia thank you for being my elder and mentor. *Mil gracias por tu sabiduría, consejos, paciencia* y *ayudas*. Dr. Irene Vasquez I appreciate the support, mentoring, guidance and advisement you have provided during my doctoral studies. Thank you Department of American Studies administrators Sandy Rodrigue, Mercedes Nysus and Hairo Barghash for all of your help, guidance and encouragement. You're the best! Carlyn Pinkins thank you for being such a compassionate writing tutor and a good friend. I will always appreciate you letting me cry on your shoulder and helping me to pick myself up during a trying time in graduate school.

Thank you Jairo Marshall for providing important help toward the formatting of my dissertation! Andrea Hernandez Holm thank you for being mi amigita and writing tutor. You were instrumental in my evolution as a writer and critical thinker, and in motivating me to believe and trust in myself as a scholar. I will always have *mucho carino para ti*. Dr. Angela Bowen, rest in power! You encouraged me to go to graduate school and pursue a PhD. You lit that fire within me so that I could believe in myself. And, I did it! Thank you! *Calpulli Teoxicalli* gracias for welcoming me into your ceremonial space and being an integral part of my dream of creating this work. I also want to thank my ceremonial community, *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca*, my elders Sophia, Isabel, Julisa, Paul and his wife, and Felipe and Teresa. I greatly appreciate *tu consejos* and for teaching by example. *Y gracias danza Azteca grupos Maguey, Fuego, Etér* and *Tonantzin*. Thank you *promotoras tradicionales* of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca*, and *comadre* y *compadre* healers, *y todo* ceremonial community members of *Angelitas*. You greatly helped me with your support of and participation in this work, and for just being the *angelitas* that we truly are. Thank you *mi abuela de la danza de la Luna*, I greatly appreciate your support of *mi trabajo y tu consejos*, and for the growth and strength I have gained as a Moondancer. Everyone who volunteered their time, knowledge and wisdom as interview participants, thank you! Your support of my work and the perspectives you contributed are invaluable. Thank you my friend Rain for welcoming me in ceremony—ceremonies which gave me powerful guidance and direction toward my dissertation. Thank you all of my ancestors and spirit guides for guiding me on this spiritual journey and for speaking to me in my conscious and unconscious dream states, so that I could conceive this important work.

I also want to thank all of the organizations and departments that provided funding toward this work, including the department of American Studies for several graduate and

teaching assistantships and funding awards, including nominating me for the 2018/2019 Graduate Student Success Scholarship. Thank you American Studies Graduate Student Association for the several scholarship you provided me, and UNM's Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies for several funding opportunities through teaching assistantships. several fellowships toward this research. Center for Regional Studies thank you for awarding me the several fellowships toward this research. Thank you Dr. A. Gabriel Meléndez for funding opportunities and support you have provided throughout my graduate studies at UMM. Thank you Center for Southwest Research for awarding me the Clinton P. Anderson Fellowship, and Chris Geherin for being the best supervisor while I was the Clinton P. Anderson fellow, and for your support toward my academic and professional endeavors. Thank you Latin American Studies for awarding me a research grant, UNM's El Centro de la Raza for awarding me the competitive Ida Romero Scholarship, and Professional Development Award, and UNM's Career Services for awarding me the Student Conference Award Program Scholarship, twice. Thank you Paulita Aguilar for always helping me with my research and being a good friend. And, thank you Jadira, Rusita, Dawn, Barbara and all my friends who have been supportive, encouraging and have stood by my side and kept me sane by keeping me grounded and making sure I balanced work and play! I love you all!

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Abstract

This dissertation is an ethnographic study which examined the ritual performances of an interconnected Mexican American and Mexican immigrant *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo* ceremonial community located in central and northern New Mexico, and central México. This project also explored if and how these rituals recognize the practitioners' indigeneity. As a Mexican American and Native scholar and ceremonial participant of this community, I provided an "insider's" understanding of the epistemologies and ontologies that inform these ceremonies. My positionality and methodology acted as a lens to critically examine *danzantes'* and *promotoras tradicionales'* claims of indigeneity. Importantly, this work provides a fluid conceptualization of indigeneity that moves beyond stipulations of blood quantum, and ahistorical perceptions of Indigenous identity that do not account for the ways in which peoples of Mexican and Indigenous ancestry have been affected by modernity.

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Preface

Ever since I was a little girl, I knew I had Hopi ancestors and they are important inspirations for my work.[1] My native ancestry has always been central to my life and has become the defining motivation for my scholarship in American Studies. My late maternal nana Rita Luna, who was half Hopi and Mexican American, reminded the family of our Hopi heritage until the day she passed into the spirit world. She was proud of being Hopi and would tell us stories of how she responded to white people who would tell her to "Go back to where you came from!" She would assert, "My people have been here for 30,000 thousand years!" My nana always reminded us that her mother Margarita was full Hopi, and that during the late 1800s Margarita's parents decided to move the family from the Hopi *mesas* because, as my nana would say, "They decided to move, near Tombstone to find work." As a scholar, I now know the deeper reasons behind her words. My nana was conveying that my great-great grandparents left Hopi land because of pressures that resulted from American western expansion and the U.S. government's agenda to assimilate Indians into mainstream American culture, which forced Indians to participate in a capitalist system that necessitated an exchange of their labor for monetary gain. Consequently, my nana's family relocated near Tombstone, Arizona, and no one in the family ever returned to Hopi, except me.

However, as a result of this displacement from our Hopi community, only my nana became an enrolled member of the Hopi tribe, when she enrolled later in life. Unfortunately, my nana did not get the opportunity to return to Hopi as well. But, I returned. When I was a graduate student of American Indian Studies at the University of Arizona, my committee chair Mary Jo Tippeconnic Fox (Comanche) and my department's internship advisor Sylvia Dawavendewa (Hopi/Havasupai/Tewa) helped me obtain two internships with Sociologist Dr. Angela Gonzales

(Hopi), and the Hopi Foundation on the Hopi reservation during the summer of 2007. Once I received these internships, I thanked Dr. Tippeconnic Fox for helping me attain them, and shared my happiness regarding the fact that I would be the first in my family to return to Hopi since my great-great grandparents had lived there. She responded, "The ancestors call us back." We both smiled.

During the time I lived and worked on the Hopi reservation I made friends and created a community. I was invited to some of the ceremonies, like the Mud Boy and Kachina dances, and traveled through the land. It was beautiful, and it inspired me to further strengthen my connection with my Indigenous heritage and community. When I returned to Tucson, I began participating in Indigenous ceremony, such as the sweat lodge with my friend Rain, who is a member of the Tohonno O'odham nation. In 2011, I increased my participation in Indigenous ceremony when I became a part of the Calpolli Teoxicalli, an Indigenous and Chicano ceremonial community in South Tucson. I attended *platicas* and *danza Azteca ceremonias* (ceremonies), Lakota *Inipi* sweat lodges, which were taught to ceremonial leader Jesus by Lakota elders, *velaciones* (all night candlelight vigils) and other *ceremonias* held by them.[2] Participating in these ceremonies began my journey of strengthening my sense of indigeneity and connection with other mixed-race Indigenous peoples through Mexica and pan-Indian (collective Native American) ceremonies. I am a Mexican American and Hopi woman, who reinforced my Indigenous roots, participates in Mexica and pan-Indian ceremonies, and lives in ceremony every day by living according to Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies that have been passed down intergenerationally through my family and ceremonial community.

As a graduate student in American Indian Studies, I developed important friendships and professional relationships with Native scholars, such as the late anthropologist Emory

Sekaquaptewa, and Historian and American Indian Studies professor Tom Holm, and created personal and professional relationships and mentorships with American Indian and Mexican American Studies professors Patrisia Gonzales and Roberto Rodríguez (Dr. Cintli, meaning corn; or simply Dr. C) who inspired me to begin my journey of further embracing my indigeneity and not seeing myself as "part" Mexican and "part" Hopi. Dr. C influenced me to begin to see myself and introduce myself as Mexican and Hopi. This transition in self-identity was influenced by Dr. Rodríguez, who once told me, "You are not part Mexican and part Hopi. You are Mexican and Hopi. Perceiving yourself in parts is the mind of the colonizer, it's dehumanizing."[3] Dr. Rodríguez made me think deeply about his message. And, he had a profound impact on me, because his words influenced me to stop seeing myself as a fractionalized person that uses the colonizers tools to measure my amount, or lack thereof, of "Indian blood quantum." I now see myself as full Mexican and full Hopi. Thank you Dr. C!

While in my PhD program, during the spring 2014 semester my Ethnic Studies professor assigned our class the article, "Decolonizing Anti-racism," by Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua, who blatantly called all People of Color (PoC), including Mexican Americans, "settler colonizers." This reading had a negative impression upon me and my colleagues of color. After we read this article, our professor arranged to have a Native American/Jewish professor lecture about this article in our next class meeting. In short, this lecture did not go well, because the students of color, which included Mexican Americans and an African American student took issue with the article, because the authors had deemed us "settler colonizers." After the guest professor completed her lecture, the only African American student in our class exclaimed in a perplexed tone, "Settler colonizers?" The guest lecturer and the African American student locked eyes, but the lecturer did not address the student's question. At this point the tension in the room

became palpable. I sat observing the room while thinking, “once again my Indigenous heritage is being negated, and this time it’s coming from scholars—people who should know and speak the truth about Spanish colonial history and the Mexican people that were created as a result of this history. In response, I spoke directly to the guest speaker and asserted, “I am a *mestiza*,[4] and *no one* is going to tell me that I am not Indigenous!” After an uncomfortable silence, the guest professor uncomfortably responded, “No one is saying that you’re not.” She was obviously taken aback by my anger. After my comment, another Mexican American student raised her hand, looked at me and then at the guest professor and said, “I think the authors are using the same rhetoric as the colonizer.” The guest professor just looked at her.

During that same semester, in an Indigenist Feminist combined graduate and undergraduate class, the students were assigned the article, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” in which authors Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang also assert that PoC are settler colonizers and that true Indigenous decolonization necessitates that all settler colonizers give back the stolen native land which they reside on. As a result of these experiences, I realized that the elision of interculturally mixed Mexican and Indigenous heritage is a fraught discourse in academia. Due to experiences that have negated my Indigenous ancestry, tense debates about Mexican Americans’ claims of indigeneity and relationship to Indigenous people regarding our sense of “homeland” within the Southwest, and who has rights to this land, I became determined to speak my truth about interculturally mixed Mexican and Indigenous peoples like myself. Through this these experiences and tensions, I realized that an informed, dynamic and impactful conversation needed to be had—this discourse is my dissertation. Within this dissertation I have asserted my indigeneity through my heart *and* mind.

Notes

[1] The Hopi Pueblo are matrilineal. As such, Pueblo heritage and identity is passed through matrilineal lines. Therefore, if your father is Hopi, but your mother is not, you are not considered Hopi. However, in my experience while living on the Hopi reservation, I noticed one individual in particular, Monica Nuvamsa, who was and is very much so considered a member of the Hopi community, because in addition to being a wonderful human being, she is a leader in the Hopi community, in that, at the time of my internship, she worked for the Hopi foundation and, prior to her employment with the foundation, she was a lobbyist in D.C. who lobbied congress regarding policy that benefited the Hopi, and she took part in ensuring that a hospital was built on the reservation.

[2] *Platicas* are heart to heart talks.

[3] Personal conversation with Roberto Rodríguez, April 7, 2010, Tucson, University of Arizona.

[4] The term *mestiza* is a created by the Spanish colonizers, during their colonization of the Americas. The Spanish used this term for peoples of mixed Spanish and Indigenous heritage. This term has its roots in *mestizaje*, which was an intentional process of diluting Indigenous blood and population from the Spanish colonies in order to create a pure blood Spanish population. However, I reclaimed this term for myself. In doing so, I conceptualize it as a positive term which affirms my indigeneity, instead of diminishing it. I have reconceptualized this term with the knowledge that in the U.S. my reconceptualization is similar to African Americas use of the phrase "Black is Beautiful." I am also cognizant that in México the term *mestizo/a* connotes the dilution of indigeneity.

Introduction

"I'm Mexican and Hopi, but I didn't grow up on the reservation." I said during a conversation with Angela, a women whom I had just met and was a classmate of a Puerto Rican friend and colleague of mine at the University of Arizona. I was then working on my master's degree in American Indian Studies. The woman replied "So, you're not *really* native." Stunned by her remark, I could not find words that would "prove" my indigeneity to her. And, I knew then, as I know now, that I do not need to prove my indigeneity to anyone, because I live and breathe this heritage and identity and walk an Indigenous ceremonial path every day. Nevertheless, I am tempted to assert my indigeneity when my, or other culturally mixed Mexican Americans' Indigenous heritage is negated, because I want people to be aware of and understand the complex history and interpersonal and intercultural mixture that created peoples of Mexican descent.[1] Through this logic, there is a diaspora among peoples of Mexican descent, in that, the degree to which we are culturally mixed varies. For instance, some of us have significant amounts of Indigenous heritage, while others have less amounts, and thus, more of other cultural mixtures, such as European and, or Black blood. Importantly, it is hegemonic political and social frameworks and institutions that have created tensions and complexities about Mexican American identity.

As my graduate work progressed, I realized that my ceremonial community was the perfect site to examine the scholarly issues of indigeneity that match the personal issues described above. On one horizon, this dissertation is an ethnographic study of a self-identified Indigenous, Mexican American and Mexican community, in the mid-size Southwestern metropolitan city *Angelitas*, in central New Mexico. On another horizon, it is both a sympathetic and critical analysis of Mexican American indigeneity itself. It is important to note that my

ceremonial community currently has a Pueblo female *danzante* (dancer) who is a part of *danza grupo Etér*. And, my ceremonial community has included white female *danzantes* and a biracial black and white female *danzante* who took part, and some who continue to take part, in my ceremonial community's social justice efforts.

When I moved to *Angelitas* in 2012, I became a member of the *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca*, a Mexican American, Mexican immigrant, and Indigenous ritual community. The specific ethnographic object of study in this dissertation is that collective. Given that my ceremonial community was the primary focus of my research, this work was not intended to state generalizations about other *danza Azteca* (Aztec dance) or *curanderismo* (Mesoamerican Traditional Medicine and, or Traditional Indigenous Medicine) ceremonial groups throughout the Americas, nor was it intended to generalize about the ways in which all Mexican American and Mexican immigrants (hereafter, Mexican or simply immigrant) identify. However, in this work, to a degree, I did speak to the heritage of the greater Mexican American population in the Southwest.

My ritual community performs ceremonies that connect us to Mexican, Indigenous *Nahua* and Mayan's past, present, and future.[2] Furthermore, our larger local predominantly Mexican American ceremonial *circulo* (circle) is a manifestation of interconnected dance, religious and community traditions practiced by similar groups throughout the Southwest, and greater United States and, México. The specific geographic location of my work was the city of *Angelitas* and Tanoan—pseudonym for a small northern New Mexico city where I conducted some of my research.

The United States census designates Hispanics and Non-Hispanic Whites from the plurality of both *Angelita's* and Tanoan's population. Native Americans are a significant

marginalized population in both cities. In comparison to the United States overall, African Americans and Asians are present in smaller than average ratios. Some of my ceremonial community members are descendants of people that lived in the Southwest prior to the United States annexation of what was México's north. And, others are the children and grandchildren of recent immigrants or are immigrants themselves. Like most Hispanics in *Angelitas* and Tanoan, the majority of the members of my ceremonial community are working class, although some are middle class and hold advanced degrees. Others are low income and struggle with poverty. Moreover, *Angelitas* is often depicted in media as a rough and tumble, drug-ridden, working-class city. Nevertheless, it contains some wealthy—largely Non-Hispanic White neighborhoods and a large university. In contrast, Tanoan is a tourist destination, widely recognized for its museums, art galleries, and largely White, and Native art communities. The members of my ceremonial community who were participants in this study include, *Conchero danza Azteca grupo Maguey,* which I am a member of, and is *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca's danza circulo*.[3] The *promotoras tradicionales* (practitioners and promoters of *curanderismo* and other traditional/natural healing modalities) of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca*. *Conchero danza Azteca grupos Fuego* (fire), and *Tonantzin* (*La Virgen de Guadalupe*/*Coatlicue*.[4] *Mexicayotl danza Azteca grupo* and *kalpulli*, *Kalpulli Etér* (heavens).[5] And, the ceremonial *grupo Coyote Bronce* (Bronze Coyote), which contains several members who are also *danzantes* for *grupo Fuego*. To a minimal degree, this project also included *Conchero danza Azteca grupos Coyolxauhqui*,[6] located in the small town of *Tonal***,** south of *Angelitas*, and *Xochipilli*,[7] located in Mexico City. It is imperative to state that pseudonymous were used for all research participants, *danza Azteca grupos*, *kalpulltin* and city locations,[8] except for Mexico City,[9] because, due to the large amount of *danzantes* in Mexico City, the chance of identifying the *danza grupo Xochipilli* is slight.

Importantly, the lineage of the *Conchero danza Azteca* grupo *Xochipilli* has been in existence since precolonial times. In addition, During the Spanish colonial era, this *grupo* and all other *danza Azteca grupos* were prohibited from dancing. However, in the 1700s when the Spanish allowed *danzantes* to dance, *Xochipilli* continued ceremonies in correlation with cosmological cycles. *Danza Azteca* was one such ceremony. *Xochipilli's* ritual lineage was maintained by generations of *danzantes* that clandestinely practiced Indigenous ceremony, by syncretizing Indigenous deities, such as *Tonantzin/Coatlicue* with the Catholic deity *La Virgen de Guadalupe*. Therefore, since *Conchero danza Azteca grupo Maguey* is a part of *Xochipilli's* main *mesa/altar* (table/altar) in Mexico City, *Maguey* is connected to *Xochipilli's* longstanding *danza Azteca* genealogy.[10]

My work poses a critical intervention into American Studies by reframing the questions of indigeneity in the experience of culturally mixed Mexican Americans, and federally recognized Native Americans, many of which are also peoples of mixed heritage. To accomplish this task, I draw from my ethnographies to demonstrate that my ceremonial community understands themselves as Indigenous, not simply because they possess this genetic heritage, but because, many of the practitioners have maintained Mesoamerican traditional medicine and Traditional Indigenous medicine intergenerationally in their families and communities,[11] such as drinking *manzanilla* (chamomile) or *yerba buena* (spearmint) tea for stomach aches, having a family member pull the skin on their back to relieve constipation, or being taught that when participating in *danza Azteca* "you should do the *pasos* correctly, because they have energy."[12] This knowledge demonstrates that indigeneity is expressed knowledge and traditional practices that have been passed down within our families and communities for generations.

I begin this dissertation with a description of my ethnographic study and introduce the *danzante* and *promotora* research participants and members of my interconnected ceremonial community located in *Angelitas* and Tanoan and México City. I also introduce the Native American scholars who participated in this project, as interviewees. Within this work, I underscore that the ritual performances of *danza Azteca*, *curanderismo,* and other ceremonies performed by my ceremonial community assert statements about the Mexican American and Mexican practitioners' everyday reality and experiences.[13] It is important to state that in order to provide categorical ethnic terms for the *danzantes* and *promotoras tradicionales* (hereafter, *promotoras*) of my ceremonial community, I refer to them as Mexican American and Mexican, which they are. However, this community identifies in multiple ways, such as simply Mexican, even if they Mexican American. Some of the practitioners, like Sophia and Paul identify as Indigenous, among other ethnic identifiers. Others also acknowledge their indigeneity, along with their Mexican heritage. And, the Mexican immigrants identify as Mexican, with the exception of Felipe, *jefe* and *danzante* of *grupo Fuego*,[14] who identifies as "energy."[15]

In addition, I discuss the performance and decolonial scholarship that informed this study.[16] I contend that through *danzantes'* and *promotoras'* adherence of *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican thought and philosophy they embody this knowledge through the ritual performances of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo* and live in ceremony every day.[17] I maintain that by conducting my research as a ceremony,[18] I, was able to have greater integrity toward myself and my community. Cree scholar Shawn Wilson understands Indigenous research as ceremony, which is a process based on relationships, and "being accountable to your relations."[19] This accountability is based on "respect, reciprocity and responsibility."[20] For me, this accountability involved individual *platicas* (heart to heart talks) with each of the *danza grupos*

and *kalpullis* of my ceremonial community. It involved, speaking to my elders and ceremonial *jefas/es* (leaders) listening to and following their *consejos* (advice). It also incorporated, transparency with my ceremonial community regarding my intent and purpose for conducting this research. And, it involved asking for and including the practitioners input.

In this work, I contend that the practitioners who are peoples of Mexican and Indigenous heritage *are* Indigenous, because their ancestors are Indigenous and were the original inhabitants of the Southwest, and because they continue to practice ceremonial and Mesoamerican traditional medicine that has been passed down intergenerationally within their families and communities. I include Indigenous Studies and Mexican American Studies scholarship that supports and illuminates these claims. I argue that the *danzantes* and *promotoras* of my ceremonial community acknowledge their intercultural heritage, and privilege their Indigenous identity through the ritual performances of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo*. And, I maintain that the *danzantes* and *promotoras* of my ceremonial community acknowledge their Mexican heritage and privilege their Indigenous identity through their ritual performances and everyday lives. I conclude this work by reflecting on poignant points made in this dissertation and by providing suggestions for further research. Ultimately, I take seriously the claim that interculturally mixed Indigenous and Mexican peoples are "not really native." In the pages that follow I critically consider a ceremonial path with other unrecognized and sometimes denied Indigenous people.

Methodology

This Ethnography

This study was conducted over the course of one year between February 2017 and February 2018. The poetics and politics of a ceremonial community's private and public ritual

performances of *danza azteca* and *curanderismo* were explored, as they were performed throughout *Angelitas* and Tanoan, New Mexico, and to a lesser degree in Mexico city, with the *danza grupo Xochipilli*. Importantly, I examined syncretized rituals of the Catholic religion and *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican cosmology within the performances, as these ceremonies are offerings to both Catholic saints and *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican deities.

In 2017, New Mexico shared ranking with Louisiana for being the second poorest state in the nation.[21] Over the years there has been an increase of immigrants that have relocated to New Mexico. This immigration of largely Mexican immigrants has correlated with an increase in the ritual performances of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo*.[22] These ceremonies act as *armas* (weaponry) against the increase in anti-Mexican sentiments espoused by right wing conservative politicians who are a part of the Donald Trump administration.[23] The effects of overt racism voiced by the U.S. government has given society license to openly mimic their biases and insight violence towards Mexican immigrants.[24] In response, the need for healing, a sense of belonging, social justice, resistance and protection has increased among Mexican immigrants and Mexican citizens within the city of *Angelitas* and the state of New Mexico.

Through my analytical methodologies of participant observations and interviews, I demonstrate that the ritual performances of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo* provide the Mexican American and Mexican immigrant community of *Angelitas* with healing, a sense of belonging. And, incite a desire for social justice, resistance and protection from discriminating policy's that threaten the wellbeing of this community. The ceremonies which I observed included, the veneration of *La Virgen de los Remedios*/*Mayahuel* (the Virgen of Remedies and *Mayahuel* the *Nahuatl* deity and guardian of healing plants and remedies, *Dia de las Animas velacion* (Day of the Souls candle vigil), t*emazkallis*,[25] the 2017 International Worker's Day protest, and *tequios*

(community work), among other rituals. I composed field notes during my observations and took photographs of several ritual performances. As previously noted, for my interviews, I borrowed from Pablo Vila's *Crossing Borders, Reinforcing Borders*.[26] During Vila's interviews he utilized photographs and asked participants to select photos that they would like to comment on.

My research followed an annual *Conchero danza Azteca* ritual calendar, created by the *Conchero danza grupo Xochipilli*, located in Mexico city, which my *Conchero danza grupo, Maguey* is connected to. *Xochipilli's* ceremonial calendar follows the *Hueyi Tlalnamic Tonalamatl* Azteca and Gregorian calendar that is fashioned after Arturo Meza's version of the Aztec calendar.[27] The *Hueyi Tlalnamic Tonalamatl calendario* (calendar) corresponds to the four seasons, and Mexica deities connected to the Aztec calendar, which follows a 260 day ceremonial cycle, and honors Mexica deity's, and seasons, that correspond to specific days and times of the year. My ceremonial community is particularly significant because *danza grupo Maguey* is connected to *danza grupo Xochipilli* through a central *mesa* (table) or *altar* maintained by *Xochipilli*, a core *familia* of *danza* leaders in Mexico city. All of the members of my ceremonial community are connected through ceremonial kinship,[28] relationships of *conformidad* (conformity) made through *ceremonia*. Moreover, many of these *danzantes* are a part of larger *grupos* that have a *danza Azteca* lineage, which extends to the pre-colonial and colonial eras. I now turn to the specifics of the dissertation document itself.

Critical Approach – Ethnography

I implemented performance, and decolonial theory as a dual theoretical lens for this project. Performance, and decolonial theory facilitated my investigation of the poetics and politics, or the cultural, social, and political statements that emanated from the ritual performances. Moreover, the implementation of performance theory illuminated the ways in

which the social constructions of identity, race, gender, indigeneity, culture, and religion played a role in performance, particularly, during the participant observation and interview processes. My preliminary research showed that the decolonial perspective of oppositional consciousness was at work within these ritual performances.[29] The practioner's oppositional consciousness resists hegemonic forces, and they identify with an intercultural Mexican American, Mexican immigrant and Indigenous heritage and way of thinking and being that evoked cultural and social cohesion among *danzantes* and *promotoras*.

The chapters of this dissertation are ethnographic case studies that speak to each chapter's main argument. For example, in chapter two I argue that the *danzantes* and *promotoras* of my ceremonial community maintain Indigenous understandings of ceremony, which influence them to live in ceremony every day. Therefore, I provide excerpts from the interviews regarding the practitioners and the Native American scholars' understandings of ceremony, and illustrate ways in which the practitioners live in ceremony every day. I chose ethnography as my primary methodological research approach, because it allowed me to provide the deep, personalized voices of the interlocutors,[30] who spoke of the specific poetics and politics that emanated from the ritual performance.

The purpose of my field notes were to capture the poetics and politics, or social, cultural, and political positionality expressed through Mexican American/immigrant practioners' rituals. The interviews were also included to better understand the poetics and politics that emanate from the performative enactments of the *danzantes'* and *promotoras'* ceremonial performances. The interviews were conducted with a digital audio recording device and notepad. I transcribed these interviews and used transcript analysis as my primary data source.

Importantly, prior to conducting my participant observations and interviews, I provided the *danza grupos* and respondents the research consent form, which explained the purpose of my research.[31] In addition, I informed each respondent that if they desired any particular data be omitted, I would do so. And, I only recorded and spoke of ceremonial discussions and items, in which I was permitted. The sample pool for this research consisted of eight respondents: two female *danzantes* and *promotoras*, one of which is an elder ceremonial leader, and the other is a middle aged ceremonial leader, *danzante*, and at the time of my interview with her, was a *promotora* of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca*; two male *danzantes*, one of which is an elder ceremonial leader and healer, and the other is a middle aged ceremonial leader; four Native American scholars, two of which were female. One of the females is an elder scholar of Indigenous Studies, and the other female is a scholar of Anthropology. The two male scholars are both professors of Native American Studies, one of which is an elder; and the other is middle aged.

An example of one of the semi structured interview questions provided eight photographic images of *danzantes* and *promotoras* participating in ritual performance. Through the exhibition of these photographs, I asked the respondents to select photos and provide their impression of the images. This interview question was taken from Vila's study, which was conducted on peoples from the Ciudad Juárez and El Paso area.[32] The purpose of Vila's work was to reveal the intricate "process of identity construction" among Mexican Americans, African Americans, and Anglos residing along this U.S.-Mexico borderland region.[33] In an effort to address his inquiry, Vila showed the interviewees various photographs of everyday activities in the Juarez and El Paso area. such as "public interactions, family life, religion, leisure, work, etc." and asked the interviewees to select photos and comment on them.[34]

The interviews consisted of one to two interviews per respondent, which lasted one-two hours each. This interview amount and duration allowed a sufficient sample size and time frame for the data collection and analysis process, in addition, to providing a comfortable and ample time frame that enabled an effective interview for both the interviewee and interviewer.[35]

During the interviews, I inquired if and how the ritual performances (re)constitute "Indigenous" cultural expressions and identifications. I juxtaposed the Native American scholar's responses that spoke to issues, affirmations, and identifications of indigeneity that are connected to ritual performance, with such responses provided by the *danzantes* and *promotoras*. My purpose here was to compare these responses, and then analyze and critique them within my dissertation chapters to better understand the expressions and affirmations of an Indigenous identity within ritual performance of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo*. This analysis enabled me, in part, to answer my core research question, and my hypothesis that the poetics and politics of the ceremonial community and their ritual performances are an affirmation of their Indigenous identity. It is important to state that, at times, quotations taken from the respondents and ceremonial practitioners are abbreviated or paraphrased for the purpose of context and clarity.

Data: An Overview of Primary Texts

It is important to note that my field notes served as the evidence for my participant observations, and my interview transcripts served as evidence for my interviews. My participant observations and interviews, interview transcripts and analyses, field notes and field note analyses all cross checked one another for accuracy of interpretation.

The interview style in which I will utilized for my interviews included semi-structured questions. I conducted these interviews at the respondents' homes and, or professional offices—comfortable, and quite locations, where the possibility of distractions was eliminated. The

majority of my interviews were conducted in one day, with the exception of my interview with Sophia. Sophia and I had to conduct our interview in three separate segments on two separate days during the winter of 2017 – 2018. All of the interviews lasted approximately 1-2 hours, with the exception of my interviews with Sophia, which lasted several hours. This time frame provided a reasonable and comfortable amount of time for the interviewer to ask a sufficient amount of questions and for the respondent to provide sufficient information without getting tired or irritated.[36]

I chose this particular ceremonial community for my research, because it is a community that I have been a part of for eight years. And, I am a member of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* as a *danzante*, *promotora* and *sahumadora*. In addition, I chose the Native American scholars as respondents in order to illicit Indigenous perspectives regarding the implications of *danzantes'* and *promotoras'* ritual performance. Through my participant observations and interviews, I hope that I have captured and conveyed a better understanding of the respondents' conceptualizations of self and community identity, as well as the political, social, and cultural nuances that underlie ritual performances performed by the *danzantes and promotoras*. As a member of this community, there exists a level of mutual familiarity, respect, and comfortability between the researcher and research participants. The most efficient way to understand the poetics and politics embedded within the rituals performed by the practitioners, and to address my research inquiries, was to observe, participate and speak with, and listen to the very voices of the people involved in these ceremonies, as well as Native American peoples who offered similar, and, at times, differing perspectives regarding the implications of Mexican American's and Mexican immigrant's ritual performance.

A Decolonial Project

This dissertation utilizes a decolonial lens to examine a specific group of Mexican Americans' participation in an interculturally mixed Mesoamerican ceremonial community. The theoretical methods I applied in this study include decolonial, and performance theory. Decolonial theory incorporates "oppositional consciousness" to question oppressive conditions, and thereby, encourage marginalized communities to become agents of social change.[37] As such, decolonial theory and decolonization can be understood politically as attaining cultural autonomy and self-determination by challenging domination through individual and collective definitions and assertions of identification. Authors who have influenced my understanding and implementation of decolonial theory include Linda Tuhuwai Smith, Roberto Rodríquez, and Patrisia Gonzales.[38]

Through my ethnographic research of participant observations and interviews with *danzantes* and *promotoras,* and with Native American scholars, I argue that the ritual performances of *danza Azteca*, *curanderismo* and other ceremonies performed by this community convey statements about Mexican American's everyday reality, and experience of the social constructions of identity, race, gender, culture, and religion, in addition to our social, political, and economic positionality in relationship to dominant society. I contend that the *danzantes* and *promotoras* of my ceremonial community participate in Mesoamerican expressive cultural forms to acknowledge and negotiate our Indigenous heritage and identity. Moreover, these rituals assert a resistance toward our absorption into hegemonic society, and erasure of our interculturally mixed Indigenous identity. As a person of mixed-race Mexican American and Hopi heritage, *danzante, promotora,* and *sahumadora* (fire keeper) of *danza grupo Maguey* and *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca*, I offer an insider's perspective of the epistemologies and ontologies that

inform our ritual ceremonies—knowledge and understanding that outsiders may not conceptualize at all, or in the ways that insiders do.[39] *Danza Azteca* has been in existence since pre-colonial times. During the Spanish colonial era this ceremony, along with other ceremonies were forced to exist clandestinely, because the Spanish associated them with things of the devil and forbade them. Yet, families and *kalpullis* during and after the Spanish and Mexican colonial eras continued to practice *danza Azteca*. During the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, there was a recovery of *Nahuatl* or *Mexica* culture and traditions, which included *danza Azteca*, and a deeper sense of cultural pride, which included a greater acceptance of *curanderismo* as a sacred form of Indigenous and Mexican healing ways. During this era, *jefes* Andres Segura,[40] and Florencia Yescas,[41] introduced Mexican Americans of the American Southwest to the Indigenous *tradición y ceremonia* (tradition and ceremony) of *Nahuatl danza Azteca*. Through the transference of Segura's and Yescas' teachings, *danza Azteca* spread throughout the United States. At present, there are well over ten-thousand *danzantes Aztecas* in the United States.[42]

The *Conchero danzantes*, like those in my ceremonial community undertake the responsible of maintaining this tradition in the present and for future generations. Through their syncretization of Indigenous and Catholic rituals, and the use of Spanish stringed instruments, which acted as a drum, during the Spanish colonial era.[43] Through the years, the *Concheros*, and later, the *Mexicayotl danzantes* invented traditions of *la danza*, such as allowing women to play the drum, and innovated the dramatic *Mexicayotl* performative style of *danza Azteca*. My participant observations included various Mesoamerican and North American Indigenous ritual performances, such as *danza Azteca*, *curanderismo*, *Mexica temazkals* (Mesoamerican sweat baths or lodges), pan-Indian ceremonial traditions, like the Lakota *Inipi*, and ceremonial community workshops or *tequios* about Mesoamerican cultural knowledge, such as plant

medicine, *Mexica* cosmology, religion, philosophy, sacred geometry, science, and architecture. I also observed the syncretism of *Mexica* and Catholic religious traditions, which are integral components involved in my ceremonial community's ritual performances of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo*. This syncretism is evident with the *Nahuatl* deity *Coatlicue/Tonantzin* and Catholic deity *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, among other syncretic expressions.[44] It is important to state that the examination of the syncretism of these deities is often the object of debate.

Mexican Americans' Indigeneity?

This dissertation critically intervenes into tensions within the interdisciplinary field of American Studies regarding Mexican Americans' claims of identity. This discourse has two camps, which includes Native American Studies scholar Jack Forbes,[45] Mexican American Studies scholars Roberto Rodríguez and Patrisia Gonzales,[46] and Chicano Studies scholar Gloria Anzaldúa who maintain that Mexican Americans are Indigenous, and "detribalized," "de-Indigenized Indigenous " peoples,[47] because of their forced detachment and displacement from their Indigenous communities during the Spanish colonial era, and later forced assimilation into colonial society. And, because the Spanish, Mexican and American colonizers coerced peoples of Mexican decent to deny their Indigenous identity, or risk continued racialized violence, and forgo any chance of obtaining the rights and protections given to citizens.[48] The above noted scholars are experts in Mexican and Chicano history,[49] and legacy of *mestizaje* practiced during the Spanish colonial era, which created mixed-race peoples of Mexican descent.[50] These scholars are knowledgeable about the interrelational and intercultural mixture that occurred between different Indigenous peoples of throughout the American Southwest, prior to the Spanish colonial era, and between Indigenous peoples of the Southwest and Mexican Americans, during and after this era. The second camp includes academician critics of Mexican Americans' claims

of Indigeneity, and their relationship with the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. These scholars include Romario Bautista, Jessica Hernandez,[51] Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, Nicole Guidotti-Hernandez,[52] Jodi Byrd,[53] Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang,[54] and Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua,[55] which contend that Mexican Americans who identify with *Mexica* culture are appropriating indigeneity; are "descendants of Indigenous people," are "arrivants," and "settler colonizers" within the Americas.

This project is important to American Studies, because it intervenes into difficult debates between Chicano scholars who support Mexican Americans' claims of indigeneity and academic who oppose this claim. Through my examination of these scholars' works, I create a dialogue between and the views of the practitioners of my ceremonial community. Through this dialogue, I hope to create a better understanding of Mexican Americans' recognition of indigeneity, how this recognition benefits our ceremonial and ethnic community, and how it acknowledges the relationship my ceremonial community has with other Native Americans of the Southwest in respectful and dignifying ways.

Indigenist anthropologist Kim TallBear asserts, "[I]ndigenous peoples have understood themselves to have emerged as coherent groups and cultures in intimate relationship with particular places, especially living and sacred landscapes. In short, Indigenous people's 'ancestry' is not simply genetic ancestry evidenced in 'populations' but biological, cultural, and political groupings constituted in dynamic, long-standing identities and, more broadly, their indigeneity.[56] While enrollment into a tribe through marriage or adoption was allowed in many tribes through the mid-20th century, today, without exception, tribal citizens must be biologically descended by enrolled tribal members.[57] If tribes and First Nations people play an increasing hand in the geneticization of what we understand as political categories (i.e., tribe, First Nation,

and citizen) we aid the ascendency of genetics as legitimate grounds for identity claims that may rival or even overtake the existing historical—legal foundations of Indigenous governance authority and citizenship.[58]

According to TallBear, being Indigenous means that an individual has Indigenous ancestry through blood, culture and political ties, that remain intact today, with a particular Indigenous community and place. TallBear contends that if Indigenous people continue to implement DNA testing to legitimate identity, "[w]e may undermine our own sovereignty."[59] I draw from TallBear's contentions. And, I add to her argument in my assertion that DNA testing among U.S. federally recognized tribes in order to legitimate enrollment also destroys tribal member's sense of belonging, traditional ways of knowing one another and of creating and sustaining community. In addition, basing indigeneity and belonging based on genetics alone is destructive toward Mexican Americans and other interculturally mixed Indigenous peoples who acknowledge and express their indigeneity with their communities in ways that TallBear notes. TallBear poignantly maintains that the use of genetic technology is a colonial tool used to measure authenticity, belonging, unbelonging and appropriation of Indigenous identity.[60] Such notions, negate both Indigenous peoples and their mixed-race relative's ways of knowing, being and community.

In conversations with Indigenous Studies and Diné scholar, Jacqueline Dean, Pueblo scholar Penelope, and Mexican American elder *danzantes, promotora,* and Mexican American ceremonial leaders Paul and Sophia agreed that being Indigenous means having ancestral intergenerational ties to a specific place, having a relationship with the land, and living by and practicing Indigenous cultural traditions. For instance, Dean stated "Indigenous applies to people who are Indigenous to lands throughout the world. . . . [I]t's a term when we use it as Indigenous

people it means people who are born to a place across many, many generations, and that we have a commonality with other people who have similar claims.[61]

Penelope affirmed, “It means you’re related to the land—first of all, or Indigenous, meaning you have connections to a certain area, and it’s related to the land. And, you practice certain ways of living, like living off the land. [I]ndigenous, I think for me, is that you practice your traditions of your people.[62]

Sophia asserted, “the term Indigenous means being native to or having an origin to a particular place—to the earth . . . that you’re Indigenous to this continent. I think, in terms of recognizing ourselves as Indigenous people—is if we’re tied to the land and our *cultura* (culture). [And] *relationship* [as Indigenous people], there was reverence that was paid . . . [to] those plants, those animals, those living beings, the water, all these things around us.[63]

Paul affirmed that the term Indigenous means,

> “[P]eople who are from a particular place that makes them Indigenous . . . . [Y]our physical, geographical, biological description of being Indigenous, that you know that we originally are from the place. So, being from a place for so long or predating others, we have that aspect of being settled in that place and having a tradition and that geographic area, because we have been from that area for so long. [T]here is another aspect, like what does Indigenous mean when we’re talking about the way we live our lives? The Indigenous way is that we chose a way of life and we follow that way. We see how it helps us to interact with our world. [I]t means those of us who are actually taking the time to *live* in those ancient traditional ways that interfaced more functionally and with our universe and with our world, as opposed to moving ourselves *away* from nature . . . being

> of [and] living with land, living off the land, living *with* the land, caring for land, caring for *ourselves*, caring for *others*—all of the qualities of what it means to be Indigenous.[64]

The Dissertation

In chapter one, I introduce the performance and decolonial scholarship that informed this study. And, maintain that the ritual performances of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo*, as well as other ceremonies performed by this community assert statements about Mexican Americans' and Mexicans' everyday reality and experiences of the social constructions of identity, race, gender, culture, and religion, in addition, to their social, political and economic positionality in relationship to dominant society. And, assert that the *danzantes* and *promotoras* of my ceremonial community participate in *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican expressive cultural forms to acknowledge their Indigenous heritage and identity.

In chapter two, I argue that the *danzantes* and *promotoras* of my ceremonial community maintain Indigenous understandings of ceremony, which influence them to live in ceremony every day. By conducting my research as ceremony,[65] I was able to communicate with integrity and transparency toward my ceremonial community. This chapter maintains that the *promotoras* and *danzantes* embody ancestral *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican traditional values and attitudes toward the practice of ceremony. In so doing, they share their gifts of intuition, healing knowledge and,[66] are informed and guided by *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican thought and philosophy by maintaining a connection with their face and heart and abiding by the Five Ethics of Indigenous epistemology and ontology.[67] In chapter three, I contend that Américo Paredes and Jose Limón argue for understanding performers as political agents. And, that through ritual

performance my ceremonial community explicitly conceptualize themselves as participant in Chicano and Indigenous struggles for social justice.

In chapter four, I contend that because of my ceremonial community's convictions of *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican Indigenous epistemology and ontology, they organically embody, what I call, the spiritual, healing, community, and teaching warrior role models through their ritual performances. Through these roles they pass on this sacred knowledge and create the "healing justice," and social justice they imagine for their ceremonial and ethnic community, and greater community of *Angelitas*. In chapter five, I argue that the ritual practitioners of my ceremonial community are Indigenous, because they possess Indigenous ancestry, are aware of this heritage and their Indigenous ancestors who were the original inhabitants of the Southwest and México. Importantly, the practitioners' ritual performances and Indigenous identifications are informed by Indigenous *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican epistemologies and ontologies. Moreover, the practitioners think, act and live according to an Indigenous worldview, with their families, friends and ceremonial and ethnic community. Finally, in the conclusion, I emphasize the answers to the core research questions of my dissertation and offer suggestions for further research.

Entry Point

Interculturally mixed peoples of Indigenous and Mexican American heritage, like myself, who not members of federal or state recognized tribes, did not grow up on the reservation, and are often perceived as outsiders by their Indigenous communities and society, do not have the same privileges as Indigenous peoples who are member of a federal or stated recognized tribe and grew up with, or still live in their native community. As such, such these interculturally mixed Mexican Americans cannot invite themselves to a private ceremony on Hopi, for example,

nor should they do so. Still, I privilege Mexican American and Mexican voices by providing a platform for them to engage in the lived and factual reality of an indigeneity that is inscribed in their bodies and is part of their lived experience.

In the pages that follow, I demonstrate that Interculturally mixed Indigenous and Mexican American people's indigeneity cannot simply be elided because it is complex and sometimes politically disturbing for Indigenous scholars, activists and their non-Native allies. At the same time, Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants should acknowledge other marginalized groups, namely, Native Americans—who may find this centering of Mexican American and Mexican voices oppressive. Importantly, through the centering of borderland people's voices, I did not intend to trump Mexican American and Mexicans' positionality or struggles over federally recognized Native Americans, or any other marginalized group. For my study, I included the voices of Mexican Americans and Mexicans who acknowledge their indigeneity and live according to an Indigenous worldview. I included their ways of living and being, as they are seen, heard, and critiqued by both their supporters and critics. After asking for guidance through a tipi ceremony (*peyote ceremonia*) and receiving answer through images I saw in the burning coals in the center of the ceremonial space, I decided to include the voices of my *danza Azteca* and *promotora* ceremonial community of *Angelitas*. Through this research, I held space for Mexican Americans and Mexicans, as they do in ceremony. As I did this, I imagined a large circle, which is the interdisciplinary field of Chicano Studies. In this dissertation I perceive indigeneity and Mexican American and Mexican voices, at the center of Chicano Studies. The fields of American, Chicano, and Critical Indigenous Studies are akin to interconnected concentric circles, which study and theorize about Chicanos and Indigenous peoples and communities. These concentric circles also traverse other academic fields, including:

Critical Regionalism and Borderlands Studies, and Queer, Black, Asian, and Disability Studies. These subfields of American Studies arose from the positionality, intellect and theorization of minoritized peoples.

Notes

[1] Peoples of Mexican descent, which Spanish colonizers deemed *mestizos/as* – as Jack Forbes explains in his book, 2nd Edition. *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black* Peoples, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993). In this text he maintains that the term *mestizo/a* comes from the mid-1700s understanding and use of it in the Americas, which meant a person of Spanish and Indian descent. Later, in the 1800s, and 1900s, the Spanish colonial definition in of *mestizo/a* meant a person of Indian and Mexican heritage. I. My intent is to respectfully acknowledge Mexican Americans' "diaspora" as Patrisia Gonzales maintains in *Red Medicine: Traditional Indigenous Rites of Birthing and Healing* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012), of mixed heritage and emphasize our Indigenous heritage. I do so with a critical consciousness of the *mestizaje* that initially created mixed-heritage Indigenous and European peoples, whom the colonizers labeled "Mexican." And, with a consciousness that acknowledges the consensual intercultural exchanges between the Indigenous peoples of the Southwest, and "*mestizo*," peoples, which contributed to the diaspora of peoples of Mexican descent. In doing so, I transform this term from a negative to a positive in that I use it with a sense of pride in my Indigenous ancestry and a reverence for the consensual exchanges that of my ancestors. In my conceptualization of mixed-race Mexican American and Mexican immigrant peoples, I borrow and build upon Gloria Anzaldúa's and Rudy Guevarra Jr.'s conception of *la mestiza* (the mixed one). These authors conceive of *la mestiza* of having an interstitial or *napantla* (in between) way of knowing and being. Anzaldúa draws from Homi Bhabha's notion of interstitial or third space in her use of *la napantla*—a consciousness of *dualidad* (duality); an in between state or process of knowing and becoming, much like the process of decolonization (Anzaldúa 2003). Guevarra uses the term *mestizo/a* in his text *Becoming Mexipino* to describe "Mexipinos." In this work Guevarra underscores that Mexipinos, like Mexican Americans, embody a *mestiza* consciousness, which embraces *dualidad* and all of what we are (2012). In this study, I use the terms mixed-race and interculturally mixed, interchangeably, and in the same sense that Anzaldúa and Guevarra conceptualize the term *mestiza/o*. However, throughout this dissertation I use the "o" at the end of Spanish terms, such as Chicano to emphasize the *Nahuatl* concept of *dualidad*, which acknowledges the feminine and masculine energies inherent in all beings. Given this context, my use of the "o," and also includes LGBTQ Mexican American *danzantes*, and current and former *promotoras* who are members of my ceremonial community.

[2] The *Nahua* were the Indigenous peoples who lived in the central valley of México prior to and during the Spanish colonial era. The term *Nahuatl* refers to the *Nahua* culture and language. See Miguel León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind*, translated by Jack Emory Davis, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), xvii-xix for discussions on the *Nahua* and *Nahuatl* people, culture and language.

[3] A *kalpulli* or *calpolli* is a *Nahuatl* term which means house. It is a traditional *Nahuatl* self-governing entity that was comprised of several families who specialized in a skill, which contributed to their economic sustainability during the pre-Columbian era. In the case of my *kalpulli*, *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca*, we continue this self-sustaining tradition by maintaining knowledge of medicinal plants and the practice of curanderismo. These kinships were formed through direct and fictive kin relations, which today, are known as compadrazgo. These kinship communities were the heart of *Nahuatl* society, because together they maintained rituals, such as ceremony and cultural knowledge that also was and is connected to Mesoamerican society and Aztec and Mayan calendars. *Conchero danzantes* of the *danza Aztec* tradition are *danzantes* who are responsible for keeping the tradition of *danza azteca* alive. They did so by clandestinely continuing this tradition and later by syncretizing *Nahuatl* rituals with Catholic customs, during the Spanish colonial era. The *Conchero danzantes' trajes* (regalia) is a modest attire, in that, the women usually where long skirts that do not expose their legs. And, the *blousa* (blouse) of their *traje* is similar to a huipil, in that it covers the arms or about three quarters of the arms and all of their torso. The men either wear pants with a belt and a Mexican style shirt, or they wear a calpa, which includes a cape and a skirt like bottom that has two slits on the sides of their quads. And, the *Concheros* also wear a penachos (head dresses), which they design with feathers, beads, or other ornaments. During the *Conchero danza azteca ceremonias* they use stringed instruments such as the *Concha*, which is made with an armadillo hide, and *mandolinas* (mandolins).The Spanish term *grupos* translates to groups in the English language. The *Maguey* or *Agave* cactus is associated with the *Nahuatl* deity *Mayahuel* which is the *guardiana* (guardian) of *plantas medicina* (medicinal plants) and *remedios*

[4] *Coatlicue* is the *Nahuatl* deity of the earth. In 1548 a *Nahua* peasant, Juan Diego saw an apparition of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* on *Tepeyac* hill (what is now México City), during the Spanish colonial era. After this event, the *Nahua* peoples renamed *Coatlicue Tonantzin*, and syncretized her with *La Virgen de Guadalupe* in order to clandestinely continue honoring *Coatlicue* and avoid punishment by the Spaniards.

[5] *Mexicayotl danza Azteca*. The *Mexicayotl danza Azteca* tradition was established in the 1960s in México by Florencio Yescas, who was a former *Conchero danzante*. This tradition is a return to indigeneity, in that, the *danzantes* do not syncretize their rituals with Catholicism. Instead they have educated themselves about Indigenous *Nahuatl* cosmology and follow pre-Columbian rituals within their danza and ceremonias. *Mexicayotl danza Azteca* is a dramatic performative style, in comparison to *Conchero danza Azteca*, in that, the *Mexicayotls'* have ornate elaborate *trajes*, adorned with long colorful macaw and turkey feathers on their *penachos* (crested head piece), and their *trajes* have slits on the front and/or sides of their thighs and legs, which expose the dancers' bare legs. In addition, the women's *traje blousas* expose their bare of upper chest region and arms. To a large degree, Yescas developed this performative style because the *danzantes* in México were poor and this form of *danza* provided an income for them from tourists who appreciated their performances. For a discussion on Yescas and *Mexicayotl danza Azteca* see Jennie M. Luna, "Danza Mexica: Indigenous Identity, Spirituality, Activism, and Performance," Dissertation, ProQuest Publishing: Ann Arbor, 2012.

[6] *Coyolxauhqui* is the *Nahuatl* moon deity. I will speak in greater detail about her significance at a later point in the dissertation.

[7] *Xochipilli* is the *Nahuatl* god of beauty, flowers, song, dance, and art.

[8] The *Nahuatl* term *kalpulltin* is plural for *kalpulli*.

[9] Although pseudonyms were provided for the vast majority of research participants, I did not provide pseudonyms for *maestra Angelbirtha* Cobb, *abuela* Bea, and *abuela Tonalmitl*, because they were not as directly involved in my research, and there are degrees of separation between them and my ceremonial community. As such, the chance of revealing my ceremonial community's identity through their association was slight. Importantly, I received direct permission from *maestra* Cobb and *abuela* Bea to use their original names. And, since *abuela Tonalmitl* is a public figure, is an internationally known ceremonial leader, and has several articles published online about her, I did not feel it was disrespectful to include knowledge about her in my dissertation.

[10] Sophia, personal conversation, February 5, 2020. *Angelitas*, New Mexico.

[11] The term practitioners(s) refers to those who participate in ritual performance or ceremony. In this case the term practitioners refers to the *danzantes* and *promotoras* of my ceremonial community

[12] See Aurelio Ramírez Cazarez et al. "It's not Traditional without the elders: Epistemological authority in Macehual knowledge system" in *Indigenous Places and Colonial Spaces* eds. Nicole Gombay and Marcela Palomino-Schalscha (London and New York: Routledge, 2018, 34-49), inform us that Meso-American Traditional Medicine and Traditional Indigenous Medicine "may be used interchangeably with Mexican Traditional Medicine" or *curanderismo*, "depending on which healing tradition the term addresses" (37). Daniel, *danzante* of *grupo Etér* shared the importance of dancing each *danza Azteca* step correctly, "because they have energy."

[13] The term performance from a folklorist, ethnographic and anthropological standpoint, according to Richard Bauman, Charles Briggs, "Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19. (1990): 59-88; *Story, Performance, and Event: Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986*; Competence in Performance: The Creativity of Tradition in Mexicano Verbal Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988); Américo Paredes, *With a Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998); Jose Limón, *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American south Texas* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994); Elisa Huerta "Embodied Recuperations: Performance, Indigeneity, and Danza Azteca," in *Dancing Across Borders: Danzas y Bailes Mexicanos*, eds. Olga Nájera-Ramírez, Norma E. Cantu, and Brenda M. Romero (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); and Alex Chávez *Sounds of Crossing: Music, Migration and the Aural Poetics of Huapango Arribeño* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017); "The Space of Affect, Or the Political Anatomy of Contemporary Fandango Performance in México," Música Oral del Sur: Revista Internacional. Españoles, Indios, Africanos y Gitanos. El Alcance Global del Fandango en Música, Canto y Danza, 12 (2015): 545-56, among other performance scholars that view performance not in terms of a theatrical performance, but rather, as a cultural expression or cultural form, which enacts and embodies the social, cultural, and political positionality of the participants. Performance also expresses identity, as is expressed in this study.

[14] A *jefe/a* is a Spanish term for leader.

[15] Felipe identified as "energy" during our interview on November 15, 2017 in South *Angelitas*, when I showed him my list of identifiers.

[16] The decolonial, decolonialism and decoloniality are states of being and processes of challenging hegemony, its limiting constructions of race, identity, gender, sexuality, culture and religion, and oppressive social, political, educational and economic institutions. Decolonialism is a constant state of progression, of becoming, of (re)imaging and (re)defining one's self, community and humanity.

[17] *Nahuatl* is the culture of the Mesoamerican *Nahua* peoples of the central valley of México. Mesoamerica is otherwise known as middle America. It includes the American Southwest, México and Central America. Professor of Mexican American Studies, Roberto Rodríguez who is one of my mentors, would call it the land of *maize* based peoples—which includes all of the Americas and the Caribbean. See Roberto Rodríguez and Patrisia Gonzales, *Amoxtli San Ce Tojuan, We are One, Nosotros Somos*, (San Fernando, CA: Xicano Records and Film, 2005); and Roberto Rodríguez, *Our Sacred Maize is our Mother: Indigeneity and Belonging in the Americas*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014).

[18] See Shawn Wilson, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Black Point, N.S.:
[19] See Shawn Wilson, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Black Point, N.S.: Fernwood Publishing, 2008.) see esp. 77. Also see Cora Weber-Pilwax, "What is Indigenous Research?' *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 25.2. 2001: 166-74, as qtd. in Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 2008, 77, for the conceptualization of research as ceremony.
Fernwood Publishing, 2008.) see esp. 77.
[20] See Cora Weber-Pilwax, "What is Indigenous Research?' *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 25.2. 2001: 166-74, as qtd. in Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 2008, 77.
[21] See Rachel Moskowitz, Bureau Chief. "Poverty in New México." New México Department of Workforce Solutions, U.S. https://www.dws.state.nm.us/Portals/0/DM/LMI/Poverty_in_NM.pdf, (January 2019): 1.
[22] American Immigration Council. "Immigrants in New Mexico." https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-in-new-mexico, (October 13, 2017): 1.
[23] See Andrew Hay, "New Mexico opens state migrant shelter, criticizes federal inaction." https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-new-mexico/new-mexico-opens-state-migrant-shelter-criticizes-federal-inaction-idUSKCN1S62TT, April 30,
2019. Also see Cynthia McFadden, Christine Romo, Julia Ainsley and Kenzi Abou-Sabe. "When migrants arrived in droves, this poor New Mexico city opened its arms." https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/immigration/when-migrants-arrived-droves-poor-new-mexico-city-opened-its-n1018656, June 18, 2019.
[24] See Kristie De Peña, "Can You Go to Jail for 'Assisting' Your Undocumented Neighbor?" https://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/can-you-go-to-jail-for-assisting-your-undocumented-neighbor/, May 8, 2017; Alan Gomez, "Trump immigration raids show greater focus on non-criminals." USA TODAY, February 16, 2017; Tanvi Misra, "The Effect of Trump's Immigration Crackdown, in 3 Maps." https://www.citylab.com/equity/2018/02/mapping-trumps-immigration-crackdownand-the-local-response-to-it/552881/; and Univisión.com, "Trump on border wall: México will pay us back." https://www.univision.com/univision-news/politics/trump-on-border-wall-México-will-pay-us-back, January 6, 2017.
[25] *Temazkallis* is the plural term for the Mesoamerican sweat baths or lodges.
[26] See Pablo Villas' *Crossing Borders, Reinforcing Borders: Social Categories, Metaphors, and Narrative Identities on the U.S.-Mexican Frontier* (2000).
[27] Arturo Meza is a respected elder and knowledge keeper of the Aztec calendar. His calendar is followed by many *Conchero* and *Mexicayotl danzantes*.
[28] See Patrisia Gonzales *Red Medicine*, 2012; and see Patrisia Gonzales in Aurelio Ramirez Cazarez et al. "It's not Traditional without the elders: Epistemological authority in Macehual knowledge system" in *Indigenous Places and Colonial Spaces* eds. Nicole Gombay and Marcela Palomino-Schalscha (London and New York: Routledge, 2018, 34-49), see esp. 37, for her understanding of "ceremonial kinship" as a means of creating relationships with elders and friends who are part of a ceremonial community of non-blood related members.
[29] See Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), for her contention that oppositional consciousness is a counter hegemonic, counter "ism," such as, racism, sexism and so on and so forth, and counter oppressive means of thinking, being, politics and activism.
[30] The terms interlocuter(s), and research participant(s), or practitioner(s) are used interchangeably to connote the ceremonial participants, or interviewees.
[31] In this work, I use the terms respondent(s), interview participant(s) and interviewee(s) interchangeably.
[32] See Pablo Vila, *Crossing Borders, Reinforcing Borders: Social Categories, Metaphors, and Narrative Identities on the U.S.-México Frontier* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000, 2-3).
[33] See Pablo Vila, *Crossing Borders, Reinforcing Borders: Social Categories, Metaphors, and Narrative Identities on the U.S.-México Frontier* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000, 2).
[34] See Vila *Crossing Borders* 2000, 2-3.

[35] See Charles L. Briggs, *Competence in Performance: The Creativity of Tradition in Mexicano Verbal Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988).
[36] See Bernard, H. Russell, ed. *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology* (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 1998).
[37] See Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), for her contention that oppositional consciousness is a counter hegemonic, counter "ism," such as, racism, sexism and so on and so forth, and counter oppressive means of thinking, being, politics and activism.
[38] Linda Tuhuwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, London: Zed Books, 1999; see Roberto Rodríguez, *Our Sacred Maize is our Mother*, 2014); and Patrisia Gonzales, *Red Medicine: Traditional Indigenous Rites of Birthing and Healing* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012); and Rodriguez and Gonzales, *Amoxtli San Ce Tojuan*, 2005.
[39] In this work I use the terms mixed-race, mixed-race heritage, mixed heritage, interculturally mixed, culturally mixed interchangeably when referring to peoples of Mexican descent who are interculturally mixed with Indigenous, European, and for some, also black heritage. However, I also use variants of the above terms when discussing interculturally mixed Indigenous peoples.
[40] The late Andres Segura introduced Chicanos in the United States to *Conchero danza Azteca* in the 1960s as part of a movement to inspire Indigenous peoples to 'rediscover their heritage' (Yolanda Broyles-Gonzales qtd. in María Teresa Ceseña, "Creating Agency and Identity Danza Azteca" in *Dancing Across Borders: Danzas y Bailes Mexicanos*. Nájera-Ramírez, Olga, Norma E. Cantu, and Brenda M. Romero, eds. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009. Andres Segura was Sophia's maestro for several decades until he passed away and she was, as Sophia has stated, "his malinche" (translator). They had a very close relationship like that of an elder mentor and mentee.
[41]The late Florencio Yescas, was a former *Conchero danzante* from México City. He was responsible for introducing the Chicanos of the U.S. to the *Mexicayotl danza Azteca* style, which he created in México City, during the 1960s. The *Mexicayotl* tradition is a return to indigeneity, in that, the *danzantes* do not syncretize their rituals with Catholicism. Instead they have educated themselves about Indigenous *Nahuatl* cosmology and follow pre-Columbian rituals within their danza and ceremonias. *Mexicayotl danza Azteca* is a dramatic performative style, in comparison to *Conchero danza Azteca*, in that, the *Mexicayotls'* have ornate elaborate *trajes*, adorned with long colorful macaw and turkey feathers on their *penachos* (crested head piece), and their *trajes* have slits on the front and/or sides of their thighs and legs, which expose the dancers' bare legs. In addition, the women's *traje blousas* expose their bare of upper chest region and arms. To a large degree, Yescas developed this performative style because the *danzantes* in México were poor and this form of *danza* provided an income for them from tourists who appreciated their performances. For a discussion on Yescas and *Mexicayotl danza Azteca* see Jennie M. Luna, "Danza Mexica: Indigenous Identity, Spirituality, Activism, and Performance," Dissertation, ProQuest Publishing: Ann Arbor, 2012.
[42] Gabriel S. Estrada, Contemporary Issues of American Indian Studies, class lecture, April 19, 2006.
[43] My elders and ceremonial leaders, Sophia and Paul have stated that the Spaniards forbid the *Nahuas* to play the *huehuetl* or drum during their ceremonies then were completely banned from conducting their ceremonies all together, before being reallowed to conduct their ceremonies. During this time the *Nahuas* began using stringed instruments (an influence of the Spanish) like the *Concha* in place of the drum, (Interview with Sophia, December 19, 2017. *Angelitas*, New Mexico; and Paul's *platica* at *grupo Etér's ensayo*, September 18, 2017). *Angelitas*, New Mexico.
[44] See Jane H. Hill, "Syncretism," *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 9.l-2, (2000): 244-246; and George Steinmetz, "The Sociology of Empires, Colonies, and Postcolonialism," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 40 (2014): 77–103.
[45] See Jack *Forbes, African Americans and Native Americans*, 1993; and *Aztecas Del Norte: The Chicanos of Aztlán*, (Greenwich, Conn: Fawcett Publications, 1973).
[46] See Roberto Rodríguez' *Our Sacred Maiz Is Our Mother, Nin Tonantzin Non Centeoltl: Indigeneity and Belonging in the Americas*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014); and Roberto Rodríguez's and Patrisia Gonzales's, *Amoxtli San Ce Tojuan, We are One, Nosotros Somos.* San Fernando, CA: Xicano Records and Film, 2005. See Patrisia Gonzales, *Red Medicine* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012)..
[47] Roberto Rodríguez, and Patrisia Gonzales implement the terms "detribalized" and "de-Indigenized" Indigenous peoples when speaking of Mexican Americans and Chicanos. See Rodriguez *Our Sacred Maiz Is Our Mother, Nin Tonantzin Non Centeoltl: Indigeneity and Belonging in the Americas* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014); and Gonzales, "Water-Womb-Land Cosmologic: Protocols of Traditional Ecological Knowledge," *Ecopsychology* 12.2 June 2020: 84-90, see esp. 88; and *Red Medicine*. Rodríguez maintains that peoples of Mexican descent were "de-Indigenized" and "detribalized" via "deceremonialization" (Rodríguez, 2014, 10; 53) during the Spanish

colonial era which "separated Indigenous peoples from their culture, kinship, ceremonies, story . . . narratives, art, music, and means of education (Rodriguez, 2014). Gonzales agrees with the Rodriguez regarding the means through which peoples of Mexican descent were "de-Indigenized" and "detribalized" and adds that they also were prohibited from practicing their medicinal knowledge of native plants and ceremonial traditions (xxiv; xxv). De-Indigenization continued into the Mexican period and American colonial era. Also see *Gloria Anzaldua, Borderlands/La Frontera, the New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999).

[48] See Martha Menchaca, *Recovering History, Constructing Race: The Indian, Black, and White Roots of Mexican Americans* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001) for discussions on Mexicans, Mexican Americans and Native Americans' denial of their indigeneity, see esp. chapters "The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the Racialization of the Mexican Population," and "Racial Segregation and Liberal Policies Then and Now."
[49] The term Chicano came about during the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. This term derives from the *Nahuatl* word *Mexica*, which refers to the Indigenous *Nahua* peoples of central México. As Mexican Americans began to learn about and recognize their indigeneity, and became politicized about their ancestors legacy and their own legacy of belonging in the American Southwest, they began to refer to themselves as Chicanos, which connoted both their Indigenous heritage and identity, and their political positionality of resistance to hegemony. However, it is important to note that not all Mexican Americans who shared this awareness and ideology, identified, during and after the Chicano Movement as Chicano. This is the case with myself and with many of the *danzantes, promotoras* and *comadre* and *compadre* healers of my ceremonial community in *Angelitas*, New Mexico. My use of the term Chicano connotes Mexican Americans who share an awareness of their indigeneity, their ancestral legacy to the Southwest, and a resistance to hegemony. At times, I use the term Mexican American(s) in this same context, which refers to peoples who do not identify as Chicano, but share the ideology noted above.
[50] *Mestizaje* means mixture and refers to the violent practice of Indigenous cultural genocide through Spaniards raping Indigenous women in the Americas. *Mestizaje* was a deliberate effort to create a *sangre puro* (pure blood) Spanish society by diluting the Indigenous blood through resultant mixed-race offspring, who as adults would bare children with Spanish partners, to continue to dilute the Indigenous blood within the colony. See Jack D. Forbes, 2nd Edition. *Africans and Native Americans*, 1993. Also see Roberto Rodríguez's and Patrisia Gonzales's, *Amoxtli San Ce Tojuan* (2005), which discusses the consensual precolonial intercultural exchanges that occurred between Indigenous peoples of the Southwest, and mixed-race peoples which also contributed to the creation and expanse of mixed-race populations.
[51] See Romario Bautista, "My Thoughts on Indigeneity," 2019; and Jessica Hernandez, "How the Chican@ Discourse Silences Indigenous Peoples," 2019, for arguments which assert that Chicanos and Mexican Americans are "descendants of indigenous people."
[52] See Nichole Guidotti-Hernandez, *Unspeakable Violence: Remapping U.S. and Mexican National Imaginaries*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Sandra Soto, *Reading Chican@ like a Queer the De-mastery of Desire* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010); and María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imaginary in the Americas and the Age of Development*, Durham: Duke University Press, (2003), for contentions regarding Chicanos and Mexican American appropriations of indigeneity.
[53] See Jodi Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), for her assertion that Mexican Americans are "arrivants" to the Americas.
[54] See Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," *Decolonization, Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1.1 (2012): 1-40 for their contention that Mexican Americans are "settler colonizers."
[55] See Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua's article, "Decolonizing Antiracism," *Social Justice* 32.4 (2005): 120-43, regarding their claim that all People of Color (PoC), including Mexican Americans, are "settler colonizers."
[56] Kim TallBear "Genomic Articulations of Indigeneity", *Social Studies Science* 0:0 (2013): 2
[57] Gover K. "Genealogy As Continuity: Explaining the Growing Tribal Preference for Descent Rules in Membership Governance in the United States." *American Indian Law Review* 31.1 (2008): 243-310.
[58] TallBear "Genomic Articulations of Indigeneity," 17.
[59] TallBear "Genomic Articulations of Indigeneity," 17; and Patrick Wolfe, "The Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8.4 (2006).
[60] TallBear, 17.
[61] Interview with Dr. Jacqueline Dean, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, March 3, 2018.
[62] Interview with Penelope, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, August 15, 2017.
[63] Interview with Sophia, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, December 19, 2017.
[64] Interview with Paul, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, November 19, 2017.

[65] See Shawn Wilson, Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods (Black Point, N.S.: Fernwood Publishing, 2008), for his conceptualization of research as a ceremony, which guided me in conducting my research as ceremony.

[66]Ojibwe professor of environmental science and forestry, specialist of plant ecology, and advocate for integrative knowledge of Indigenous wisdom and scientific knowledge for the shared goal of sustainability, Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Minneapolis: Milkweed, 2013), maintains that our gifts are meant to be shared. These "gifts" include plants healing properties, and human's ability to use these properties, and their own healing abilities for the good of humanity.

[67] See Rosemary Christensen Ackley, "Cultural Context and Evaluation, A Balance of Form and Function," *National Science Foundation*, www.nsf.org, 2003, 23-24, for her conceptualization of the 3 "Rs" of Indigenous epistemology, ontology and education, which include "respect, reciprocity and relationships." Also see Patrisia Gonzales, *Red Medicine*, 2012, and Roberto Rodriguez's *Our Sacred Maiz Is Our Mother*, 2014, for their reconceptualization of the 3 "Rs", which they revamped to include "responsibility" and "renewal," and named this paradigm the 5 "Rs", of Indigenous epistemology and ontology. I also drew from Patrisia Gonzales, class lecture, the 5 "Rs", 2010, and Roberto Rodríguez's, class lectures in 2012, and 2011, both at the University of Arizona, Tucson, Department of Mexican American Studies.

Chapter One: *Danza Azteca* and *Curanderismo*, Cultural Expressions of a Ceremonial Community

Introduction

On a rainy spring morning in April 2017 I watched the ritual performance of *Conchero danza Azteca* in the form of an opening ceremony, followed by a *danza* procession given by *grupo Fuego*, for the annual César Chávez march and event in South *Angelitas*. The opening ceremony was held at a community park around the corner from the main event site. Most of the *danzantes* were dressed in *Conchero* style, with red sashes around their heads and waists for energetic and spiritual protection. The women wore long skirts. Juan, one of the *danzantes* wore a white cotton *calpa* (cape), and *el jefe* Felipe wore a white cotton male skirt, with vertical slits on each side of his thighs. And, all the *danzante* wore their *ayoyotes* (ankle rattles). At the onset of the ceremony, as the rain dropped sprinkles over the ceremonial space, Juan blew a conch shell, which signified the beginning of the ceremony. At the sound of the conch the *danzantes* formed two single file lines, which they intertwined through the *danza* to form one circle around Felipe, the *huehuetlero* (drummer), who stood at the center of the *danza circulo*. Once the *danzantes* were in a circle, Juan blew the conch again and the *danzantes* began to honor the seven directions of the east, west, north, south, the heavens, the earth, and the center—our heart, turning counter-clockwise to face each direction they honored. Once the practitioners completed honoring the seven directions, Juan blew the conch and the *danzantes* lead the procession through one of the oldest Mexican American neighborhoods in South *Angelitas*. During this point in time, the rain began to fall in bigger, more frequent droplets. Directly behind the *danzantes* were two elder Mexican American men that carried a banner of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*. Marching immediately behind these men were Sophia and Laura—an elder *comadre*

healer, former *promotora* and lead team organizer of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca*. These two elder *comadritas* (dear comadres) held the *kalpulli* banner as they and the rest of the Mexican American and Mexican community of *Angelitas* marched in a heavy rainstorm. As the community marched, the *danzantes* danced and Juan periodically blew the conch throughout *la ceremonia* to call in our ancestors. Shortly after the beginning of *la marcha y danza* (march and dance) the rain-storm transformed into a torrential down poor, yet, the *danzantes* continued to dance and the community continued to march until they completed the processional route. That day the *danzantes* danced with strong determination, as they planted their steps *con ganas* (with desire) on the pavement. The *danzantes* danced as though they wanted to make something move upon the earth into the atmosphere. And the community that marched behind them supported them and the entire community with "*más devocíon"* (more devotion).[1] The community, including the *danzantes* moved as though nothing could stop them, not even the torrential rain. Through this ceremony, the *danzantes* of *grupo Fuego* privileged their indigeneity. The privileging of indigeneity was demonstrated by *Fuego* conducting and Indigenous opening ceremony that honored the seven sacred directions, followed by an Indigenous *danza*. But, the *danzantes* were not the only ones that privileged indigeneity, the elders of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* and the entire community of South *Angelitas* did as well, by honoring and participating in an Indigenous ceremony, with *danzantes Aztecas* who lead this ceremony and march.

Importantly, during this ritual the practitioners conveyed an adamant reverence for Indigenous *ceremonia* and support of the Mexican American and Mexican communities, by continuing this *ceremonia* in the torrential rainstorm. In addition, through ritual ceremony during the César Chávez march and event, my ceremonial community exhibited their advocacy for social justice for the Mexican American and Mexican community of *Angelitas*. Every year *grupo*

Fuego offers this opening ceremony and leads the procession for the César Chávez day march in South *Angelitas,* and *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* and other *danzantes* of *grupo Maguey* and *Etér* participate in the procession and are welcome to dance with *grupo Fuego* as well. Significantly, through this and other *ceremonias*, the practitioners of this ceremonial community constitute their social identity as Indigenous people.

In this chapter I demonstrate that through the ritual performances of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo* the practitioners' (re)imagine our social and political realities. The practitioners embody Indigenous cultural knowledge, ritual and identifications. I draw from performance scholar Elisa Huerta's perspectives in my consideration of intersections of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo*. Through these ceremonies the practitioners connect ritual with "imaginaries and cultural performance" that are "at the heart of the political and social implications of *danza azteca* [and *curanderismo*] practices and the narratives created and embodied by *danzantes*" and all practitioners of my ceremonial community.[2] Similar to Huerta's study on *danzantes Aztecas*, I too found that the practitioners of my community (re)imagine their personal, social and political reality through ritual by expressing their identity and culture as Indigenous, in liberated and powerful ways.

During the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s many Mexican Americans educated themselves and were educated by knowledgeable elders who told them about the ritual performances of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo*. These ceremonies (re)rooted Chicanos to their Indigenous ancestor's original homelands, in a conceptual and factual manner.[3] This (re)rooting gave Mexican Americans a greater sense of belonging within the Southwest and connected them to their Indigenous spiritual and religious ways, which honor their Mesoamerican ancestors, deities and environment. Ultimately, this essay concludes that through ritual performance the

practitioners of this ceremonial community privilege their Indigenous identity and constitute their social identity.

This essay also reviews the performance and decolonial literature that informed this study. These works helped me determine that through ritual performance the practitioners of this community privilege their Indigenous identity. And, their social identity is constituted through performance. To better understand this argument, it is crucial to examine scholars who have conducted research on expressive cultural forms performed within Mexican American communities.

In the pages that follow, I claim that *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo* reinvigorated Mexican Americans' (re)cognition of their Indigenous ancestry and sense of pride in their Indigenous cultural heritage and traditions. Next, I discuss anthropologist and folklorist Charles Briggs and Richard Bauman's theorizations of linguistic performance. Importantly, their work draws from Mexican American scholars, as well as non-Mexican American academics in their theorizations of performance. Second, I discuss ethnographic scholarship by Mexican American anthropologist and performance scholar Elisa Huerta and anthropology scholar Enrique Maestas whose work focuses on *danza Azteca* as performed among Mexican American and pan-Indian ceremonial communities in California, Texas and the Southwest. Here, I examine the performative space and enactment of *danza Azteca* as an assertion of Mexican American indigeneity. I conclude with a reflection of the present essay and a prelude to the ways in which chapter two builds upon chapter one through my contention that Américo Paredes and Jose Limón argue for understanding performers as political agents. And, that through ritual performance Mexican Americans explicitly conceptualize and interweave Chicano and Indigenous struggles for social justice. It is critical to state that I privilege performance theory

and interrogate the literature on performance that was instrumental toward this study. I speak more about decolonial scholarship in chapter four. In the proceeding section, I underscore that the revival of *danza Azteca* and a renewal of perceptions about *curanderismo* that arose during the Chicano Movement reinvigorated Mexican Americans' sense of pride in their Indigenous heritage and cultural traditions.

The Chicano Movement and Ritual Performance

During the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, a resurgence of *danza Azteca* came about and a greater sense of pride in the practice of *curanderismo* spread. During this era *jefe* Andres Segura brought *Conchero danza Azteca*, and *jefe* Florencio Yescas brought the *Mexicayotl* form of *danza Azteca* to the United States. These traditions gave Chicanos an awareness in and sense of pride in their Indigenous heritage—which served as their connection with and legacy to the American Southwest. Importantly, these rituals strengthened their personal and political convictions regarding their sense of belonging within the Southwest. This was the affect that *danza Azteca* had on my elders Sophia and Paul. They have shared the Indigenous *Mexica* knowledge which they gained as activists in the Chicano Movement with the *danzantes* and *promotoras* of our ceremonial community. And, today the Mexican Americans and Mexicans of my ceremonial community practice the rituals of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo* to privilege our Indigenous identity. Still, this tradition is older than the Movement and it has long faced oppressive forces.

During the Spanish colonial era in México, the Spaniards, with their quest for expanding Catholicism and empire, deemed Indigenous ceremony, such as *danza Azteca* and traditional healing as *cosas del diablo* (things of the devil) and "*brujeria*" (witchcraft)—particularly traditional healing. The colonists also perceived these rituals as potential sites of resistance and

banned them to prevent any means of revolt from the Indigenous peoples of México and what is now the American Southwest.[4] It would not be until after the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 and the Spanish *Reconquista* of 1692 that Indigenous people of present day New Mexico and the American Southwest would be able to practice their religious traditions with a little more autonomy, particularly their medicinal practices.[5] This is not to say that Indigenous people possessed complete freedom to practice their rituals and medicinal practices. They began to practice their religion and cosmological reverences in syncretized Indigenous and Catholic forms. And, practiced their private customs, in more traditional Indigenous ways.

During the Mexican and American colonial eras of México, and the present day American Southwest, Indigenous peoples continued to endure persecution and death for practicing their religious traditions.[6] Therefore, the syncretism of their religious practices was a necessity. It would not be until the passage of American Indian Religious Freedom Act on August 10, 1978 that Native Americans could freely participate in their religious traditions. Such discrimination and taboo of Indigenous rituals affected not only Native Americans, but also interculturally mixed peoples of Mexican descent and *genízaro* peoples in the Southwest. [7] In New Mexico and the Southwest, peoples of Mexican descent either stopped practicing *curanderismo* all together or practiced it clandestinely, for fear of judgment and criticism from other Mexican Americans and Anglos. However, some Mexican American families kept this tradition alive, as was the case in my family, especially through my Hopi maternal great-grandmother Margarita, nana Rita, mother Ophelia and tia Olivia.

In addition, during the Mexican period and into the 1960s *Conchero danza Azteca* in México was only allowed under the auspices of the Catholic church. It was not until the rise of global decolonial and social justice movements of the 20th century,[8] that *Conchero danza Azteca*

began to be practiced independent of the Catholic Church by families who secretly maintained and practiced this tradition among their families during and after the Spanish colonial era. Both Sophia and Paul have told me and their *danzantes* that the *Concheros* are responsible for keeping *danza Azteca* alive.[9] Importantly, as previously stated, this essay is not only about *danza Azteca*, it is also about performance theory.

Performance Theory

Bauman's study of oral narrative performance conveys an understanding of what is encompassed through performance. Bauman asserts, "[o]ral performance like all human activity, is situated, its form, meaning, and functions rooted in culturally defined scenes or events – bounded segments of the flow of behavior and experience that constitute meaningful contexts for action, interpretation, and evaluation."[10] Such verbal and non-verbal forms of performance expressed between the practitioners and audience are cultural productions that are the result of, and response to *danzantes'* and *promotoras'* social and political positionality, which for them involves their struggles against marginalization, that is a result of dominant society's minoritization of them based on their race, class, gender, and citizenship status. The *danzantes'* and *promotoras'* art forms, "like any form of communication" have "the potential to rearrange the structure of social relations within the performance event and perhaps beyond it."[11] The structure of social relationships (re)arranged within the performance space, transcend that space and impact the structure of social relationships beyond the performative space. For instance, within my ceremonial community, I have witnessed community members who have participated in our ceremonies as spectators, and later, come to *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* and express a desire to participate in ceremony with us and our interconnected ceremonial community.

Danza Azteca and Curanderismo: *"Embodied Recuperations" of Indigeneity*[12]

Elisa Huerta's ethnographic study "Embodied Recuperations: Performance, Indigeneity, and *Danza Azteca*" analyzes "Chicanas and Chicanos participation in *danza azteca* in order to illuminate processes of representation, identification, and historical and cultural recuperation in relation to theories of cultural performance and embodiment."[13] For instance, Huerta informs us that "the multilayered practices involved in the performance of *Danza Azteca* offer rich sites for the articulation, negotiation, and contestation of Chicana and Chicano notions of indigeneity."[14] In my study, I, like Huerta, focused on *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo* as a means of recuperating Indigenous identity and culture and was attentive to "embodiments" that were communicated during *danzantes'* and *promotoras'* ritual performances. Huerta draws from Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" to consider "how Chicanas/os and Mexicanas/os in the United States imagine themselves as Indigenous,[15] and how they imagine their relationship with other communities."[16] Huerta found that through *danza azteca,* the connection between imaginaries and cultural performance is at the heart of the political and social implications of *danza azteca* practices and the narratives created and embodied by *danzantes*.[17]

Danza Azteca on International Worker's Day

Charles Briggs's *Competence in Performance* maintains that his research subjects, the *Mexicanos* of northern New México are Indo-Hispano peoples (interculturally mixed with Indigenous and European heritage). And, that within the community of Córdova, "Performance features do not merely reflect situational factors. Rather, they interpret the social interaction, thus opening up the possibility of transforming its very nature."[18] My findings suggest this dynamic to be particularly profound during the *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo* opening *ceremonias* that

the *Conchero danza Azteca grupos Maguey* and *Fuego* participated in for the May 1, 2017 International Workers Day protest at Tewa park in *Angelitas*. During this protest, predominantly undocumented Mexican immigrants, and Mexican Americans joined forces to protest anti-immigrant policies and sentiments espoused by the recent Donald Trump administration. For the opening ceremony, the *danzantes* offered a *danza* in the center of an open space in front of the band stand. During this ritual, the *danzantes* captivated the audience's attention, everyone's eyes were on us. You could feel the energy of the people change as we sacralized that space.[19] Immediately after the *danza*, the *promotoras* of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* and *comadre* and *compadre* (feminine and masculine terms for "ceremonial kin"),[20] community healers of our kalpulli formed a large circle in front of the band stand and honored the seven Indigenous directions.

During the *curanderismo ceremonia*, the social dynamics continued to transform, as many of the current and former *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca promotoras* and current *comadre* and *compadre* healers held space at each of the four directions. At each of the directions, at least one or two healers held a *sahumador* (Mesoamerican cauldron). Once the circle was completely formed, we began to honor the seven Indigenous directions. In the center of the circle stood Sophia and community activist and organizer Betty who jointly led this collective work. As they began honoring the seven sacred Indigenous *Nahuatl* directions, the audience organically followed. We started by facing east to honor this direction—the place of new beginnings, and of the sun. We then turned left, or in a counter-clockwise direction to face and honor the west—the place of women, women's medicine, and water. We continued to move in a counter-clockwise direction as we honored each remaining direction. And, as we honored each direction, we blessed each direction with our *sahumadors* by lifting them in the air above and in front of our

bodies. In each direction we honored, we made the sign of the cross, and then moved our *sahumadors* in a counter-clockwise, and then clockwise direction. Making the sign of the cross is a syncretization of the *Nahuatl Nahui Ollin*—the symbol for constant movement and change in motion, and of the Catholic sign of the cross. The counter-clockwise and clockwise movements of the sahumador in circular movements are done with the intention to thoroughly smudge a person or space. We honored the direction of the north next, which is the place of our *antepasados* (ancestors), and of *ceremonia* and healing. We then honored the direction of the south—the place of our inner child, fire, and our desires. The direction of the heavens was honored next, which is the place of the spirit world. We then crouched down upon the cement floor beneath us to honor the earth. After which, we honored our hearts—our center, which is the place of inner knowing, truth and love. Throughout this honoring we paused for several seconds and offered prayers and remained present during each honoring.

At the completion of honoring the seven directions, all the healers continued to hold space at each of the four main directions for about an hour while several speakers spoke. During this time no one from the audience walked near, around or through the sacralized ceremonial space we created. It was as though they knew it was sacred and respected it. Importantly, the sacralization of space through ritual is not only religious, but, also political, because the practitioners joined in solidarity with leaders and advocates of the immigrant and social justice community of *Angelitas*. Importantly, by following the Indigenous rituals of *danza Azteca* and honoring the seven directions, the practitioners privileged their Indigenous identity, and their social identity was constituted through this performances.

In *Competence in Performance*, Briggs built upon the study of performance theory and ethnopoetics through an examination of several genres of verbal art within the northern New

México Spanish-speaking community of Córdova.[21] Briggs argues that verbal art within Córdova is an enactment of counter-hegemony.[22] For instance, *dichos* (legends and proverbs) convey residual cultural elements to its audience to emphasize the importance of maintaining culturally ethical ways of knowing and being lost to modernity. Performers of a proverb embody these morals and values, while legend performers motivate the audience to self-reflect on the ways in which their ethics and behavior differs from residual *Mexicano* cultural mores. I observed this same effect within verbal performance in my discussions with Sophia about the significance of *Tezcatlipoca*—an old *Nahua* philosophy about the obsidian mirror which reflects the dark and light aspects of ourselves and helps us understand the inner and, or interpersonal conflict we experience. I also witnessed this in personal conversations with other *promotoras* and during my interview with Paul. During such conversations, a similar effect occurred, where each practitioner gained a greater understanding of any conflict they were experiencing. In so doing, the resolution to the conflict is realized by understanding the cause of the problem. Through such verbal performances the practitioners identify with their Indigenous heritage and identity, and constitute their social identity through performance by drawing upon *Nahua* philosophy and deities such as *Tezcatlipoca*, and *Nahua* and Mesoamerican Indigenous values of face and heart—an Indigenous philosophy of developing a relationship between the mind and heart, which enables us to maintain integrity with ourselves and others. And, develop our passions and talents for the betterment of humanity. I discuss the face and heart connection in more detail in chapters two and three.

Briggs affirms, "counter-hegemony organizes oppositional politics and culture into an alternative mode of perceiving and organizing social life."[23] Briggs emphasizes this point by drawing from anthropologist Sylvia Rodríguez, who maintains that ethnic identity was a means

of 'cultural and social self-determination' during the establishment of Anglo American hegemony in northern New México.[24] Following Rodríguez, Briggs contends that "*Mexicanismo*" in the region, in and of itself, is an expression of "counter-hegemony."[25] I, like Briggs, analyzed the workings of "counter-hegemony" during my participant observations. In so doing, I found that traditional *Nahua* and Mesoamerican ethics and values are conveyed through *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo* ritual performances. Moreover, the practitioners acknowledge their Mexican heritage, and privilege their indigeneity through ceremony—expressions that are in and of themselves "counter-hegemonic," because, dominant society does not value Mexican American mixed-race identity and their assertions of indigeneity. This is made obvious in the United States' refusal to provide de-Indigenized Mexican Americans tribal enrollment with federally recognized tribes, because, according to the United States, Mexican Americans do not possess the mandated Native American blood quantum amount, which is usually one quarter Native blood quantum, however, blood quantum stipulations differ among tribal nations. Such stipulations were initially established by the United States government during the tribal allotment and reservation eras, and were later borrowed by tribal governments who continue to implement blood quantum stipulations. In so doing, tribal government blood quantum requirements also prevent interculturally mixed Mexican Americans from obtaining tribal enrollment.

Similar to the ways in which proverb and legend verbal art forms convey residual *Mexicano* cultural values and mores, my participant observations of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo* cultural art forms revealed that these performances also demonstrate residual Mesoamerican cultural ethics, such as *respeto* (respect), *conformidad*, *unidad*, and mutual reciprocations of gratitude, in the form of "ritual gifting."[26] Hence, the practitioners embrace and embody their indigeneity and constitute their social identity through performance. I discuss in

greater detail "ritual gifting" and other cultural ethics that are disappearing among contemporary subaltern mixed-race Mexican American communities in chapter four.

Within the article, "Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life," authors Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs argue that performance research challenges hegemony by encouraging academics to privilege "the cultural organization of the communicative processes."[27] The authors consider the form, content and contextual structuring of the communicative process. The contexts within which the "cultural organization" and "communicative processes" transpire during the ceremonial performances of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo* are necessary prerequisites for understanding our rituals in *Angelitas*.[28] This is evident, for example, during *La Virgen de los Remedios/Mayahuel velacion*, and other *velaciones*, when the *danzantes* and *promotoras* code switch from speaking Spanish to speaking *Nahuatl* during the opening and closing prayers, and during the closing *palabras* (words), and from singing in Spanish to singing in *Nahuatl* during the offering of *cantos* (songs). Importantly, the "cultural organization" and "communicative processes" of code switching from Spanish to *Nahuatl* involved in the expressive cultural forms of *danza Azteca*, *cantos*, storytelling about *Nahuatl* deities,[29] and during *curanderismo* rituals convey a privileging of their Indigenous identity, and a constitution of their social identity. Such code switching, according to Bauman and Briggs, enable negotiations of identity, social relations and community.[30]

Bauman and Briggs assert that, "code-switching can heighten attention to competing languages and varieties to such an extent that identities, social relations, and the constitution of the community itself become open to negotiation."[31] The authors' observations of "oppositional consciousness" within subaltern performances illustrate the deeper personal and political implications, which oppositional consciousness and decolonial performativity has for my

ceremonial community.[32] For instance, I found that "code-switching" between English, Spanish, and *Nahuatl* the *velaciones* and *temazkals* signal the *danzantes'* and *promotoras'* acknowledgement of their intercultural identity, particularly when Sophia says *La Virgen de Guadalupe's* name in Spanish. However, I want to emphasize the privileging of the practitioners' indigeneity, which occurred when they sang in *Nahuatl,* and when Sophia referred to *La Virgen de Guadalupe* as *Tonantzin* and then as *Coatlicue,* which are *Nahuatl* names for *La Virgen*. During such times, the privileging of indigeneity is indicated by an emphasis in tone and an upbeat change in energy. A different kind of reverence was evidenced when the practitioners sang in *Nahuatl*. I also observed an emphasis in tone and reverence in Sophia's voice when she said, *"Tonantzin,"* followed by *"Coatlicue."*[33] By speaking and singing in Spanish and *Nahuatl,* decolonial performativity is enacted, because Spanish and an Indigenous language are privileged, The practitioners do not sing in English. And, a syncretized Mexican and Indigenous ritual is performed within a settler colonial nation which privileges the Christian religion, not the religion of colonized people.

In addition, the social relations and the structure of the community became open to negotiation. For instance, during *velaciones,* the main language in which *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* elder's Sophia, Isabel and Julissa spoke was Spanish. *Grupo Fuego's jefe* Felipe and *danzante* Marco of *grupo Fuego* also primarily spoke in Spanish, as they are immigrants to the U.S., and Spanish is their first language. It is poignant that Spanish is primarily spoken during *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca's velaciones*. As a result, I have observed Mexican American participants speak Spanish, or speak broken Spanish during the sharing of *palabras* and the singing of *cantos* from our *libro de cantos* (book of songs) that is written in Spanish, while singing with the other

danzantes and participants, even though it appears that English is the primary language in which these specific participants speak.

Code switching during ceremonies from Spanish to English is done primarily to translate for participants who are not fluent in the Spanish language. "Cultural organization," and "communicative processes" of *forma* (form), conducted through verbal and non-verbal interactions were evidenced through *danza Azteca*, *cantos,* and *curanderismo*, particularly, during the creation and presence of the *central altar*, in terms of the ways in which *danza, cantos,* and *curanderismo* are performed in front of the *altar*. For instance, turning one's back toward the *altar* is a sign of disrespect and is not permitted. If someone was not aware of this reverence, or if they forgot and turned their back, they were politely corrected by one of the elders or one of the *sahumadoras*.[34] In addition, often during a *velacion*, Sophia or Isabel communicated with the *sahumadoras*, *promotoras* and other ceremonial participants by motioning with their eyes, heads, or hands, to indicate a specific direction in which they wanted them to be in or move toward, and to indicate who they wanted them to interact with. Such verbal and non-verbal cultural organization and communicative processes follow *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican Indigenous ritual reverences and processes, which again, demonstrate the practitioners' privileging of their indigeneity and constitution of social identity.

Performance—a Privileging of Indigeneity Among Working Class Danzantes y Promotoras

Bauman and Briggs underscore that linguists' and anthropologists' arguments minimize and discredit native speakers' views of language structure and use.[35] Such contentions were espoused by early anthropologists who did not comprehend the knowledge that native perspectives offered, especially regarding competing perspectives on language and social life

generated by gender and class.[36] In contrast, performance theory privileged non-Native female and male performance practitioners of differing social and economic positionalities.

Bauman and Briggs found that performances enacted by "marginalized groups on the periphery of industrial capitalism are often overtly concerned with deconstructing dominant ideologies and expressive forms."[37] They maintain that performers of groups on the periphery of industrial capitalism, "have substantive contributions to make to the process of deconstructing hegemonic views of language and social life and exploring a broader range of alternatives."[38] Through my observations, I found that the use of code-switching to *Nahuatl* was a site where the practitioners reject the language of the colonizers and return to the language of their Indigenous ancestors. The practitioners performance of Indigenous ceremony in and of itself is a rejection of religions, such as Christianity, patriarchal gendered hierarchy, and political views that are embedded in hegemonic religious practices. Moreover, through the ritual performances of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo*, "a broader range" of alternative perspectives and understanding are possible. For instance, understanding oneself and all life forces of the universe to possess *dualidad* (duality) is a perspective which hegemonic society considers a separate binary. In contrast, according to *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican thought and philosophy *dualidad* is not a separate category. Rather, *dualidad* is understood as complimentary energies, such as masculine and feminine—energies that are within beings.

Bauman and Briggs include points of critique by Limón, M. Jane Young, and Simon Bronner, who argue that performance approaches are too preoccupied with poetics to be able to discern broader historical, social, cultural, and political contexts.[39] Bauman and Briggs expand Limón, Young, and Bronner's contention by underscoring the importance of analyzing textual, symbolic, and contextual elements of performance. Such an approach allows the ethnographer to

perceive "the multiplicity of indexical connections that enable verbal art to transform, not simply reflect social life."[40] Within my work, I too consider the textual, symbolic, and contextual elements of the performance of verbal art, as well as other forms of performance through nonverbal communicative processes such as *danza Azteca*. Such communicative processes not only reflect the dynamics of social life, but also enable a "collective" social transformation to emerge.[41] Here again, the authors underscore the potentiality in which performance has to transform social life. However, they do not demonstrate what that transformation would look like for minoritized communities. In what follows I further illustrate how the *danzantes* and *promotoras* privilege their Indigenous identity and constitute their social identity through ritual performance. In so doing the potentiality of performance to transform social life is also illuminated through *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca's altar* during their *Dia de las Animas velacion*.

Dia de las Animas Velacion Altar: An Assertion of Mexican Americans' and Mexican Immigrants' Indigeneity

Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca's altar for the *Dia de las Animas velacion* is specifically constructed into a three-tiers, usually by Sophia, Julissa, Isabel and, or the *sahumadoras* of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* and the and *danzantes* of *grupo Maguey*. The construction of the *altar* into three tiers honors *Nahua* and Mesoamerican perspectives about the multiple realms that exist in our environment. These tiers include the highest tier, which represents the spirit world, the middle tier, which represents the physical world, and the lowest tier, which represents the underworld. This three-tiered *altar* is an Indigenous element, because it honors each of these realms, including our loved ones who have passed, *antepasados* (ancestors), and our spirit guides that all dwell in the spirit world or top tier. In the middle tier—the physical world, all that exists in our immediate tangible environment is honored. And, in the lowest tier—the underworld, the

earth and the mysteries of life are honored. Ultimately, in each tier all of the *energias y elementos de el universo* (energies and elements of the universe) and our connection to each realm is recognized and revered. In following an Indigenous *forma* for our *altar*, the practitioners privilege their indigeneity and constitute their social Indigenous identity through the *Dia de las Animas velacion*. The *Dia de las Animas velacion* is the only *velacion* in which the practitioners construct a three-tiered altar. We do this to honor all of the *Animas* existent in each realm and *del universo*.

During this *velacion* I witnessed my ceremonial community and invited guests express a profound gratitude and respect for this ceremonial space. As such, in essence, I have witnessed ritual "performance transform social life," because the practitioners and community members who attended this ceremony demonstrated the commitment and beauty involved in partaking in is this all night *velacion*. This is further witnessed by attendees who first attended this *velacion* in 2017, and returned in 2018, and again in 2019. And, I have witnessed this by the practitioners and community members devotion and commitment to regularly participating in other rituals, such as the *Dia de San Isidro y Santa Maria de la Cabeza* procession and blessing of the a*cequias* and fields *ceremonia*, which I will discuss in greater detail in chapters two and three.

Anthropologist Enrique Maestas describes a poignant observation about intercultural expressions of indigeneity through the performance of *danza Azteca* that are relevant to the practitioners of my ceremonial community in *Angelitas*. He states that "when we make our ceremony, we are Indigenous people making of Indigenous ceremony in honor of all those who serviced to give birth to us and have taught us to stand our ground as Indigenous people."[42] Huerta underscores that Maestas perceives "*danza* as a place of Indigenous 'knowing' through the body and through dance.[43] Conceptualizing *danza* as a space in which identity constructions

and ways of knowing are reconfigured "opens up a range of possibilities for Chicanas/os who participate."[44] Huerta and Maestas perspectives about performance support my finding that the privileging of indigeneity and the social constitution of this identity are asserted during the ritual performances of *danza Azteca, and curanderismo.*

Furthermore, Huerta maintains that "the performative aspects of *danza,* then and now, allow for corporeal articulations of oppositional consciousness and potentially, although not necessarily, for progressive politics,"[45] an issue that I will take up in chapter three. I incorporated Huerta's scholarship to examine the ways in which oppositional political consciousness, as discussed in chapter two, is asserted through *danza Azteca*, *curanderismo,* and other *ceremonias*. Huerta's contention regarding *danza Azteca* being an expressive form in which *danzantes* create an "oppositional consciousness,"[46] and therefore, effect a collective re-conception of being in the world, epistemologically, ontologically, spiritually and politically—an assertion that is shared by all of the practitioners of my ceremonial community, and by the Chicano scholars discussed in this chapter who have conducted performance, and, or decolonial work within Mexican American and Mexican communities. Thus, based on my observations, and works by Bauman, Briggs, and Chicano scholars, performance is a site of collective social transform.

Mexican American Studies and Indigenous Studies Scholars' Conceptualization of Indigenous Ceremony

Mexican American Studies and American Indian Studies scholar Patrisia Gonzales's work on Mexican or Mesoamerican Traditional Medicine and her knowledge regarding *curanderismo* and *promotora* work was integral to my project. Gonzales maintains that the role of the *promotora tradicional* is to facilitate all people to connect with their inherent ability to participate "in their own well-being" and "self-governance."[47] And, to assist people "in the

remembering, activation, preservation—*and embodiment* of knowledge" through "education and ceremony."[48] In addition, Gonzales's understanding of "certain traditions in curanderismo and MTM [Mesoamerican Traditional Medicine] as Indigenous knowledge,"[49] that "curing worldviews . . . of curanderismo" are founded upon Indigenous knowledge,[50] that the treatment of *susto* is an Indigenous practice, and that *limpias* also stem from Indigenous knowledge were helpful in my understanding of the Indigenous knowledge that is the foundation of *curanderismo*.[51] Gonzales also draws from Rosemary Ackley Christiansen in her view of "[e]lder epistemology."[52] Gonzales underscores the importance of adhering to and continuing elder epistemology. She maintains,

> Elder Epistemology presents Indigenous ways of knowing based on core values embedded in elder knowledge, oral tradition, and participatory learning (*ibid*). Inter-generational knowledge is based on respect, reciprocity, and fulfilling responsibilities that create and maintain relationships. In ceremony we engage in reciprocal protocols with the human, natural and spiritual worlds through mutual kindness and respect. Ceremonial epistemologies create accountability to elders, the community and the spirit world.[53]

Christiansen and Gonzales's knowledge and understanding of elder epistemology reflects the ways in which my ceremonial community understands it, learns from it, reveres it, and continues it in our *ceremonias*, and more importantly, shares this knowledge with present generations to ensure its continuity.

Mexican American Studies scholar Roberto Rodríguez's and Gonzales's notion on "de-Indigenization,"[54] were helpful in my comprehension of the ways in which peoples of Mexican descent became detached from their Indigenous communities, and of knowing themselves as

Indigenous peoples. In addition, Rodríguez's view that the "de-Indigenization" processes required Indigenous peoples "separation from culture, kinship, ceremony, story . . . narratives," art, music, and means of education, which he terms "deceremonialization."[55] Rodríguez contends that the recuperation of Indigenous ceremony is a part of the process of decolonizing one's mind and recovering one's indigeneity.[56] This, the author asserts, is also a process of rehumanization.[57]

Rodríguez contentions were instrumental in my understanding that the practitioners' recuperation and continuance of *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican ceremonies was a part of their re-Indigenization and rehumanization process. And, Rodríguez enhanced my knowledge about the colonial practices that forced peoples of Mexican descent to become acculturated into colonial society and detached and displaced from their Indigenous communities, and thus, ways of knowing themselves as Indigenous peoples.[58] Through the acculturation process and the practice of *mestizaje*, peoples of Mexican descent became *mestizos* who were perceived as mixed blood Indigenous peoples, and therefore, subhuman in the eyes of the Spanish colonizers. Essentially, Rodríguez facilitated my understanding of the history of de-Indigenization and the processes of decolonization and re-Indigenization, which the practitioners of my ceremonial community embody through ceremony and in their everyday lives.

Through my journey of this research process I conducted my research as ceremony.[59] I was first informed of the concept of research as ceremony when I submitted a proposal to the 2017 Association of Indigenous Research (AIRA) Conference. The conference organizers, asked potential presenters to state how they incorporate Lori Lambert's "Spiderweb Conceptual Framework, Indigenous Research Paradigm: A Conceptual Model," in their scholarship. Lambert's model locates indigeneity and a sense of places in our hearts.[60] In this heart-center, also lies our "voice."[61] And, scholars are urged to consider why we want to do our research, and

that our research should be "tribal and cultural specific."[62] Additional intersecting webs in this model include, "ethics and respect," "tribal protocols of our elders," "community collaboration and permission," and "disseminating data in a way the community understands."[63] Lambert's model helped me to realize that I was conducting my research as ceremony with the elements involved in her spiderweb model. During this time, my friend Dawn Dee, introduced me to Shawn Wilson's *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. Wilson understands Indigenous research as a process based on relationships, and "being accountable to your relations."[64] This accountability is based on "respect, reciprocity and responsibility" with one's community, and with the research ontology, epistemology, methodology and axiology,[65] which are interconnected and interrelated.[66] Thus, conducting research as a ceremony necessitates a reverence of theses tenets and Indigenous ethics throughout the research process.

Wilson's conceptualization of Indigenous research as ceremony resonated with me, because of the innate respect and responsibility that I have for my ceremonial community, and the integrity I have for myself and toward them. I knew that I wanted to ensure that I maintained the values and ethics of respect, reciprocity and responsibility toward my community throughout my research process. After I asked for guidance in ceremony and spoke to my elder Miluna about the approach I should take in my research, I realized that I needed to conduct my research as a ceremony.

From the onset of my research I included protocols involved in ceremony, such as asking for and drawing from elder knowledge. I used my intuition, remained transparent with my ceremonial community about my research, and requested permission from my ceremonial community to conduct research with them and include their input. In addition, as a Buddhist and ceremonial member, I chanted and prayed every day and lit sage, sweetgrass, cedar, and

lavender, and offered tobacco as I requested guidance from my spirit guides, ancestors and *el universo*.

Conclusion

In chapter two, I argue that the *danzantes* and *promotoras* of my ceremonial community maintain Indigenous understandings of ceremony, which influence them to live in ceremony every day. By conducting my research as ceremony, I included Indigenous ways of thinking, knowing and being, which are embedded in the way I live. I approached my research and research participants with these Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies, and was respectful of them through my theoretical and analytical methodologies. For instance, I followed Indigenous protocols that respected elder knowledge, input and *consejos*, and asked for and included my ceremonial community's input. And, I remained accountable toward my community, by revering Indigenous values such as the five ethics of respect, responsibility, relationship, reciprocity and renewal, and the *Nahua* face and heart connection. With these values, ethics and philosophies, I was able to communicate with integrity and transparency with my community, which resulted in deepening my relationship with them.

This chapter maintained that the *promotoras* and *danzantes* of my ceremonial community embody ancestral traditional values and attitudes toward the practice of ceremony. In so doing, they share their gifts, which Ojibwe environmental science scholar Robin Wall Kimmerer maintains all beings have. These "gifts," Kimmerer affirms, include plants healing properties, and human's ability to use these properties, and their own healing abilities for the good of humanity. I also asserted that the practitioners of my ceremonial community are guided by *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican thought and philosophy, by maintaining a connection with their face and heart and abiding by the five ethics of Indigenous epistemology and ontology. In chapter two

I expand upon the concepts of the five ethics of Indigenous epistemology and ontology, and the face and heart connection. I discuss ways in which my ceremonial community is informed and guided by *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican thought and philosophy through ritual performance, and as they "live in ceremony every day."[67]

Notes

[1] See Don Leandro qtd. in Richard Flores, *Los Pastores: History and Performance in the Mexican Shepherds' Play of South Texas* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995, 117-18; 151-53).
[2] Elisa Huerta "Embodied Recuperations: Performance, Indigeneity, and Danza Azteca," in *Dancing Across Borders: Danzas y Bailes Mexicanos*, edited by Olga Nájera-Ramírez, Norma E. Cantu, and Brenda M. Romero (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009, 15).
[3] I conceptualized the term (re)rooting from Gloria Anzaldúa's perspective that Chicanos have Indigenous ancestral heritage in the Southwest, and that acknowledging our Indigeneity illuminates these roots, Anzaldúa asserts in the article "Speaking Across the Divide," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 15. 3/4 (Fall 2003/Winter 2004): 7-22, by Anzaldúa, Simon J. Ortiz, Inéz Hernández-Avila and Domino Perez.
[4] Huerta, "Embodied Recuperations," 6; Malcom Ebright and Rick Hendricks, *The Witches of Abiquiu: The Governor, the Priest, the Genízaro and the Devil* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006); Roberto Rodriguez, *The X in La Raza* (Albuquerque: Roberto Rodriguez, 2001).
[5] See *Surviving Columbus: First Encounters*, Director/Producers George Burdeau, and Larry Walsh (KNME/Albuquerque, New Mexico PBS; and Institute of American Indian Arts, 1992, DVD); and Malcom Ebright and Rick Hendricks, *The Witches of Abiquiu*, 2006, for discussions on Indigenous healing ways practiced after the Spanish *Reconquista* of New Mexico.
[6] *The Peyote Road: Ancient Religion in Contemporary Crisis*, Directors/producer Phil Cousineau, Fidel Moreno; Gary Rhine (Berkeley: Berkeley Media, 2008); *The Canary Effect: Kill the Indian, save the Man*, produced/ directed by Robin Davey and Yellow Thunder Woman (Bastard Fairy Films, 2007, DVD).
[7] Indigenous scholar, Ned Blackhawk informs us that in present day New Mexico and Colorado, during the Spanish colonial era *genízaros* were detribalized Indians that lived in outlining areas of the colonies and served as "buffers" to protect the colonies from the understandably violent hostile Indians. During this era, the colonists often took *genízaros* as servants and formed intimate relations with them, which created mixed-race *genízaros* in proceeding generations—see *Violence over the Lands: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).
[8] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism", in *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, ed. 43-84, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); See Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres, eds. *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); and Julie Buckner Armstrong and Amy Schmidt, eds. *Civil Rights Reader: American Literature from Jim Crow to Reconciliation* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009.
[9] Sophia, Interview December 19, 2017, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico; Paul, group conversation at ensayo, September 18, 2017. *Angelitas*, New México. Also see *The Eagle's Children*, director Bruce "Pacho" Lane (Rochester NY: Ethnoscope Film and Video, 1979); *Danzante*, author Miguel Grunstein; Danza Azteca de Anahuac; KNME-TV (Television station: Albuquerque, N.M: PBS Video Firm, 1993.
[10] Richard Bauman, *Story, Performance, and Event: Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 3).
[11]See Jose Limón, "Legendary, Metafolklore, and Performance: A Mexican-American Example, *Western Folklore* 42, (1986):191-208. Also see Jose Limón qtd. in Richard Bauman 1986, 4.
[12] Huerta, "Embodied Recuperations", 2009.
[13] Huerta, 6.
[14] Huerta, 6.
[15] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006). Anderson theorizes about the building of a nation, and underscores that a nation is a socially constructed community, one that is "imagined" by the people who perceive themselves as part of that national group (6–7). I draw from Eliza Huerta's understanding of Anderson's notion of "imagined communities," and Anderson's conceptualization of "imagined community," and 'imagined communities," to demonstrate how a community is a social construction, and I apply this understanding to the ways in which *danzantes* and *promotoras* of my ceremonial community have constructed and continue to construct ceremonial community.
[16] Huerta, 14-15
[17] Huerta,15.
[18] Charles Briggs *Competence in Performance: The Creativity of Tradition in Mexicano Verbal Art*) Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988, 15).

[19] See Sylvia Rodríguez, *The Matachines Dance: Ritual Symbolism and Interethnic Relations in the Upper Río Grande Valley* (Albuquerque: University of New México Press, 1996) for her notion of sacralizing space, which she maintains is the process of sacralizing a landscape or space during ritual ceremony.
[20] Aurelio Ramirez Cazares et al. explains that the terms *comadre* and *compadre* are "ceremonial kin" in their chapter "It's not 'Traditional' without the elders," in *Indigenous Places and Colonial Spaces*: The Politics of Intertwined Relations, eds. Nicole Gombay and Marcela Palomino-Schalscha (London and New York: Routledge, 2018). And, the field of anthropology and ethnography understand the terms *comadre* and *compadre* as fictive kin.
[21] Briggs, *Competence in Performance*, xv-xvi; 2.
[22] Briggs, *Competence in Performance*, 361.
[23] See Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (England: Oxford University Press, 1977, 122), qtd. in Briggs, 1988, 361.
[24] See Sylvia Rodríguez, *The Matachines Dance: Ritual Symbolism and Interethnic Relations in the Upper Río Grande Valley* (Albuquerque: University of New México Press, 1996) for her notion of sacralizing space, which she maintains is the process of sacralizing a landscape or space during ritual ceremony.
[25] Briggs, 362.
[26] Flores, *Los Pastores*, 152.
[27] Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs, "Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19, (1990): 61.
[28] Bauman and Briggs, "Poetics and Performance," 61.
[29] Bauman and Briggs, "Poetics and Performance," 61.
[30] Bauman and Briggs, 1990, 63. Also see, Jane and Kenneth Hill *Speaking Mexicano,* Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, Michael Holquist ed. Translated by Carly Emerson and Michael Holquist *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981); Valentin Nikolaevich Vološinv, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Translated by Ladislav Matejka, and I. R. Titunik New York NY: Seminar Press, 1973).
[31] Bauman and Briggs 1990, 63. Also see, Jane and Kenneth Hill *Speaking Mexicano,* Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, Michael Holquist ed. Translated by Carly Emerson and Michael Holquist *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981); Valentin Nikolaevich Vološinv, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Translated by Ladislav Matejka, and I. R. Titunik New York NY: Seminar Press, 1973).
[32] See Chela Sandoval *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) for discussions about "oppositional consciousness". Also see Chela Sandoval qtd. in Briggs 1988, 362.
[33] Sophia, *Dia de las Animas velacion, Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* ceremonial house, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, November 1, 2017.
[34] *Sahumadoras* are the firekeepers of *la danza*. The *sahumadoras* carry fire and smudge the ceremonial space with smoke that they create from hot coals and *copal* (medicine) placed in clay cauldrons during Mesoamerican c*eremonias*.
[35] Bauman and Briggs, 61.
[36] Bauman and Briggs, 61.
[37] Bauman and Briggs, 66. Also see Claire Farrer ed, *Women in Folklore* (Austin: University of Texas, 1975); Jane and Kenneth Hill *Speaking Mexicano: Dynamics of Syncretic Language in Central Mexico* (Tucson AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1986; Lawrence Levine *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977); Jose Limón "Legendary, Metafolklore and Performance: A Mexican American Example: *Western Folklore* 42, (1983):191-208; Américo Paredes, "On Ethnographic Work Among Minority Groups: a Folklorist's Perspective," *New Scholar* 7, (1977):1-32; Kathleen Stewart "Nostalgia—a polemic" *Cultural Anthropology* 2, (1989):227-41; Marta Weigle "Women as Verbal Artists: Reclaiming Sisters of Enheduanna Frontiers 3, (1978):1-9.
[38] See Bauman and Briggs, 66. Also see Niko Besnier "Language and Affect" 19, (1990):419–451; Michelle Rosaldo "The Things We Do With Words: llongot Speech Acts and Speech Act Theory in Philosophy *Language and Society* 11, (1982): 203-35.
[39] Bauman and Briggs, 67; also see Jose Limón, and M. Jane Young "Frontiers, Settlements and Development in Folklore Studies" *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 15, (1986):437-60; and Simon Bronner "Art, Performance and Practice: The Rhetoric of Contemporary Folklore Studies" *Western Folklore* 47, (1988): 75-102.
[40] Bauman and Briggs, 69.
[41] Bauman and Briggs, 69.
[42] Enrique G. M. Maestas, "Danza Azteca: The Rebirth of a Cultural Renaissance," *RazaTeca*

Magazine 5, January/February 1997. Also see Maestas qtd. in Huerta, 15-16.
[43] Huerta, 16.
[44] Huerta, 16.
[45] Huerta, 16.
[46] See Huerta, 6; and Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, for their use of "oppositional consciousness."
[47] See Patrisia Gonzales *Red Medicine: Traditional Indigenous Rites of Birthing and Healing* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012, 10).
[48] See Patrisia Gonzales, *Red Medicine*, 2012, 10.
[49] See Patrisia Gonzales, *Red Medicine*, 2012, 212-13. Also see Aurelio Ramirez Cazarez, et al. "It's not 'Traditional' without the elder: Epistemological Authority in a Macehual knowledge system," in Nicole Gombay and Marcela Palomino-Schalscha, Indigenous Places and Colonial Spaces: The Politics of Intertwined Relations, (London and New York: Routledge, 2018, 36, 37, 39), for discussions on Mesoamerican traditional medicine, which to a considerable degree is founded upon Indigenous knowledge, and for discussions regarding "curing worldviews … of curanderismo) which are "begotten from Indigenous knowledge," (Gonzales, *Red Medicine*, 2012, 12).
[50] See Patrisia Gonzales, *Red Medicine*, 2012.
[51] See Patrisia Gonzales, *Red Medicine*, 2012, xix; 212), for discussions on the connection of *susto* and *limpias* with Indigenous knowledge.
[52] See Rosemary Ackley Christensen, "Cultural Context and Evaluation: A Balance of Form and Function," National Science Foundation, www.nsf.org, 2003. Also see Christensen qtd. in Aurelio Ramirez Cazarez, et al. "It's not 'Traditional' without the elder: Epistemological Authority in a Macehual knowledge system," in Nicole Gombay and Marcela Palomino-Schalscha, Indigenous Places and Colonial Spaces: The Politics of Intertwined Relations, (London and New York: Routledge, 2018, 39), for discussion on "elder epistemology."
[53] See Rosemary Ackley Christensen, "Cultural Context and Evaluation: A Balance of Form and Function," National Science Foundation, www.nsf.org, 2003. Also see Christensen qtd. in Aurelio Ramirez Cazarez, et al. "It's not 'Traditional' without the elder: Epistemological Authority in a Macehual knowledge system," in Nicole Gombay and Marcela Palomino-Schalscha, Indigenous Places and Colonial Spaces: The Politics of Intertwined Relations, (London and New York: Routledge, 2018, 39), for discussion on "elder epistemology."
[54] See Roberto Rodríguez, *Our Sacred Maiz is our Mother: Indigeneity and Belonging in the Americas* (Tucson: University of Arizona, 2014, 46; 53); and Patrisia Gonzales *Red Medicine*, 2012, for discussions on the processes of de-Indigenization with peoples of Mexican American descent, in México and the United States.
[55] See Roberto Rodríguez, *Our Sacred Maiz*, 2014, 10; 53
[56] See Roberto Rodríguez, *Our Sacred Maiz*, 2014, 46; 53.
[57] See Roberto Rodríguez, *Our Sacred Maiz*, 2014, 46; 53.
[58] See Roberto Rodríguez, *Our Sacred Maiz*, 2014; and Gonzales, *Red Medicine*, 2012.
[59] See Shawn Wilson, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Black Point, N.S.: Fernwood Publishing, 2008), for his conceptualization of research as a ceremony and of conducting research as a ceremony. In my implementation of conducting research as ceremony.
[60] See Lori Lambert, PhD, "Spiderweb Conceptual Framework, Indigenous Research Paradigm: A Conceptual Model," https://www.americanindigenousresearchassociation.org/mission/spider-conceptual-framework/, accessed June 22, 2020.
[61] See Lori Lambert, PhD, "Spiderweb Conceptual Framework, Indigenous Research Paradigm: A Conceptual Model," https://www.americanindigenousresearchassociation.org/mission/spider-conceptual-framework/, accessed June 22, 2020.
[62] See Lori Lambert, PhD, "Spiderweb Conceptual Framework, Indigenous Research Paradigm: A Conceptual Model," https://www.americanindigenousresearchassociation.org/mission/spider-conceptual-framework/, accessed June 22, 2020.
[63] See Lori Lambert, PhD, "Spiderweb Conceptual Framework, Indigenous Research Paradigm: A Conceptual Model," https://www.americanindigenousresearchassociation.org/mission/spider-conceptual-framework/, accessed June 22, 2020.
[64] See Shawn Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 2008, 77.
[65] See Cora Weber-Pilwax, "What is Indigenous Research?' *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 25.2. 2001: 166-74, as qtd. in Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 2008, 77.
[66] See Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 2008, 70.
[67] Sophia, Interview, December 19, 2017, South *Angelitas*.

Chapter Two: "We live in ceremony every day"

Introduction

"We live in ceremony every day"[1]

"What does ceremony mean to you?"[2] "Ceremony is a way of paying reverence to life . . . in the way that we live, from the time that we wake up, to the time that we go to bed. . . . overall it's paying reverence to life."[3] "We live in ceremony every day."[4] Sophia's response to my interview question, and conversation with her about ceremony while we were preparing for a *temazkal* connects to Patrisia Gonzales's notion of ceremony. Gonzales affirms, "IK [Indigenous knowledge], ceremonies . . . are places for acquiring knowledge. . . . I offer a meaning of *ceremony* as ways of [sic] conduct[,] to honor, show gratitude, and sustain that which is considered sacred."[5] For the practitioners of my ceremonial community, "paying reverence to life," showing gratitude, sustaining what we consider sacred, and creating spaces where knowledge can be acquired *is* ceremony. For instance, the *danzantes* and *promotoras* of my ritual community consider their relationships with their families, friends, *comadres y compadres* (in the physical and spiritual world),[6] our community, and the natural world as sacred. This is evidenced by honoring these relationships through the *Dia de las Animas ceremonia*, which honors loved ones who have passed, and the relationships the practitioners have in the present. The *danzantes* and *promotoras* also revere these relationships through their everyday interactions with their environment. For the practitioners, ceremony is a space where they revere the sacred. Importantly, the *danzantes* and *promotoras* follow Indigenous values of ceremony, such as the five ethics, which they put into practice in their everyday lives.

In this essay, I draw from participant observations of, and interviews with elder primary interlocuters Sophia, who is a ceremonial leader, traditional healer, *promotora*, *danzante* and *jefa*

of *danza grupo Maguey*. And, Paul, who is a *danzante* and *jefe* of *Mexicayotl danza Azteca grupo Etér*, a ceremonial leader, and traditional healer. In addition, I draw from interviews conducted with two members of federally recognized tribes, Native American scholars Penelope and Leon. Through this juxtaposition, I illustrate Indigenous views that inform the *danzantes'* and *promotoras'* understanding of ceremony. Through excerpts of these participant observations and interviews, I underscore that the *danzantes* and *promotoras* of my community live in ceremony every day by adhering to Indigenous philosophy, values and understanding of ritual, which inform and guide the practitioners' thoughts, intentions, actions and interactions with others and the environment.

I begin this essay with a discussion of the 5 "Rs", or what I call the Five Ethics of Indigenous epistemology and ontology, and how these values contribute to the practitioners understanding of ceremony. I then offer theoretical perceptions of ritual, which includes ceremony, by the late religious studies scholar Catherine Bell, and anthropologist Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner. Next I provide personal *testimonios* (testimonies) about ceremony taken from excerpts of the interviews conducted with Paul, Sophia, Penelope, and Leon. First, I discuss Paul's understanding of ceremony. I then move to a discussion of Sophia's perceptions of ceremony. Next, I discuss Julisa's notion of ceremony. Then, I move to a discussion of Penelope's conceptualization of ceremony, and conclude with Leon's view. Sophia, Paul and Julisa's perceptions reflect *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican thought and philosophy about ceremony. And, Penelope and Leon's understandings convey a Pueblo woman's and a Diné man's belief of ceremony.

Through Paul, Sophia and Julissa's *testimonios* I demonstrate the Indigenous worldviews that informs these elder's understanding of *ceremonia*—tenets which they live by every day, and,

pass on to the younger generations in our ceremonial community. Essentially, I argue that the *danzantes* and *promotoras* of my ceremonial community maintain Indigenous understandings of ceremony, which influence them to live in ceremony every day. This knowledge and teachings illuminate how the practitioners "create and recreate their community," and identity,[7] with their respective *kalpullis*, *danza grupos*, and their ethnic community, which ensures that an Indigenous worldview of ceremony is passed down to future Mexican American and Mexican generations of *danzantes* and *promotoras*. I also discuss the everyday experiences and identity conveyed through understandings and enactments of ceremony, in order to demonstrate the social interactions and conditions experienced by the practitioners. In addition, I discuss their cultural, religious, social, political and economic positionality, and the oppression embedded within these social institutions that they are subjected by hegemonic society.

Anthropological Theories of Ritual and Ceremony

Cultural anthropologist Victor Turner describes ritual as "the affirmation of communal unity in contrast to the frictions, constraints, and competitiveness of social life and organization."[8] Within my ceremonial community, the practitioners gather together and treat each other as equals, with the exception of our elders and ceremonial leaders whom we honor and extend greater degrees of respect and reverence. Through the practitioners' rituals they create unity and solidarity for their ceremonial and ethnic community, and greater community of *Angelitas*—a matter I discuss in greater detail in chapter four. In chapter four I also illustrate the practitioners' participation in the blessing of the *acequias* (irrigation canals). During this ritual the practitioners pray for an abundance of *acequia* waters, so that the farmer's fields in South *Angelitas* will provide a healthy harvest for their families and the community. During this ceremony, the *danzantes* and *promotoras*, along with the community create unity, solidarity and

hope. In so doing, they dissolve the "frictions, constraints, and competitiveness of social life and organization."

Clifford Geertz describes ritual as, "any religious ritual . . . [that] involves this symbolic fusion of ethos and world view."[9] Ethos and world-view are "synthesized" in symbols within ritual.[10] Ethos indicates "the moral and aesthetic aspects of a culture—a people's 'underlying attitude toward themselves and their world.'"[11] Worldview, specifies the 'cognitive, existential aspects of a culture, a people's understanding of reality,[12] "their most comprehensive idea of a general order of existence."[13] Geertz contends that ritual "is in some sort of ceremonial form—even if that form be hardly more than the re-citation of a myth, the consultation of an oracle, or the decoration of a grave . . . . In ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turns out to be the same world."[14]

During the *Dia de las Animas ceremonia*, popularly known as *Dia de los Muertos*, hosted by *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* every year between November 1st and November 2nd, the "symbolic fusion of ethos and world view," of *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican cosmology is evidenced through several actions throughout the ceremony, and is profoundly demonstrated through the three tiered *altar*—a large central focus of the ceremony, among other Indigenous effigies. The adorned three tiered *altar* signifies the spirit world (top tier), the physical world (middle tier), and the underworld (bottom tier). These tiers, represent the connection between each of these worlds, and the practitioners' connection with them as well. In addition, the photographs of the practitioners and other ceremonial participants' loved ones that have passed, which the *sahumadoras* place on the middle tier represents our loved ones presence in the spirit world, and for one night, in the physical world with us. This reverence, exhibits the practitioners and ceremonial participants sustained connection to their loved one's in the present. For my

ceremonial community, through the imagined world that the practitioners create during this *velacion*, we are re-united with the spirits of our loved ones. This reunion is a reminder of my ceremonial community's continued connection with their loved ones, even though they are no longer living in the physical world. This is our reality.

Performance Theorist's Interpretation of Ritual

Stanley Tambiah contends that ritual is performative, because it includes three key elements: 1) "it involves doing things," including speaking; 2) "it is staged" and uses varied expressions to offer "participants an intense experience;" and 3) it involves emphasized "values."[15] These emphasized features of ritual are evident in the organization of elaboration, the selected site, and "the degree of redundancy or elaboration."[16] "[A]ll of which present and validate the social hierarchy indirectly depicted by them."[17]

The rituals of my ceremonial community include the three key elements Tambiah speaks of. For instance, during the *San Isidro y Maria de la Cabeza* and blessing of the *acequias* and fields *ceremonia* there are many acts of "doing" and speaking that the practitioners of my ceremonial community enact. For example, the *danzantes*, *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca promotoras*, and *comadre* and *compadre* healers dress in white—a color that represents purity, light and, for us, the attire of a healer. Most of our garments are either white dresses with or without colorful hand stitched flowers on them, or white *huipils* (hand stitched, Indigenous styled blouses from México and Central America) with white *faldas* (skirts)—all of these garments are made in México or Guatemala purchased in these locations by the practitioners. The *promotoras* or traditional healers and other ceremonial practitioners offer an opening *ceremonia* where they pray out loud as they honor the seven Indigenous directions. After which, they walk in a community procession along the *acequias*. The ritual is "staged" in terms of the selected location

of the ceremony. The practitioners begin the ritual at a grotto of a Catholic Church, which is located on the church grounds that is connected to the *acequias*. The ceremony is begun with Sophia at the lead, as the practitioners offered the opening prayer. After which, the priest offered a few words. Then a few of the key members of the *acequia* organizing board spoke. And finally, the new *padrinos* (god parents) and guardians of the wood carved statue of *San Isidro y Maria de la Cabeza* shared a few words. Additional locations of the *ceremonia* included a community member's field who offered their field to be blessed by four of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca's promotoras*. The *promotoras* blessed the field by smudging it with sacred copal smoke that burned on hot coals in the *promotoras' sahumadors* (Mesoamerican clay cauldrons). As the *promotoras* smudged they made the sign of the cross with the *sahumador,* and then motioned their *sahumadors* in one clockwise and then one counter clockwise motion. They smudged the field a few times as they walked the perimeter of the field. An additional "site," among other locations of the ceremony, included a main *acequia*. Here, the *promotoras* usually smudge the *acequia* only once. After which, they and the community place depetaled *flores* (flowers) in *acequia*.

Another location included the dirt beneath a huge old oak tree that sits next to the main *acequia*. Here the community stood and sang under this great tree. Specific actions during this ritual indicated "values," such as the importance of honoring the seven directions; "values" of a location, such as a Catholic church, the *acequias,* the field and the great oak tree. In addition, social hierarchies within the ceremony were also pronounced. For instance, Sophia being a leader of this ritual demonstrated the prominent position she has within our ceremonial community and within South *Angelitas,* as a member of the *acequia* organizing board, and as ceremonial leader and healer. Another denoted social hierarchy was the order in which the

community members spoke after the opening prayer. Here, the first person to speak was the priest, followed by other members of the *acequia* organizing board, and the *padrinos*. All of these actions and symbols offered an "intense experience" for the participants and audience.

A Religious Studies Understanding of Ritual

Religious Studies scholar Catherine Bell informs us that performance theorists' primary assertion is that ritual communicates, "and it is through this function that ritual indirectly affects social realities and perceptions of those realities."[18] Likewise, as previously noted, during the *Dia de las Animas ceremonia*, we communicate the Mesoamerican belief that humans living in the physical world sustain relationships with those our loved ones who have passed and now reside in the spirit world.

Importantly, Bell underscores that performance theory is popular because of its "distinctive imagery . . . that of a sensitive and appreciative participant interpreter, not a coldly detached, analytic scientist."[19] As a ceremonial participant and researcher, I maintain an insider/outsider positionality. Therefore, being a "sensitive and appreciate participant interpreter" was essential for my ability to gain a greater degree of trust from my community. It is for these reasons that I chose performance theory as a principal methodology for my study.

Bell finds that "the fundamental efficacy of ritual activity lies in its ability to have people embody assumptions about their place in the larger order of things."[20] Within my *kalpulli*, ceremonial leader, during the *temazkal ceremonias*, Vanessa has emphasized to the practitioners that they are a "microcosm" in relationship to the "macrocosm of the universe," and has remined them that their prayers in the *temazkal* have vibrations, energy, and a power that can affect our world.[21]

Maulana Karenga maintains that "ritual [is] a primary means for self-transformation and cultural revolution."[22] And, Bell affirms that "ritual meditates a series of relationships between 'us' and some 'other,' . . . such as the ancient wise ones who have resisted the forces of modernity."[23] Likewise, as my ceremonial community conducts ritual they are guided by the wisdom of ancestral Indigenous concepts and philosophies, which aide in their "self-transformation," and efforts toward a "cultural-revolution" that is manifested through their dissention of hegemonic, oppressive "forces of modernity." This self-transformation and cultural revolution was evidenced in the International Workers Day protest of 2017, where my ceremonial community gathered for ritual and in solidarity with undocumented immigrants and social justice allies to resist the Donald Trump administration, which at the time, was espousing discriminating and divisive rhetoric aimed toward undocumented Mexican immigrants. Through our opening *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo ceremonias,* a transformation in mood and motivation was evidenced by the crowd of people in attendance. After our *ceremonias* the event attendees appeared more focused, present and resolute toward their collective aim for social justice. It was as though a deeper sense of peace and strength had manifested within them. This is the type of "self-transformation" and "cultural revolution" Karenga and Bell speak of that is ignited through ritual. In what follows I discuss Indigenous ethics that inform and guide my ceremonial community during their rituals and in their everyday life.

The Five Ethics of Indigenous Epistemology, Ontology and Education

Specific epistemologies and ontologies that inform my ceremonial communities identity and lifeways are described by my mentors and Mexican American Studies scholars Patrisia Gonzales and Roberto Rodríguez, with their conceptualization of the 5 "Rs," or what I call the Five Ethics of Indigenous epistemology and ontology.[24] Chippewa scholar Rosemary Ackley

Christensen initially developed the 3"Rs," of Indigenous epistemology, ontology and education, which includes "respect, reciprocity, and relationships."[25] Gonzales and Rodríguez contributed to Ackley Christensen's paradigm by adding "responsibility" and "renewal." Gonzales and Rodríguez assert that "responsibility" reflects a commitment to ethical relationship with our selves, one another and our environment, and "renewal" reflects a "regeneration," a re-birth, or transformation of a life or relationship, as a result of adhering to the first 4 "Rs."[26] Gonzales utilized the 5"Rs in her knowledge, practice and scholarship of Mesoamerican Traditional Medicine. And, Rodríguez utilized the 5"Rs to emphasize Indigenous epistemology and ontology.

Mexican Americans, such as the practitioners in my ceremonial community, that are in the process of (re)covering, or who intergenerationally revere their Indigenous heritage adhere to the holistic ethics of the 5"Rs."[27] The elders and some of the younger generation practitioners of my ceremonial community have (re)covered their indigeneity, and still, others are in the process of doing so. Through this cultural (re)covery and reverence, the practitioners of my community maintain an Indigenous holistic worldview.[28] For instance, while conducting my research, I witnessed the practitioners treat one other and the environment with the precepts of five ethics, during *ceremonia* and *platicas*. The five ethics are ways of knowing, being, and treating ourselves, one another and our world. It is another Indigenous guide that informs the practitioners of how to live in ceremony every day.

Every day Experiences and Identity Conveyed Through Performance

Anthropologist Alex Chávez, Elisa Huerta, Jose Limón, Richard Flores, Sylvia Rodríguez and Américo Paredes, Ethnomusicologist Brenda Romero, and Performance scholar Charles Briggs assert that through performance, practitioners create an identity and convey their

everyday social conditions.[29] These every day experiences consist of the performers' cultural, religious, social, political and economic positionality, but also, the oppression which they are subjected to by hegemonic society, and the ways in which they challenge it, and participate in, and constitute their own domination—a matter which I discuss in greater detail in chapter three. The everyday social conditions experienced by the *danzantes* and *promotoras* of my community result from low income, undocumented immigration status, white supremacy, racism, patriarchy, sexism, and homophobia. In what follows, I highlight poignant views about ceremony that illustrate the ways in which these understandings affect the practitioners' every day social interactions and conditions.

Ceremonial Performance as "a way of life"[30]

Nahuatl and Mesoamerican Indigenous worldviews inform the practitioners of the ritual ceremonies of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo*, because, ceremony is "a way of life" for us. Therefore, the consciousness and acts of ceremony transcend the performance spaces of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo* into the practitioners' mundane everyday lives, enabling them to *be* in ceremony every moment of their lives, whether they are engaging in ritual for a specific event, or going about their day, interacting with others and their environment. Some of the Indigenous principles which inform their ceremony of life include the five ethics and the face and heart concept,[31] a *Nahuatl* philosophy that teaches the individual to connect their conscience and heart. The face and heart enables the individual to live with integrity with themselves and others, to realize one's talents, develop them, and share these gifts with humanity.[32] Such Indigenous views help the practitioners' to transform their everyday lives into sites of ritual and sacredness, by "view[ing] ceremony in the way that we live, from the time that we wake up, to the time that we go to bed," and "paying reverence to life,"[33] every day. Among past and present Indigenous

societies throughout Mesoamerican and the American continent, to live in this way is to live with integrity and a reverence for oneself and the environment. This way of life for Native American and Mexican American ceremonial participants is called "walking the red road." Mesoamerican knowledge keeper and educator, Carlos Aceves, and Mexican anthropologist and historian Miguel León-Portilla shed light on the concept of the "red road" through their contention that ancestral Mesoamerican peoples associated the color red with light and truth—perspectives that guide Indigenous Mesoamericans and ceremonial participants on their lives path.[34]

In what follows, I provide *testimonios* (testimonies) shared during my interviews with my elders Paul and Sophia, and Penelope and Leon.

Testimonios of Ceremony, according to an Indigenous Worldview

In my conversation with Paul, *jefe* of *Kalpulli* and *Mexicayotl danza azteca grupo Éter*, he stated the following response to the question, "What does ceremony mean to you?

> [L]ife itself is an ongoing ceremony. . . . ceremony can mean everything when we think of it in that way. And, it gives us an idea of how we should comport ourselves as we go through life. If every day and aspect of our life is a ceremony, then where is our intent, and how are we celebrating that ceremony every moment of our life. . . . there [are] categories of ceremony, from the ceremony of everyday life, specialized ceremony for a specific purpose, [and] public and private ceremony.[35]

In my conversation with Sophia, regarding her response to the same question, she stated, "I think ceremony is a way of paying reverence to life, because you can view ceremony in the way that we live, from the time that we wake up to the time that we go to bed . . . paying

reverence to life as you live your day, and also doing ceremony to pay reverence to specific things at specific times, but overall, it's paying reverence to life."[36]

Paul and Sophia have a common perception of what ceremony means. For them, ceremony is the way we live our lives every day; how we carry ourselves and treat others; and it is meant for specific venerations, such as equinoxes and solstices. At times throughout my interviews with Paul and Sophia they demonstrated that they are elders and keepers of *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican knowledge and traditions. Paul and Sophia's personalities as elders, ceremonial leaders, healers, and keepers of *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican knowledge and traditions inform us of how they live on a daily basis, and what it means to live in ceremony every day.

Interview with Paul

On the morning of November 19, 2017, I spoke with Paul in his art studio, at his family's home in *Angelitas*. Upon my arrival, he politely offered me a seat. He said, "Make yourself at home."[37] Paul is an amazing artist. Creating art is one of his passions, and he sells his work as a means of income. Prior to beginning the interview, he had been working on a painting of a black crow with beautiful ebony black and midnight blue hues. He wanted to continue painting as we conducted the interview, but we decided against it, because the distance between the couch where I was sitting was too far away to clearly capture his voice on my recording device.

Paul is a Mexican American *Mexicayotl danzante Azteca*. He has been dancing for over forty years and has been an activist for Chicano and American Indian rights since the inception of the social movements of the 1960s. During this era, he was part of the Chicano Movement and the American Indian Movement (AIM).

Paul's response to my question, "What does ceremony mean to you?" suggests, that for him, life is "an ongoing ceremony,"[38] in revering life in this way it is our responsibility to be

conscious of how we treat ourselves and others. To be cognizant of his intentions "and how we are celebrating that ceremony every moment of our lives."[39] One of the ways Paul "celebrat[es]" the ceremony of life, is by living in ceremony every day through his intentions and actions, which remind us of our interconnectedness with one another.[40]

In addition, I asked Paul and the other *danzantes* and *promotoras* interviewed, to choose from a list of cultural identifiers that I created, which were based on identifiers I have heard my ceremonial community use for themselves and one another. From this list Paul first identified as "human,"—an identifier that was not on my list. He asserted this identifier. Paul then identified as "Mexican American," "Chicano," and "a little bit Chicana," (he said with a clever smile). By asserting that he is "a little bit Chicana," he acknowledged the *Nahuatl* perspective of *dualidad* (duality), which recognizes the masculine and feminine energies inherent in all beings. He then identified as "Indigenous" and "*Mestizo/Mestiza*."[41] It was interesting that Paul identified with varying identities. This indicates that he is flexible in his understanding of himself as a culturally mixed person.

Paul's perception of our interconnectedness to others was evidenced on October 29, 2017, while I conducted my field research of a *Mexicayotl danza Azteca* ritual performance. A friend and I attended a public *danza Azteca* presentation or *obra* (work), as *Kalpulli Éter* calls them. *Kalpulli Éter* offered this *danza Azteca* performance, which was part of a large, mostly Mexican American celebration of *Dia de los Muertos* that was held at a community cultural center in downtown *Angelitas*. At the onset of the *obra*, Paul welcomed all in attendance, and thanked everyone for coming to celebrate *Dia de los Muertos*. He then said the following poignant words, "There is only one race—the human race. According to our DNA, we are more alike than we are different."[42] What was important about Paul's words, is that he said this during

a time when the Mexican American community of *Angelitas* witnessed the anti-Mexican immigrant sentiments of Donald Trump's administration and an increase in racialized violence, which some journalists and scholars believed were associated with the Trump administration's biased and discriminative politics.[43] Paul reminded us of our humanity and interconnectedness during a time when the nation was politically divided, and anti-Mexican prejudice was palpable.

In a return to Paul's views regarding ceremony, he stated that ceremony is for "a specific purpose," which includes both "public and private" events. Some of the "public" rituals include the Mexica New Year, the César Chávez march opening *danza Azteca* ceremony and procession lead by *grupo Fuego* and other *danzantes* of my ceremonial community, and the *Dia de San Isidro y Santa Maria de la Cabeza* and blessing of the *acequias* and fields *ceremonia*. Private rituals include a woman's fifty-second birthday ceremony—a *Nahuatl* rite of passage that celebrates a woman's first half of her life cycle on earth, transition into elderhood, and transition from a time of receiving, to a time of giving.

Interview with Sophia

I now turn to a portion of my interview with, Sophia, to discuss her response to the question, "What does ceremony mean to you?" Sophia is an elder, co-founder of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca*—a grassroots organization that focuses on continuing Mesoamerican knowledge, and traditional healing available to the low-income community of *Angelitas* and supporting immigrant rights. Sophia is also a ceremonial leader, *promotora* and *jefa* of *danza grupo Maguey*, *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca's Conchero danza Azteca circulo*, which I am a part.

Like Paul, Sophia has been a long-time advocate for Chicano rights, since the inception of the *Movimiento* (Chicano Movement). In fact, in her early twenties, she was Brown Beret. During the past eight years that I have lived in *Angelitas*, she and I have become like family. She

is someone who I perceive like a *tia* (aunt) and I have expressed this sentiment to her on several occasions. Like Paul, Sophia has been a *danzante* of *danza Azteca* for well over forty years.

As I entered her home, we gave each other a long hug. We then sat down in her dining room, and I noticed that she had a small *altar* on the table, it contained all the *elementos Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican peoples consider sacred. These *elementos* include fire, water, earth, air. She also had some copal—*medicina sacrado* (sacred medicine) burning in a small black *sahumador* that contained mini instant lighting coals that she lit to burn the copal.[44] The copal had a sweat aromatic scent. The copal and burning coals, together, represented earth, fire and air—with the smoke. These four *elementos*, according to *Nahuatl* culture are associated with the four sacred directions: fire is associated with the south, which is the place of the child, our desires and will. The element water represented the direction of the west and is the place of feminine energy and women's medicine. The copal represented the direction of the east and is associated with the earth, the place of *Madre tierra* (mother earth). And air represented the north and was signified by the smoke. The direction of the north is the place our ancestors, ceremony and healing.

On Sophia's *altar*, she included a pink quartz stone shaped like a heart. This stone also represented the element earth. She also had a small glass of water with another earth element, an obsidian stone inside of it. According to *Nahuatl* philosophy, water is used to cleanse and is a conductor for the obsidian, which is believed to absorb negative energies and spirits and protect ceremonial participants. In addition, Sophia had a small white clam shell that also represented the element air. The shell contained copal inside it, which she used to create more smoke on the hot coals. Copal is considered medicine, and as Sophia has said on multiple occasions, "You can't lie in front of the *sahumador*."[45] By creating an *altar*, for me, meant that she wanted to

create a sacred space for our interview. As a result of this sacralized space,[46] our *palabras* were honest and intentional, and allowed us to have a beautiful *platica*.

According to Sophia, ceremony is "the way that we live, from the time that we wake up to the time that we go to bed . . . also doing ceremony for specific things at specific times, but overall, it's paying reverence to life," every day.[47] Sophia has expressed this sentiment on other occasions as well. For example, during a conversation we had while preparing for a *temazkal* for Earth day at the *kalpulli*, she affirmed, "We're in ceremony every day."[48] She asserted that we do ceremonies "to pay reverence to specific things at specific times."[49] Here, she was referring to *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican traditions, such as the celebration of solstices, equinoxes, and the honoring of *el cuatro vientos*—the four winds or directions of the north, south, east and west, in addition to three more directions—the heavens, the place of our spirit guides, the earth or *la Madre tierra* (the mother earth), and our center or heart—the place of our true selves.

Through my personal interactions with Sophia, I observed the ways in which she is "in ceremony every day." For example, in September 2014, *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* hosted a "walking" workshop in the Rio Grande *Bosque* (forest), to explore where and how to harvest the medicinal plant *yerba mansa* (swamp root). The purpose of this workshop was to later make tinctures of the plant. Once we arrived at the location where there was *yerba mansa*, Sophia disappointingly said, "Oh, I forgot to bring tobacco." I replied, "I have some." She smiled and said, "Oh, good. Can we have some to offer to the *plantas* (plants)?" I smiled and said, "Sure." And then gave some to Sophia and the other *danzantes*, which included Catalina, George, and their two children. After which, we each said a prayer and asked for *permiso* (permission) from the *plantas* to harvest them. Then Sophia explained how to pick the plant. Our action of offering tobacco to the *yerba mansa* in exchange for the plants *permiso* to give us it's life for medicine

was an enactment of the five ethics of Indigenous epistemology and ontology. This was conveyed by our showing respect, relationship, responsibility, reciprocity and hopes of renewal for the plant by offering it tobacco. We also harvested the plant carefully, and we only harvested what we needed. Through our actions we showed "reverence" for the *yerba mansa* and ensured that the plant would reproduce in the following season. By following the five ethics, we created a ceremonial space as we harvested. This is an example of how through an Indigenous understanding and ritual, we live in ceremony every day.

Interview with Pueblo Scholar Penelope

In my interviews with the Native American scholars I found it interesting that some of these scholars shared notions of ceremony that were similar to those expressed by Sophia, Paul. And the other *danzantes* and *promotora* interviewed. Below I discuss these similarities expressed by two of the Native American scholars, Penelope and Leon.

On November 11, 2017, I interviewed Penelope, a Pueblo scholar at a major university in New Mexico. I have known Penelope for several years and consider her a friend. Upon my arrival for our interview we gave each other a hug, and then caught up with one other. When I asked about the meaning of ceremony, Penelope responded, "Ceremony is what we do throughout the day, from the time we wake up in the morning, to eating breakfast, it's a ritual.[50] It's about being a good person and how we live our life and treat people, because it comes back to you."[51]

Penelope said that ceremony is also "related to healing . . . welcoming a new baby," or celebrating "a marriage," or feast day dances.[52] She affirmed that "ceremony is also teaching," like when "my mom taught me how to make piki bread."[53] For Penelope, ceremony is a "ritual" that has "many different aspects."[54] Penelope's perspectives regarding ritual convey that, like

Paul, ceremony is meant for specific purposes or special events. And, like Paul and Sophia, she believes that ceremony, "happens all the time, it's in our daily lives."[55] Another similarity I found was in Penelope's understanding that there is a cause and effect relationship between "what we do throughout the day. . . . [And] how we live our life and treat people . . ."[56] Her words illustrate that through our intentions, thoughts and actions we express a respect for ourselves and others. In doing so, we live life in a sacred and ritualized way every day.

Interview with Diné Scholar Leon

Leon is a Diné professor at a major university in New Mexico, he stated that ceremony "refers to a spiritual and existential experience for individuals who partake in ritual or a healing aspect, or some type of important connection between human beings and non-human entities. . . . I think it's going to have a different experience for everyone and that you go into it with a very open mind and also very respectful for the experience of it."[57]

For Leon, ceremony is a spiritual, healing process that creates a connection between human and non-human forces. And, this process must be done with respect. There are common sentiments among each of the interviewees discussed here, regarding their perceptions of ceremony. These commonalities indicate that ceremonies are spiritual experiences, ritualistic in nature, and are meant to honor special occasions and entities. This is evident in Penelope, Leon, Paul and Sophia's sentiment that ceremony is where "ritual," and "healing" take place, and is about the "connection between human and non-human entities."[58] In *Mexica* traditions, this occurs in the performance of *danza Azteca*, *velaciones*, *curanderismo* healing treatments, and other cultural expressions. These interview participants were also in agreement that having a "reverence" and "respect" for specific rituals, and the ceremony of everyday life is essential.[59] Penelope provides an individual Puebloan woman's understanding of the ritualized cultural

forms involved in ceremony, which include "teaching," as well as "many different aspects."[60] Her notions correlate with *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican perspectives of ceremony, in that, through them teachings and knowledge are shared and multiple integral elements are involved. Importantly, through the interviews with Paul, Sophia, and Penelope a common belief that ceremony is how we live life every day was expressed. It is important to state that additional ceremonial community members, and Native American scholars interviewed also shared similar beliefs about ceremony expressed by the above noted interviewees. These interlocuters include Felipe, who is a Mexican immigrant and *jefe* of *danza grupo Fuego*, and Vanessa, who is also a Mexican immigrant, ceremonial leader, *danzante*, and traditional healer, and at the writing of this dissertation, is now a former *promotora* of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca*. And, Gene, a Pueblo scholar, and Jacqueline, a Diné scholar. These common perspectives are included in the following excerpts taken from the interviews. For instance, Felipe maintained that ceremony is a way to connect with the natural world, "with the creator, [and] the universe."[61] Vanessa stated that ceremony is for "special" events or "times," like the "solstice."[62] Gene affirmed that ceremony is a way for people to come together "communally" to express their "cultural spirituality."[63] And, Jacqueline asserted that ceremony is "a celebration . . . an acknowledgment, it can be a remembrance, [and] it can mean a drawing upon a communities beliefs and values, from the past and invoking them in the present, so that we remind ourselves of what's important to us."[64]

Julisa's Notion of Ceremony

Other *danzantes* and *promotoras* within my ceremonial community also shared Penelope's view of ceremony as a "teaching." For example, Julisa, is an elder *promotora*, *sahumadora* of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* and *danzante* of *grupo Maguey*. Julisa maintains that the transference of knowledge is a ceremony. She shared this perspective with me as we drove

through the south western eastern desert of New Mexico, en route to México City, to participate in a *danza Azteca* celebration for our *danza grupo's* guardian, *Mayahuel, Virgen de los Remedios,* with our *comadre* and *compadre danzantes* in México City. During our drive, Julisa stated that when her granddaughter Aliya was about five years old, she took her to her university's library to show Aliya her dissertation. Julisa stated that she told her granddaughter, "This is a book that grandma wrote." She then told me, "I showed her where I had thanked her in the acknowledgments. *That's a ceremony*."[65] For Julisa, ceremony is about sharing knowledge, *cariño* (affection), and teachings with her granddaughter that showed Aliya of what Mexican American women are capable of accomplishing. In so doing, Julisa showed her granddaughter that she too is capable of such an accomplishment. Importantly, the Indigenous perspective that through ceremony knowledge and teachings are shared were also expressed by Patrisia Gonzales, as previously noted, and Penelope.

Paul and Sophia have educated themselves regarding the foundational philosophies that inform Mesoamerican cultural and ceremonial knowledge and traditions. These philosophies are similar to the foundational philosophies that inform Native American cultural and ceremonial knowledge and traditions expressed by Penelope, and the highly respected education scholar, and Santa Clara Pueblo intellectual Gregory Cajete.[66] Paul and Sophia also share Penelope's perception that ritual is "a teaching" and has "many different aspects."[67] They shared this sentiment on multiple occasion during my field research.

The knowledge that Paul shared during *Kalpulli Éter's danza Azteca obra* for *Dia de los Muertos,* parallels with the Mayan greeting *In Lak Ech,* which was (re)covered by Chicano activist, artists, scholars and writers during the Chicano Movement, and continues to be shared today in Chicano and Mexican American Studies programs, and ceremonial communities.

Roberto Rodríguez emphasized the tenets of *In Lak Ech* his book, *Amoxtli The X Codex In Lak Ech-Panche Be & Hunabe Ku & The Forgotten 1524 Debate*, which states, "*Tu eres mi otro yo* – You are my other self. I am you and you are me. If I hurt you, I hurt myself. If I hate you, I hate myself. If I love and respect you, I love and respect myself."[68] Rodríguez maintains that *In Lak Ech* is a concept that has been shared by Chicanos in the U.S., the peoples of Central and South American, and the Caribbean.[69] As a long-time activist and keeper of Mesoamerican knowledge, Paul likely learned this concept and similar Indigenous concepts as a young activist in the Chicano Movement and AIM.

In personal *platicas* and public cultural events and workshops, Paul and Sophia have spoken about the Mesoamerican perspective that we are interconnected with one another and the environment. Our elders teach our ceremonial community about Indigenous Mesoamerican knowledge that is hundreds, if not thousands of years old. In doing so, they not only gift us with this knowledge, but also, ensure its continuity. This knowledge shows us how to develop and maintain a connection with our face and heart, which enables us to live our lives with integrity, a good heart, and strong mind in our everyday lives. These teachings help us to live every day with the five ethics, to value our dignity, that of others, and value our environment, while remaining cognizant of these inter-dependent relationships.

Paul's perspectives during the *Dia de las Muertos danza Azteca obra* at the cultural center, reflect the teachings espoused by the *In Lak Ech* concept, particularly his view that "we are more alike" than "different."[70] With his words, Paul lifted the audiences' spirits, including mine, as he reminded us of the importance of treating one another with dignity and respect. Moreover, Mesoamerican perspectives such as *In Lak Ech* inform the ritual performances of my ceremonial community and enable the practitioners to be informed and guided by Mesoamerican

thought and philosophy during ceremony and in their everyday lives. Such concepts guide *danzantes* and *promotoras* on "how to comport" themselves in how they treat themselves, others and the world, as they "go through life."[71] Importantly, these *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican concepts guide my ceremonial community of to walk in "the ceremony of everyday life."[72]

Mesoamerican Traditional Medicine

In Patrisia Gonzales's text *Red Medicine*, she informs us that Indigenous people have their own terms for *limpia* and *susto*. She maintains that Indigenous peoples have their own "word for *limpia* or *barrida*, the ceremonial sweeping ceremony, is *ochpantli* or *tleuchpantle* in some Nahua languages; *hoku* among the Otomi; [and] *kutsúrhentani* (Purépecha),"[73] for example. In addition, the Mayan word for soul wound (susto) is "*komel*."[74] *Limpia* treatments are a common form of healing among the *promotoras* of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca*. However, treatments of *susto*, in which the treatment calls the soul back to the patient, is done primarily by the elders of the *Kalpulli*. Such a treatment is practiced by the *Kalpulli's* traditional healers who have extended knowledge and practice of Mesoamerican traditional medicine healing ways. In my conversation with Sophia she informed me that she had several elder teachers throughout her life who taught her various healing treatments about healing herbas (herbs) and *plantas*. Sophia is also a master gardener and has many medicinal plants such as *yerba buena* (good herb—mint), which is used for stomach aches, lemon grass, used as a tea to aid digestion, and *romero* (rosemary), which is used to sweep down the body to stimulate the endocrine system and flush toxins out of the body in the *temazkal* and during *limpias* and *velaciones*. And, Sophia has roses, among many other *plantas*, which are used for full moon *temazkals* and *ceremonias*.

When I asked Sophia, who was her primary teacher for *curanderismo*, she responded,

> [M]y family, we always had a garden, we always had *plantas* and stuff and I learned a lot through my *abuelas*. I can't say that, per say, my *abuelita* was a *curandera*, but when I was growing up we never had [health] insurance, so any illness you had, of course we'd go to my grandmother and great-grandmother. And, so a lot of that knowledge was passed down, but I had, I think through [an] awakening that I want[ed] to know more about my people, I learned about that healing aspect of it [medicinal plants].[75]

Sophia learned from the elders within her family, and later in life, when she was an adult living in El Paso, with her husband, and young daughter, she met Señor Uribe, a healer from Juárez, México. Sophia stated that she met Uribe because of her "interest in herbs and growing,"[76] *la plantas*. Through Uribe, she increased her knowledge of the healing properties of *la plantas* and how best to grow and care for them. Not long after meeting Señor Urribe, she met Andreas Segura, who became her *maestro* for both *curanderismo* and for *Conchero danza Azteca*. Sophia stated that she became Segura's apprentice, and that he would take her to people's homes where he would give healing treatments. Sophia assisted Segura during these treatments, and learned from him in this way. Sophia stated that Segura gifted her first *sahumador*. Prior to being gifted this healing element, Sophia had not used a *sahumador*, because she wanted to "honor," and respect it.[77] Sophia affirmed

> He [Andres Segura] was my primary teacher for healing and for *danza*. . . . because he taught me *so much* of the basic, philosophical, scientific [aspects]. He would say, '[there's] a big difference between Indigenous thought and western thought . . . our teachings [are] our world. Our universe is scientific, and that's truth. You can't change truth, truth is truth.'[78]

Sophia also learned from several other elder healers. For example, Segura introduced her to *maestra* Magdalena, of which Sophia stated, "At the time I was so impressed, because she was a *viviente*—a person who could see in your body and tell you what's wrong."[79] And, Sophia and the women of the *Kalpulli* also met Doña Modesta Lavañda, and internationally known *curandera* from Mexico. In fact, Lavañda's daughter Ireñe once stayed at the *Kalpulli* in South *Angelitas*, for two weeks. Sophia stated, "during that time we learned some very basic things. She shared prayers, we even had the old *temazkal*, and we did some *temazkallis* with her, cause her mom is a the *temazkalera*."[80] Sophia also learned from the late Doña Predicanda and Doña Maclovia Zamora from central New Mexico, both were well-known and highly respected *curanderas*.

What is important, is that these elder healers taught Sophia essential values of healing and *la plantas*, which reflect the five ethics. For example, with the healing, as Segura stated, "'[there's] a big difference between Indigenous thought and western thought . . . our teachings [are] our world. Our universe is scientific, and that's truth. You can't change truth, truth is truth.'"[81] Hence, if a plant, such as mullen, when made into cough syrup works to heal a cough, then the curing is the "scientific" proof of its effectiveness, and if oregano, when made into a tea acts as an expectorant for phlegm then there is the "scientific" proof. And, if massaging a person's stomach helps digestion and ease constipation and inflammation, then this and many other Mesoamerican traditional medicine forms of curing are efficient, scientifically proven means of healing.

Based on my conversations with Sophia and observations of her as a traditional healer, I have witnessed her revere the five ethics. For instance, it is apparent that Sophia's elders taught her the importance of forming a relationship with the plants, being responsible (responsibility)

for taking care of the plants, and respecting the plant, by only taking and using what was needed, and being responsible in her use of the plant when treating others. Sophia was also taught, that she has a reciprocal dynamic with the plants, in that, if she was a good care taker of the plant, the plant would continue to return, grow abundantly, and always help those in need of the medicine—in effect renewal and regeneration was also created.

Aurelio Ramírez Cazeraz inform us of the importance of revering and continuing elder knowledge. The authors maintains that, "elders connect the Indigenous thought and knowledge with authority and experience."[82] The elders knowledge and experience maintain connections with the knowledge of the *antepasados* of the past with their Indigenous and culturally mixed descendants in the present through the continuance of Mesoamerican traditional medicine.

In my observations I witnessed the ways in which ceremony effects the practitioners. For instance, I noticed *danzante* and *comadre* healer Jackie's personality transform. Through her participation in *temazkallis* with *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca*. At first, it was difficult for her to own and use her voice to express herself. However, after months of having *platicas* with Sophia and continuing her participation in the *temazkal*, Sophia began teaching Jackie how to use the *sahumador* for her own self-healing. After a couple of months, Jackie began to own and speak her voice in the *temazkal*, her confidence strengthened, and she began to co-lead some of the *temazkals*. And, during a time when I was experiencing painful episodes of irritable bowel syndrome, Jackie stood with me once in the hot *temazkal*, after the ceremony ended, and she massaged my stomach for a while to ease my discomfort. Her healing hands provided the comfort and curing I needed.

Importantly, some of the five ethics are also used for maintaining accountability. For instance, at the initial stages of my observations, primarily when I was taking photographs for

my later interviews, elders of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* Sophia, Isabel and Julisa were uncomfortable with me taking photographs of *ceremonia*. For example, during one *temazkal*, I asked Vanessa, who lead the *temazkal* that evening, If I could take some photographs of the participants during the opening *ceremonia*, and that I would first, as ask for the participants *permiso* and inform them of the purpose of the photographs. Vanessa gave me her *permiso*. However, once I started taking the photos, I noticed a discomfort in Sophia's facial expression and posture, even as her eyes were closed during the opening ceremonial circle, as the participants were being smudged. And, I sensed discomfort from the other participants as well. Sophia and I later talked about these tensions, to which she said, "*es como ahogar*" (it's like being choked). I apologized to her, and reassured her that I was only going to use the pictures for my analysis and the interviews.

At another point and time, when I wanted to take pictures at the Reproductive Justice conference. Sophia asserted, "You can take pictures, but you have to give healings first. Take the pictures during a break."[83] I understood, that I was a *promotora* first and foremost, and as such, I had to make healing work and ceremony a priority, whether the ceremony was in the form of *curanderismo* or *la danza*. A few minutes after this tense conversation Sophia said, "Come here Dina," and she gave me a hug.

There were a few other tense moments with Sophia regarding taking photographs of the specific ceremonies I had selected throughout 2017. After the tension experienced by the participants while I took pictures of the *temazkal*, Sophia, Isabel and Julisa called one of their *comadres* Pricilla who is a traditional healer, and one of my mentors who was thoroughly aware of the purpose of my research. Sophia, Isabel and Julisa asked Pricilla for clarity regarding the purpose of the photos. And, Pricilla provided them the same information I had told them. I will be forever grateful for the clarity she gave them. Taking those photographs was stressful, and I

was relieved to finally be done taking them after the blessing of the *acequias ceremonia* in May of 2017. I expressed this relief with Sophia during a long *platica* as we drove from *Angelitas* to Watsonville, California, to participate in our first *Xilonen ceremonia* with *maestra* and *jefa* Angelbirtha Cobb of *danza grupo* White Hawk.[84] I was glad we had this *platica*, because after this, our dynamics became more comfortable around my research, and our relationship started mending around the tensions we had experienced.

The five ethics that were implemented between Sophia, myself and toward my ceremonial community during this tense time, included, respect for my ceremonial community and for my elders. Responsibility, in the form of accountability toward my ceremonial community by prioritizing ceremony above my research. Relationship, by maintaining integrity and harmony with my elders, ceremonial community and *comadres* and *compadres* throughout my research process. Reciprocity, through mutual respect between myself and my ceremonial community, particularly with Sophia. And, my relationship with Sophia was renewed from a dynamic of tension to a dynamic of harmony, peace and comfort with one another. And, now I feel a greater sense of respect from the *danzantes* and *promotoras* toward me as a result of abiding by the five ethics.

Essentially, through the *danzantes'* and *promotoras'* adherence of the five ethics and other *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican thought and philosophy they continue to apply and embody elder, cultural, healing, and ritual knowledge through the ritual performances of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo* and live in ceremony every day.[85]

The contention that performance conveys cultural identity is discussed by several anthropologists including Charles Briggs and Richard Bauman, Mexican American and Latino scholars Jose Limón, Brenda Romero, Sylvia Rodríquez, and Enrique Lamadrid, who maintain

that Mexican American and Indigenous dance traditions, such as the *Matachines* and *Los Comanches* dances assert an intercultural identity when performed by Nuevo Mexicano practitioners, and an Indigenous identification when performed by Native American practitioners.[86] I draw from Limón, Briggs and Bauman, Romero, Rodríquez, and Lamadrid's notion of Mexican American performance in order to provide clarity and understanding about the ways in which the *danzantes* and *promotoras* of my ceremonial community adhere to *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican Indigenous worldviews of ceremony, as they conduct ritual in the performance space, but also, as they live in ceremony every day. Moreover, by abiding by these principles, they assert and privilege their indigeneity.

Conclusion

This chapter illustrated how the *danzantes* and *promotoras* live in ceremony as they conduct the ritual performances of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo* and as they live every day, by maintaining an Indigenous *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican understanding of ceremony. The philosophies, such as the five ethics of Indigenous epistemology, ontology, and education,[87] the face and heart,[88] the Mayan "*Tu eres mi otro yo*" concept, and the perception that "life is an ongoing ceremony," the practitioners are informed and guided on how to live in ceremony every day. Moreover, common perceptions the interviewees conveyed about ceremony, such as, "We live in ceremony every day,"[89] that ceremony is a "teaching," "it is how we treat one another,"[90] and that it is about "paying reverence to life."[91] indicate that the practitioners of my ceremonial community share cultural and religious Indigenous understandings with our Native American neighbors and relatives in the Southwest and Mesoamerica. Through these Indigenous principles, the practitioners' of my ceremonial community ensure the continuance of *Nahuatl* and

Mesoamerican cultural, social and religious knowledge, which emphasize the importance of living with dignity and integrity, valuing all life and developing humanity every day.[92]

In chapter three, I build upon the themes discussed in chapter one through my contention that Américo Paredes and Jose Limón argue for understanding performers as political agents. And, through ritual performance the practitioners of my ceremonial community explicitly conceptualize and adjoin Chicano and Indigenous struggles for social justice. I underscore that through assertions of self-determination, oppositional and decolonial consciousness, the practitioners (re)construct their social and political reality, overcome oppressive and limiting categories of race, and create collective social transformation that honors humanity. Significantly, my dissertation will show that in the state of New México the *danzantes* and *promotoras* of my community overtly acknowledge and embrace their indigeneity, and the practice of *curanderismo*.

Notes

[1] Sophia, Interview, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, December 19, 2017.
[2] Interview, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, December 19, 2017.
[3] Sophia, Interview, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico December 19, 2017.
[4] Sophia, Personal conversation, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, October 21, 2017.
[5] Patrisia Gonzales, *Red Medicine Traditional Indigenous Rites of Birthing and Healing* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012): see esp. xxiii.
[6] *Comadres y compadres* refers to fictive female and male kin members within my ceremonial community and throughout other danza Azteca and curanderismo communities.
[7] Laura Larco, "Encounters with the Huacas: Ritual Dialogue, Music and Healing in Northern Peru," *The World of Music*, Music and Healing in Transcultural Perspectives, 39.1. 1997, 35.
[8] See Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1966), also qtd in Catherine M. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York : Oxford University Press, 2009): see esp. 20-21.
[9] See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1977):see esp.113; 127.
[10] See Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 89, in Bell *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*: see esp. 26.
[11] Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 26. See Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* 89; 126-27, in Bell *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*: see esp. 26.
[12] See Geertz *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 89, 98, 126-27; and Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 26.
[13] Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 26.
[14] Geertz *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 112-13; and Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 26.
[15] See Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*: see esp. 41-42, regarding her reading of Stanley J. Tambiah's "A Performative Approach to Ritual," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 65 (1979): 113-69: see esp. 139; 153-54; 158; 166, which theorizes ritual as performance.
[16] Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*: see esp. 41-42, regarding her reading of Stanley J. Tambiah's "A Performative Approach to Ritual," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 65 (1979): 113-69: see esp. 139; 153-54; 158; 166, which theorizes ritual as performance.
[17] Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*: see esp. 41-42, regarding her reading of Stanley J. Tambiah's "A Performative Approach to Ritual," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 65 (1979): 113-69: see esp. 139; 153-54; 158; 166, which theorizes ritual as performance.
[18] Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*: see esp. 43.
[19] Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*: see esp. 46.
[20] Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York : Oxford University Press, 2009): see esp. 13 in Preface.
[21] Vanessa, ceremonial leader, *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca temazkal* for Universidad Sin Frontera retreat, South *Angelitas*, May 6, 2017.
[22] Maulana Karenga, *Kwanzaa: Origins, Concepts, Practice* (Los Angeles Kwaida Publications 1977): see esp. 18; qtd. in Catherine M. Bell *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*: see esp. 13 in Preface.
[23] Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*: see esp. 14 in Preface.
[24] Patrisia Gonzales and Roberto Rodriguez "responsibility" and "renewal" to Rosemary Christensen Ackley's conceptualization of the 3 "Rs": "respect, reciprocity and relationships," of Indigenous epistemology and ontology, in "Cultural Context and Evaluation," 2003. I drew from Patrisia Gonzales, Lecture, the 5 "Rs,", 2010; and book *Red Medicine*, 2012; Roberto Rodríguez's, class lectures in 2012, and 2011; and his book *Our Sacred Maiz Is Our Mother*, 2014.
[25] Rosemary Christensen Ackley, "Cultural Context and Evaluation", 2003, 23-24.
[26] Patrisia Gonzales, Lecture, the 5 "Rs," January 26, 2010; *Red Medicine:* 2012; and Roberto Rodríguez, class lectures: 2012, and 2011; and his book *Our Sacred Maiz Is Our Mother*, 2014.
[27] Gonzales, *Red Medicine*, 2012; and Rodríguez, *Our Sacred Maiz Is Our Mother*, 2014.
[28] Gonzales, *Red Medicine*, 2012; and Rodríguez, *Our Sacred Maiz Is Our Mother*, 2014.
[29] See Alex E. Chávez, *Sounds of Crossing: Music, Migration and the Aural Poetics of Huapango Arribeño* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), and "The Space of Affect, Or the Political Anatomy of Contemporary Fandango Performance in México," *Música Oral del Sur: Revista Internacional*. Españoles, Indios, Africanos y Gitanos. El Alcance Global del Fandango en Música, Canto y Danza, 12, 2015:545-562; Elisa Huerta "Embodied Recuperations: Performance, Indigeneity, and Danza Azteca," In *Dancing Across Borders: Danzas y*

Bailes Mexicanos, edited by Olga Nájera-Ramírez, Norma E. Cantu, and Brenda M. Romero (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Sylvia, Rodríguez, "Honor, Aridity, and Place. In *Expressing New México: Nuevomexicano Creativity, Ritual, and Memory*, ed, Phillip B. Gonzales, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007); Richard Flores, *Los Pastores: History and Performance in the Mexican Shepherds' Play of South Texas* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995); José E. Limón, *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American south Texas* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994); Romero, Brenda A, "The Matachines Music and Dance in San Juan Pueblo and Alcade, New México: Contests and Meanings" (Ann Arbor: U.M.I, 1993); Charles Briggs, *Competence in Performance: The Creativity of Tradition in Mexicano Verbal Art*), (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988); and Américo Paredes, *With a Pistol in His Hand* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1998; © 1958).

[30] Sophia, Interview, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, December 19, 2017 .

[31] See Gregory Cajete, *Look to the Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education* (Durango: Kivakí Press, 1994; Yolanda Chávez Leyva, "In ixtli in yóllotl/ a face and heart: Listening to the Ancestors," *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, series 2. 4 ¾ (Fall 2003/Winter 2004), 96-127; and Miguel León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, translated by Jack Emory Davis (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 3-13.

[32] See Gregory Cajete, *Look to the Mountain*, 1994; Yolanda Chávez Leyva, "In ixtli in yóllotl," 96-127; and Miguel León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, 3-13.

[33] Sophia, Interview, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, December 19, 2017.

[34] See Carlos Aceves, *Nine Seasons: Beyond 2012, A Manual of Ancient Aztec & Maya Wisdom*, (San Marcos: Indigenous Cultures Institute, 2012); and León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, 1963.

[35] Paul, Interview, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, November 19, 2017.

[36] Sophia, Interview, South *Angelitas*, December 19, 2017.

[37] Paul, Interview, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, November 19, 2017.

[38] Paul, Interview, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, November 19, 2017.

[39] Paul, Interview, 2017.

[40] Paul, Interview, 2017.

[41] Paul, Interview, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, November 19, 2017. Paul's identification with the terms "Chicano, Chicana" and "Mestizo/Mestiza," acknowledges the *Nahuatl* perspective of *dualidad* (duality), which recognizes the masculine and feminine energies inherent in all beings

[42] Paul, *Dia de los Muertos danza Azteca* presentation, *Angelitas*, New México, October 29, 2017.

[43] Williamson, Vanessa and IsaBeija Gelfand. "Trump and racism: What do the data say?" https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2019/08/14/trump-and-racism-what-do-the-data-say/, August 14, 2019, n.p. Retrieved September 30, 2019. Also see Griffin Sims Edward, and Stephen Rushin, "The Effect of President Trump's Election on Hate Crimes", https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3102652, January 14, 2018. Retrieved September 30, 2019. 2018, 1.

[44] *Copal* is tree sap that is harvested from trees that grow in Mesoamerica. This sap is considered sacred medicine and is used in ceremony.

[45] Sophia, Interview, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, December 19, 2017.

[46] Sylvia Rodríguez, *The Matachines Dance: Ritual Symbolism and Interethnic Relations in the Upper Río Grande Valley* (Albuquerque: University of New México Press, 1996).

[47] Sophia, Interview, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, December 19, 2017.

[48] Sophia, Personal conversation, *temazkal*, *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* ceremonial house, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, April 23, 2017.

[49] Sophia, Personal conversation, *temazkal*, *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* ceremonial house, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, April 23, 2017.

[50] Penelope, Interview, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, November 15, 2017.

[51] Penelope, Interview, November 15, 2017.

[52] Penelope, Interview, November 15, 2017.

[53] Penelope, Interview, November 15, 2017.

[54] Penelope, Interview, 2017.

[55] Penelope, Interview, 2017.

[56] Penelope, Interview, 2017.

[57] Leon, Interview, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, December 7, 2017.

[58] Penelope, Interview, 2017; and Leon, Interview, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, December 7, 2017.

[59] Penelope, Interview, 2017; Paul, Interview, 2017; Sophia, Interview, 2017; Leon, Interview, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, December 7, 2017.
[60] Penelope, Interview, 2017.
[61] Felipe, Interview, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, November 15, 2017.
[62] Vanessa, Interview, Esplanada, New Mexico, December 11, 2017.
[63] Gene, Interview, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, December 5, 2017.
[64] Jacqueline, Interview, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, February 3, 2018.
[65] Julissa, Personal conversation, Socorro, New Mexico, August 31, 2017.
[66] Gregory Cajete, *Look to the Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education* (Durango: Kivakí Press, 1994); and *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence* (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 2000).
[67] Penelope, Interview, November 15, 2017.
[68] *In Lak Ech*, translated by Roberto Rodríguez, in *Amoxtli: The XCodex, In Lak Ech-Panche Be & Hunab Ku, & the Forgotten 1524 Debate*, Collective copyright (Austin: Eagle Feather Research Institute, 2010): see esp. 18.
[69] Roberto Rodríguez, *Amoxtli: The XCodex* 2010, 11.
[70] Paul, *Dia de los Muertos Danza Azteca obra* (work) and presentation, October 29, 2017, *Angelitas*, New Mexico.
[71] Paul, Interview, November 19, 2017.
[72] Paul, Interview, November 19, 2017.
[73] See Soledad Mata Pinzón, Carlos Zolla, et al. *Diccionario enciclopédico de la medicina tradicional mexicana*. Biblioteca de la medicina tradicional mexicana. Vols. 1 and 2. Mexico. DF: Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1994, qtd. in Gonzales, *Red Medicine*, 206.
[74] Gonzales, *Red Medicine*, 202.
[75] Sophia, Interview, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, January 9, 2018.
[76] Sophia, Interview, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, January 9, 2018.
[77] Sophia, Interview, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, January 9, 2018.
[78] Sophia, Interview, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, January 9, 2018.
[79] Sophia, Interview, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, January 9, 2018.
[80] Sophia, Interview, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, January 9, 2018.
[81] Sophia, Interview, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, January 9, 2018.
[82] Aurelio Ramírez Cazarez et al. "It's not Traditional without the elders: Epistemological authority in Macehual knowledge system" in *Indigenous Places and Colonial Spaces* eds. Nicole Gombay and Marcela Palomino-Schalscha (London and New York: Routledge, 2018, 34-49), see esp. 35.
[83] Sophia, Reproductive Justice conference, *Bernardo*, New Mexico, June 1, 2017.
[84] *Maestra* Angelbirtha Cobb is an elder and *jefa* of *Mexicayotl danza Azteca grupo* located in Watsonville, California. This *danza grupo* shares ceremonial lineage with Florencio Yescas, who was Cobb's *maestro*, and former jefe of White Hawk.
[85] Mesoamerica is otherwise known as middle America. It includes the American Southwest, México and Central America. Professor of Mexican American Studies, Roberto Rodríguez who is one of my mentors, would call it the land of *maize* based peoples—which includes all of the Americas and the Caribbean. See Roberto Rodríguez and Patrisia Gonzales, *Amoxtli San Ce Tojuan, We are One, Nosotros Somos*, (San Fernando, CA: Xicano Records and Film, 2005); and Roberto Rodríguez, *Our Sacred Maize is our Mother: Indigeneity and Belonging in the Americas*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014).
[86] See Brenda A. Romero, "The Matachines Music and Dance in San Juan Pueblo and Alcade, New México: Contests and Meanings" (Ann Arbor: U.M.I, 1993); Sylvia Rodríguez, *The Matachines Dance: Ritual Symbolism and Interethnic Relations in the Upper Río Grande Valley* (Albuquerque: University of New México Press, 1996); and Enrique R. Madrid, *Hermanitos Comanchitos: Indo-Hispano Rituals of Captivity and Redemption*, (Albuquerque: University of New México Press, 2003).
[87] See Rosemary Christensen Ackley, "Cultural Context and Evaluation", 2003; Patrisia Gonzales, *Red Medicine*, 2012; and Roberto Rodríguez, Lecture, the "5R's", University of Arizona, Tucson, January 17, 2011, for discussions regarding the 3R's and 5R's, or what I refer to as the Five Ethics of Indigenous epistemology and ontology.
[88] Cajete, *Look to the Mountain*, 1994; Leyva, "In ixtli in yóllotl", 2003/2004; León-Portilla *Aztec Thought and Culture*, 1963.
[89] Sophia, Personal conversation, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, October 21, 2017.
[90] Interview, Penelope, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, November 15, 2017.
[91] Sophia, Interview, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, December 19, 2017.

[92] Interview, Paul, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, November 15, 2017; and Interview, Sophia, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, December 19, 2017.

Chapter Three: Ritual Performance and Political Agency in Chicano and Indigenous Struggles for Social Justice

Introduction

During *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca*'s *temazkallis*, ceremonial leaders Sophia and Vanessa encouraged the process of healing during the full and new moon *temazkal ceremonias*. Through ritual, they retold the story of *Coyolxauhqui*, a *Nahuatl* deity and story, which recounts of how the moon deity *Coyolxauhqui* was cut into pieces by her brother *Huitzilopochtli*, god of the sun and war. Yet, despite her dismemberment, *Coyolxauhqui* has the power to make herself whole again. We are reminded of *Coyolxauhqui* and of our power to heal ourselves through the waxing and waning cycles of the moon. Like the *corrido* (ballad) of Cortez and the folk hero told by Paredes, *Coyolxauhqui* also signifies a heroine, and the ways in which hegemonic discourse creates a sense of emotional, psychological, social, and, a mind, body and spiritual (dis)memberment of Mexican Americans, Mexicans and, of all people.

Since we maintain *confianza* (confidence and trust) in the *temazkal*, I will only share my experience of performative storytelling through the story of *Coyolxauhqui* in the *temazkal*. For me, this storytelling creates a healing space that encourages self-reflection and provides deep intuitive insight toward personal and, or interpersonal conflict. As a result, healing manifests as internal or external emoting of thoughts and feelings in the *temazkal*—a safe, comforting and supportive space. Such insight and release of emotions has strengthened me and inspired a greater determination to resolve personal and interpersonal conflicts. Hence, the performative storytelling of *Coyolxauhqui* in the *temazkal* and its effects illustrate Paredes's and Limon's contention that performers are political agents, because personal convictions intersect with political positionality. For instance, I once participated in a *temazkal* with *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca*.

During this particular ceremony, I prayed for insight regarding internal conflict I had with a man who I had been dating on and off for several years. The greatest conflict between us was that he was not ready to commit. After I shared my dilemma with the other women in the *temazkal* and prayed for insight toward this conflict, I felt better. And, I walked away from that *ceremonia* with more confidence toward my decision to continue dating this man, with standards, but without the expectation that the relationship would evolve.

I begin this essay with a discussion of Briggs's insights regarding biases of non-Native ethnographers. Next, I briefly discuss Jose Limón's and Richard Bauman's contention that performance has the ability to (re)imagine social dynamics beyond the performative space. I then move to a discussion about specific Mexican American ethnographic and performance works, to demonstrate the ways in which academics, Américo Paredes, Jose Limón and others underscore that performance is inherently political. I begin this section by demonstrating the importance of performative storytelling. And, draw from Paredes's border hero Cortez, told in *corridos*—a Mexican folksong about struggle and injustice, and compare Cortez to the *Nahuatl* deity and protagonist *Coyolxauhqui* to demonstrate the ways in which Mexican American and *Nahuatl* Indigenous storytelling and their protagonists tell of societal injustice and ways in which to overcome it.

Next, I discuss Limón's assertion regarding *Mexicano's* performance of the polka dance, namely, that the dance enacts a "struggle for meaningful identity, a struggle sited upon the body."[1] I draw from Limón's assertion to illustrate the similar ways in which the ritual performances of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo* embody "struggle for meaningful identity, a struggle sited upon the body." I then proceed to discuss Richard Flores's *Los Pastores,* where I implement his argument, that performance "is a collective representation that 'speaks,' like other

forms of symbolic alignment, to the social desires, sacred longings, and personal motivations of its performance community,[2] and to illuminate the ways in which the ritual performances performed by my ceremonial community also 'speak,' to the social desires, sacred longings, and personal motivations like, social justice, healing and wellness. I then discuss Elisa Huerta's contention that through the performance of *la Danza Azteca*, the *danzantes* develop an "oppositional consciousness" that resists social inequalities,[3] to demonstrate the ways in which the *danzantes* of my ceremonial community also utilize *danza Azteca* as a site for "oppositional consciousness." I then discuss Laura Larco's study of *la mesa curanderismo ceremonia*, which enables both the patient and community participants "to create and recreate their community, their identity," and links between the past and present,[4] to illustrate the ways in which the traditional healing practiced by the *promotoras* of my ceremonial community also facilitate the patient to create and recreate their community, environment, and identity through the healing process. Finally, I draw from the *promotoras'* approach to healing to demonstrate my assertion that traditional medicine heals deep wounds and (dis)eases caused by trauma, and generational trauma.

Principally, in this essay, I contend that Américo Paredes and Jose Limón argue for understanding performers as political agents. And, that through ritual performance my ceremonial community explicitly conceptualize themselves as participant in Chicano and Indigenous struggles for social justice.[5] And, I discuss some of my participant observations and examine scholarship by Mexican American and Latino anthropologists, and performance scholars, such as Américo Paredes, Jose Limón, Richard Flores, Elisa Huerta, and Laura Larco to illuminate my findings, and the practitioners I know and write about.

Through ritual performance the practitioners explicitly conceptualize themselves as participant in Chicano and Indigenous struggles for social justice. The academics noted above all conducted participant observations on expressive cultural forms within Mexican American and Latino communities located in Texas, California, New Mexico, México, and Peru. Within this essay, I hope to provide a deeper understanding of the politics, agency and social justice struggles involved in the ritual performances of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo* performed by my ceremonial community.

In a return to my discussion about my experience in the *temazkal*, today, I am grateful for the support, insight and strength I received from that *temazkal,* because now this man and I are in a happy committed relationship, with standards and expectations of mutual respect. This example demonstrates an experience and process of "the personal is political,"[6] in that, although I had some doubts, I decided to stand my ground and see our relationship through. I knew then that if this relationship ultimately did not work out, I would be disappointed, but not devested. And, I was willing to take that risk. This example, demonstrates "the personal is political," because, I maintained my integrity and acted upon my own volition. I defied the traditional cultural, and Catholic religious teachings I had been brought up, which told women that we should be "married" or, according to my mother, that my sister and I should only be sexually intimate "with someone you love" and "with someone who loves you," of course. However, as an independent, adult culturally mixed woman, I challenged these cultural and religious mores. Instead of allowing these mores to dictate the parameters of *my* relationship, *I determined* these parameters. I also challenged the gender dynamics existent in our relationship, by questioning and disagreeing with this man at times—such defiance completely went against traditional Mexican American, conservative, hegemonic, patriarchal notions of female gender roles and

expectation of subservience. Importantly, both Mexican American and Indigenous women face challenges regarding traditional cultural and religious gendered mores and unequal gendered power dynamics.

Challenging traditional cultural, religious and dominant societal gendered dynamics was, and is, an enactment of the "the personal is the political." Hence, the ritual performance of the *temazkal* and its empowering effects upon me illustrate this essay's argument, that Paredes and Limón find that performers embody political agency through performance. And, that through ritual performance the practitioners explicitly conceptualize themselves as participant in Chicano and Indigenous struggles for social justice.

It is important to state that I implement the terms Chicano(s) and Mexican American(s) as politicized Mexican Americans did during the Chicano Movement, to indicate Mexican Americans' recognition of their indigeneity and resistance to hegemony. However, it is important to state that during and after the Chicano movement not all Mexican Americans who recognized their indigeneity and possessed an oppositional consciousness toward hegemony identified as Chicano. This is the case for myself and for some of the practitioners of my ceremonial community. Importantly, my use of the term Chicano is meant to emphasize that the Mexican Americans and Mexicans of my ceremonial community understand themselves as a diaspora of interculturally mixed Indigenous peoples. And, with this understanding the practitioners privilege their Indigenous heritage.

Folklorist and anthropologist Charles Briggs provides valuable insights regarding inherent biases among "non-native" ethnographers. Drawing from scholars of anthropology, philosophy, and social science, such as James Clifford and George Marcus; Vincent Crapanzano; Hans-Georg Gadamer; Clifford Geertz; and Paul Rabinow and William Sullivan, and Briggs

maintain that "the consciousness of scholars is shaped by their gender, social class, ethnographic group, [and I add race], and geographic region."[7] White male perspectives often align with those of hegemonic society. As such, their ability to perceive and comprehend the unequal social dynamics of race, class, and gender of their subaltern research participants is often limited.[8] In addition, my understanding of race derives from Michael Omni, Howard Winant, and Jack Forbes's conceptualizations. These scholars maintain that race is a social construction, based on a social hierarchy, in which white people are at the top, and PoC, including Indigenous peoples are subaltern.[9] This dominant social hierarchy privileges white supremacy and hegemony, while subordinating all other racialized people.

Briggs includes Mexican American scholars in his work, such as Américo Paredes, Octavio Ignacio Romano-V, and Nick Vaca, to assert that white scholar's cultural biases can "contribute to reification of prejudice stereotypes of Mexican-Americans when conducting ethnographic research."[10] The perpetuation of such stereotypes throughout the 20th century created tensions between Chicano and white scholars and motivated Chicano academics to conduct and publish research about their own communities in order to correct degrading misperceptions about their culture.[11] Briggs's research offered an insider's view of Mexican American communities, and corrected biased research that aligned with racist dominant societal views of these communities. During this era, Anglo academicians argued that the insider perspective potentially created its own biases. Mexican American ethnographers Paredes and Richard Flores challenged such arguments by contending that insiders' possess a culturally specific knowing and understanding not perceived by non-Native researchers.[12] I agree.

The selected Chicano performance scholarship included in this study indicate that performance *is* inherently politically driven. In addition, both Bauman and Limón argue that

performance has the ability to (re)imagine social dynamics beyond the performative space.[13] For instance, these scholars' contend that performance can politicize ethnic community participants—a cognitive transformation that I too found to be true among the Mexican American practitioners and audience members of *Angelitas*, as a result of their participation in ceremony. In the proceeding section, I discuss Paredes's, Limón's and other ethnographers works, which found ways in which performance is politically motivated.

Mexican American Ethnographic and Performance Scholarship

Américo Paredes's *With His Pistol in His Hand* is an ethnographic study of the performance of song and story along the Texas/Mexican borderlands. Paredes informs the reader that the *corrido* is a Mexican ballad or folksong that was performed by Texas-Mexicans during the early to mid-twentieth century to express their culture, identity, and experience of racialized violence and resistance along the U.S.-Mexican borderlands. Paredes underscores that the societal pressures and inequalities of hegemony influences oppositional positionality, which he demonstrates through the border hero protagonist Cortez. I implemented Paredes's famous text and interpretation of Mexican American culture as a template for my participant observations. Incorporating this model enabled me to understand *Nahuatl* mythological protagonists conveyed within ritual performances of *danza Azteca and curanderismo*. For instance, during several of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca's temazkallis*, I witnessed ceremonial leaders Sophia and Vanessa of encourage the healing process during full and new moon *temazkalli ceremonias*. They drew upon the story of *Coyolxauhqui*, which tells of a battle between the *Nahuatl* moon deity and her brother *Huitzilopochtli*, god of the sun and war. During this struggle *Coyolxauhqui* was cute into pieces by *Huitzilopochtli*. Yet, despite her dismemberment, *Coyolxauhqui* possessed the power to make herself whole again. We are reminded of *Coyolxauhqui*, and of our power to (re)member

and heal ourselves through the waxing and waning cycles of the moon. *Coyolxauhqui* symbolizes the ways in which hegemonic society creates a sense of emotional, psychological, social and, mind, body, and spirit (dis)memberment of peoples of Mexican decent. Hence, when we recall *Coyolxauhqui* we summon the inner strength and power to challenge antagonistic forces within society and within our interpersonal relationships that cause conflict and pain. *Coyolxauhqui*, like Cortez, symbolizes a spiritual and political warrior, who fights for peace, justice and equality. The Indigenous story of *Coyolxauhqui* demonstrates that through story and metaphor, the practitioners of my ceremonial community become, as Paredes and Limón contend, political agents and, that through ritual the practitioners explicitly conceptualize themselves as participant in Chicano and Indigenous struggles for social justice. The majority of the women and men who participate in our *temazkallis* are Mexican American and Mexican peoples who acknowledge their Indigenous ancestry. And, at times enrolled members of in federally recognized tribes also participate in my ceremonial community's *temazkals* and Lakota *Inipi* sweat lodges. In fact, several years ago *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* practitioners and a family of Chicano *comadres y comadres* and their ceremonial group, which is connected to my ceremonial community and were taught by Lakota elders in the *Inipi* tradition, came together and built an *Inipi* sweat lodge from willow reed. Together, we share this lodge and use it as a *temazkal* for the *kalpulli's* Mesoamerican style sweat bath, and as a Lakota *Inipi* sweat lodge when our *comadres y compadres* use it.

Through these ceremonies the practitioners (re)imagine their social and political reality, where social justice and equality are promoted, and "healing justice," traditional healing, self-healing, wellbeing, and "self-governance" or self-determination is advocated.[14] In the following section I discuss how I implemented Limón's work in my analysis of the ways in which the

practitioners of my ceremonial community are affected by capitalist society and the ways in which they challenge it.

In Limón's *Dancing with the Devil* the author illustrates how dance is an expressive cultural form and act of resistance among the Tejano community of South Texas.[15] For Limón, the polka is both a musical form and performative dance.[16] To demonstrate this point he drew upon Hanna Lynne's notion that dance reflects culture and identity in his conceptualization of the dance hall as a site where the Mexican American working class assert their cultural identity.[17] Limón draws from Bernard Siegel to contend that dance may be a form of 'defensive structuring in which members of society attempt to establish themselves in the face of felt, external threats to their identity."[18] This defensive posturing demonstrates how "'inside[r] culture[al]" performance opposes threats upon their subaltern community by a "distinct 'outside' culture."[19] This resistance toward a "distinct 'outside' culture" is expressed on the dance floor as a "struggle for meaningful identity, a struggle sited upon the body."[20] Similar to Limón's research, my findings confirm that the practitioners of my ceremonial community assert their Indigenous identity through performance. This is evidenced in the story of *Coyolxauhqui,* that is told in the *temazkal*, among other *ceremonias*.

This *ceremonia* also demonstrates the practitioners' political stance which conveys Chicana feminine power and determination to seek and obtain human and equal rights and social justice for her gender and community. The "struggle for meaningful identity, a struggle sited upon the body" in the *temazkal* is illuminated by the women listening to, learning from and applying the Indigenous story of *Coyolxauhqui* in their lives.[21] The practitioners' struggle is evidenced by the sacrifice of their bodies which experiences intense heat, uncomfortableness by having to sit upon the hard dirt floor and limited space that they endure, due to a large amount of

people in the *temazkal*. At the same time, they counter these threats upon their identity and culture by (re)imagining their reality. Hence, these findings illuminate my contention that Américo Paredes and Jose Limón argue for understanding performers as political agents. And, that through ritual performance this ceremonial community explicitly conceptualize themselves as participant in Chicano and Indigenous struggles for social justice.

In the next section, I draw upon Richard Flores's work of the *Los Pastores* performance, which further illuminates Paredes and Limon's contention that performers are political agents, and ways in which the practitioners of my ceremonial community are political agents. And, that through ritual performance this community explicitly conceptualize themselves as participant in Chicano and Indigenous struggles for social justice.

In *Los Pastores,* Flores argues that this performance "is a collective representation that 'speaks,' like other forms of symbolic alignment, to the social desires, sacred longings, and personal motivations of its performance community."[22] Flores's contention motivated me to listen to the ways in which the *danzantes'* and *promotoras'* ritual performances "speak" to their "desires, longings, and motivations."[23] Such yearnings are exhibited in the *temazkal* through the women's *palabras*, which express inner and, or interpersonal conflict, sorrow and anger over injustices existent in the world, and their personal and professional aspirations.

Flores maintains that "cultural performance" in general, and *Los Pastores* in particular, "are not mirrors of the real but, events constructed from the same historical and social processes of the everyday, aesthetically reconfiguring the world of those who produce them."[24] In my study, I too perceived the ways in which *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo* (re)construct the practitioners' reality. For example, in a *temazkal* that I attended in the winter of 2017, and a *despidida* (farewell) *ceremonia* which *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* conducted in summer 2017, I

observed my acquaintance, Soria pray to be guided to make the best decisions for her academic and professional life. In the *temazkal*, she prayed for guidance toward her options and selection of a graduate program. By springtime of the following year, she had several options and chose the one she felt was best for her. During the summer *despidida ceremonia*, she was blessed by several of the *promotoras*, and *sahumadoras*, including myself who gave her a *despidida* and blessing *ceremonia*, but, in essence, her family, friends and community were all a part of this ceremony. All of this support, provided positive energy for her that day.

Due to the guidance Soria received during her participation in ceremony and prayer, she decided to accept an offer from an ivy league institution, succeeded in her program, graduated, and is now at home in *Angelitas* among her family, friends and ceremonial community. Most importantly, she now has a rewarding profession. Through ceremony, Soria received guidance from her spirit guides, and loved ones and ancestors who have passed on to the spirit world. These *animas* not only guided her, but also, helped her manifest her dreams. However, her accomplishments were not won without some struggle. Graduate school is intense and comes with struggles. Ivy league institutions, in particular, are cites of great racial and class inequality, where subaltern communities are the minority. This alone comes with its conflicts. However, it is evident that she overcame any struggles she may have endured and is now living her dreams. Soria is a Mexican American woman, who comes from a working class family. This factor alone placed her in a minority population of people whose odds of getting into an ivy league are low, because they, unlike their privileged, wealthy competitors, do not possess the monetary capital or prior ivy league primary and higher education, in addition, to family connections that give them an upper hand in the application process of such schools. Yet, Soria beat those odds. This example demonstrates Paredes and Limón's contention that performers are political agents. In

what follows, I apply Huerta's conceptualizations of "oppositional consciousness" to illustrate the ways in which the practitioners of my ceremonial community resist social inequalities caused by racism.[25]

In Huerta's "Embodied Recuperations" she argues that through the performance of *Danza Azteca,* the *danzantes* develop an "oppositional consciousness" that resists social inequalities brought on by racism.[26] Huerta's contention enabled me to better understand how the cultural forms of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo* resist social inequalities generated through racism. For Huerta, "the performative aspects of *danza* . . . allow for corporeal articulations of oppositional consciousness and potentially, although not necessarily, for progressive politics."[27] By drawing upon Huerta's notion of "oppositional consciousness," I too found that the practitioners of my community convey physical "articulations of oppositional consciousness . . . and progressive politics."[28] For instance, I once participated in a sweat lodge that *Coyote Bronce* conducted in the Lakota *Inipi* way. Pedro is a ceremonial leader *Coyote Bronce's* community. Pedro is of mixed Chicano and Lakota heritage. His Lakota elders taught him this ceremony. Pedro's wife Alejandra was also taught this ceremony by Indigenous elders and has learned and shared Indigenous ceremonial ways with Pedro. This Lakota lodge is located in the back yard of Alejandra and Pedro Luceñio's house in South, *Angelitas*. Alejandra is also a *danzante* and the *sahumadora* for *grupo Fuego*. During this *ceremonia* I released my hurt and anger over a colleague's criticism of my scholarship. The women in the *Inipi* gave me their *consejos* and comforted me. After the *Inipi*, I had a greater resolve to carry myself with dignity toward this person and remained civil toward them, even though it took some time for the tensions between us to dissipate. Today, I am grateful for the support, insight and strength I received from that sweat lodge, because this person and I have since amends. This is an example of the political

agency that Paredes and Limón speak of, in that, I took an oppositional stance in my research, one that acknowledges Mexican Americans' claims of indigeneity, even though many academics do not agree with this view. Through the *Inipi*, I owned my position on this issue, and refused to react defensively or disagreeably toward this person—an act, which in and of itself is "oppositional consciousness," because it denies the ego. Instead, I responded from a place of integrity, which helped heal my relationship with this scholar.

Importantly, I hold this stance with an embracement of my Mexican American and Native heritage and with an understanding that other Mexican Americans acknowledge their mixed heritage as well, whether or not they are members of federally recognized tribes. The academy is hegemonic political space with distinct hierarchies of power. My ability to navigate the differential power dynamics between myself and other scholars, particularly those in positions of power, is essential, and is an enactment of political agency. My participation in Chicano and Indigenous struggles for social justice, political stance, and desire for social justice in the academic environment helped transform the relationship I had with the scholar whom I had a conflict with, and enabled us to disagree, and still respect one another. I am grateful for this outcome.

In the next section, I discuss ethnomusicologist Laura Larco's article, "Encounters with the Huacas: Ritual Dialogue, Music and Healing in Northern Peru." Through Larco's work, I demonstrate how the *curanderismo la mesa ceremonia*, as conducted by the "*mestizo*" communities of the northern coast of Peru are sites where the practitioners are political agents, and personal and collective change occurs.[29] I additionally compare the similar ways in which the interculturally mixed Indigenous and Latino practitioners in Larco's study struggle for social justice, with the ways in which the interculturally mixed practitioners of my ceremonial

community, explicitly conceptualize themselves as participant Chicano and Indigenous struggles for social justice.

Larco maintains that the purpose of the *mesa ceremonia* is to rebalance "the physical and emotional healing of the patient."[30] The *mesa* is an *altar* that is laid on the earth and includes the natural elements of earth, water, wind, and fire, healing plants, and other ritual objects that assist the *maestro* or *curandero* in his diagnoses and healing of the patient's illness.[31] During this ceremony the participants include the *maestro* (teacher), his assistants, and a group of patients and their family member's. Both the patient and community are affected by the *mesa,* as this ritual along with the ingestion of the medicinal and mind altering San Pablo cactus, enables "people to create and recreate their community, their identity," and links between the past and present.[32] The "*mestizo*" communities of Peru's northern coast believe that illness is caused by physical, social, and symbolic means.[33] During the course of the *mesa ceremonia* both the illness and its cause are verbalized by the *maestro* and witnessed by all in attendance.[34] When imbalance exists between these relationships, "illness and disease occurs in the individual, which can affect the whole community."[35] During the ceremony, these interconnected relationships "are put into tacit and tangible play with one another, recreating the world. As the patient is healed, balance is restored to the patient and their family and community."[36] The efficacy of the *mesa* lies in the community support and mutual accountability between the patient, *maestro,* and community member participants. Moreover, the "reciprocal relationships" with the environment, the community, and the supernatural are integral to the effectiveness of this ritual performance.[37] Although many *mestizo* communities continue to practice *curanderismo,* some conventional medical doctors in Peru are detached from and often dismissive of traditional healing ways. This lack of understanding and disregard toward *curanderismo,* influences Peruvians to continue to

seek out *maestros* to cure a variety of dis-eases.[38] In fact, the number of *maestros* in Peru is growing to accommodate the people's desire for traditional healing.[39]

Larco's work reflected several similarities between the *curanderismo ceremonias* in Peru and the interculturally mixed interconnected ceremonial community in New Mexico, in that both communities continue to practice *curanderismo*. In the following section, I illustrate these similarities with a healing treatment I provided a woman in March 2017 at an annual free healing event in *Angelitas*.

Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca's promotoras participate in this free healing event every year. In 2017, I provided healing treatments at this event for the first time. My first patient was a young Anglo woman who I treated through healing touch (energy healing) and Reiki. At the onset of the session, I asked her, as I do all of my patients, "How may I help you? I do energy healing, which includes healing of the mind, body and spirit. I respect whatever you may or may not want to share. And, it will be confidential. It is up to you." She smiled and stated that she struggles with maternal generational trauma.[40] I nodded and said, "well would you like to get started?" She said, "Sure." I replied, "Ok, I'm going to start by connecting with you [energetically]. Is it okay to place my hand on you shoulder?" She responded, "Okay." I then told her, "Relax. Take seven slow deep breaths, then breath normally." She closed her eyes and began to take deep breaths. At the onset of the session, I felt heaviness in her auric energy field. However, toward the end of the session, her energy felt lighter, and her facial expressions had transformed from a look of sadness and tenseness to a peaceful smile. At the end of our session. I asked, "How do you feel." She smiled and said, "Better." She then asked, "Can you feel things?" I replied, "Yes, and I sense things intuitively. Can I suggest something? But, you can take whatever resonates with you, and leave whatever does not." She responded, "Sure." I then respectfully said, "This is the message

that I received when I was working on you. You don't have to carry this trauma. It isn't your responsibility to hold onto it. Let it go." We also spoke about her relationship with the family member who she was holding this trauma for. She pensively looked at me contemplating my words. After which, she smiled, thanked me and asked if I had a card. I explained, "I only do healings for healing events with *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca*, because I'm working on my dissertation right now, and don't have much time. But, if you want to have regular healings, talk to Sophia." As I said this, I looked in the direction of where Sophia was doing healings moved my hand toward where Sophia was giving *platicas* and *limpias*. My patient looked in the direction of where Sophia was, smiled and, "Okay," Thank you." I will now discuss specific similarities between my and Larco's study.

During the healing *ceremonia* that I provided this woman, I, like Larco, witnessed "accountability," and "healing" take place with the patient in the ceremonial space.[41] This was evidenced by the woman acknowledging that she carried her family member's trauma, and realization that she can choose to continue causing her own suffering or, choose to let it go, and manifest healing. I witnessed a rebalancing of this patient's "physical and emotional" state of being, evidenced by her breathing becoming relaxed and calm, her posture change from being slouched to becoming upright, and her facial expression changed from appearing uncomfortable to appearing peaceful.[42] I observed this woman receive insight from my healing treatment and *consejos*, which may have inspired her to "create and recreate" her family dynamic or "community" and "identity." But, she definitely made links between the past trauma her family member experienced and the present,[43] which facilitated her healing during that session. Like the *maestro* in Larco's study, I too verbalized the patients "illness and its cause," and a means of healing. Moreover, this patient shared with me a malady she recognized, which was the

imbalanced dynamic was causing a strain on her relationship with her relative who was the original victim of the generational trauma that they both were enduring.[44] During the ceremony, these interconnected relationships were "put into tacit and tangible play with one another, recreating the world. As the patient [was] healed, balance [was] restored to the patient and their family and community."[45] The efficacy of this ceremony, like the *mesa*, lies in the community support of others in the ceremonial space, and mutual accountability between the patient and healer, and community members,[46] or, in the case of the woman I provided healing for, between her, myself and the other healers in at the healing health fair. And, beyond this ceremonial space this patient's healing could potentially transcend the ceremonial space to include herself, her relative, and additional family members. The "reciprocal relationships" with the environment, community, and the supernatural [were], as in Larco's study, integral to the efficacy of this ritual performance.[47]

Importantly, the ritual performance that I participated in with this patient demonstrates my argument, that performers are political agents. And, that through ritual performance the *promotoras*, who were providing healing treatments that day, explicitly conceptualize themselves as participant in Chicano and Indigenous struggles for social justice. Hence, the *promotoras* are political agents, because, they believe in making traditional healing available for everyone. They believe that practicing and promoting natural healing ways that enable us to heal ourselves—a perspective that counters hegemonic conventional medicine, and health insurance providers—capitalist systems that value dominant medical cures in the form of prescribed medication. Such capitalist values contribute to the United States high amount of (dis)ease and dependency on pharmaceutically manufactured medication.[48] These values influence the U.S. government to priorities money spent toward our health care system, which generate high monetary return

through pharmaceuticals and medical visits, instead of investing in preventative measures that maintain human health and wellness.[49] Americans would be healthier if the U.S. placed a higher value on preventative measures that promote health and wellness, like Japan—a country that has the highest rate of healthy centennial citizens worldwide, because this country values traditional forms of health and wellness. If the U.S. had similar values and assisted traditional healers in the promotion and accessibility of natural healing, without it being coopted or conventionalized, wellness, quality of life, and the ability to self-heal, which Sophia calls "healing justice,"[50] would prevail. This "healing justice" is social justice.

Furthermore, through ritual performance the *promotoras* conceptualize themselves as participant in Chicano and Indigenous struggles for social justice, because they privilege their Indigenous identity, and work with members of federally recognized tribes in their collective effort to promote healing justice. As such, their work is political, because they continue Mesoamerican traditional medicine and traditional Indigenous medicine through the continued practice of Mesoamerican forms of healing and curing, which help people heal from their ailments, and help survivors of generational trauma and gendered violence heal from the abuse and disfunction they have endured. Abuse and trauma are political issues, especially given the fact that in the state of New Mexico, Hispanic and Native American women suffer disproportionate rates of domestic violence (abuse/trauma) than their non-ethnic counterparts. An Analysis of 2017 data from the New Mexico Interpersonal Violence Data Central Repository, indicated that,

> Approximately three-quarters (71%) of the domestic violence victims identified by law enforcement were female. Ninety-two percent of the adult-victims served by domestic violence service providers were female.

> New Mexico victims of domestic violence, as reported by law enforcement, were predominantly 19-45 years old (62%). . . . Native American survivors (13%) are represented significantly more among victims than their representation in the state population (2.5% and 10.9%, respectively). Similarly, adult victims, as reported by domestic violence service providers, were predominantly 22-40 years old (61%) and Hispanic (51%).[51]

As working class, college educated, culturally mixed Indigenous, Mexican American and immigrant women, the *promotoras* of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* are quite aware of gendered violence, in which Hispanic, Native and all women suffer in the state of New Mexico and throughout the U.S. at the hands of patriarchal, *machismo*, misogynistic male abusers. For example, during multiple conversations I had with Sophia about my research, I stated that my study demonstrated various maladies that the Mexican American and Mexican *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* community members endure, such as substance abuse, and Sophia emphasized, "and domestic violence."[52]

In personal and group conversations with Sophia the *mujeres* (women) of our *kalpulli* described the impact of generational trauma among Mexican Americans, particularly in terms of various disorders like anxiety and obsessive compulsive disorder. Sophia asserted that traditional medicine in comparison to the United States medical approach, is a more efficient and effective approach to heal trauma and other illnesses and (dis)eases. Mesoamerican traditional medicine and other traditional forms of medicine implemented by the *promotoras* can heal deep wounds and (dis)eases caused by trauma, generational trauma, and heal common and specific ailments that the dominant medical system heals well, like a sinus infection, or broken leg.

In spring 2017 Sophia gave a public presentation titled, "Decolonizing Healing"[53] at a non-profit organization in downtown *Angelitas*. During her talk she asserted, "We need to recover our traditional ways of healing, because conventional medicine is a sick system. If you're sick, they'll [the doctors'] tell you, 'here take this prescription'. It's a temporary fix. It does not get to the root of the problem," as Mesoamerican traditional medicine and other forms of natural healing do. In another conversation, Sophia and I talked about how my research was going to benefit our community, to which I stated, "I am going to show that ceremony helps us overcome various forms of abuse and inequalities in society."[54] Sophia asserted that "poverty" was an additional inequality that our community endures.[55] When the *promotoras* of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* participate in healing rituals at healing events or in the privacy of their or their patients homes, they do this work with an awareness of the "de-spirited medicine,"[56] Sophia spoke of that is inherent in the dominant medical system, because "it doesn't include a holistic approach" of healing the mind, body and spirit.[57] The *promotoras* practice Mesoamerican traditional medicine and other traditional and natural healing ways to help their patients heal from (dis)eases such as trauma, generational trauma, domestic violence, substance abuse, and poverty. The *promotoras'* approach healing with their intuition, to discover the original source of the patient's (dis)ease and they treat the person through a holistic healing approach. Such an approach helps the patients and community realize the agency they have within themselves, to embody it and, act upon it.

The points I made above support my argument that Paredes and Limón argue for understanding performers as political agents. And, that through ritual ceremony my ceremonial community explicitly conceptualize themselves as participant in Chicano and Indigenous struggles for social justice, because they ontologically and epistemologically understand

themselves as intercultural mixed peoples of Indigenous and Mexican descent, who privilege their indigeneity, and continue to practice Mesoamerican traditional medicine that was passed down intergenerationally within our families and communities. As Audre Lorde states, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare."[58] The practitioners of my ceremonial community put theory such as Lorde's into practice through ritual performance. The practitioners ceremonies are spiritual, religious acts, that embody a proud, powerful community which enacts agency by acting toward the fulfillment of social justice efforts, such as healing justice, immigrant rights, and gender equality—all of which are manifestations of my ceremonial community's (re)imagined society.

Conclusion

Within this essay, I hope I have provided a deeper understanding of the politics, agency and social justice struggles involved in the ritual performances of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo* performed among my ceremonial community.

In chapter four, I discuss my perception of the ways the *danzantes* and *promotoras* embody, what I perceive as the spiritual warrior, healing warrior, community warrior, and teaching warrior role models. Through these roles they continue to implement Indigenous *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican thought and philosophy. And, transfer *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican religious, cultural and ceremonial beliefs and practices, such as the notion of "*Tu eres mi otro yo*/You are my other self,"[59] to the younger generations of practitioners, and teach their ethnic community and the greater *Angelitas* community about the interconnected and interdependent relationship that exists between humanity and the environment, about the healing properties of *plantas,* and about taking a holistic approach to healing. In addition, I underscore that these roles and ritual performances are spiritually and politically motivated, assert a decolonial positionality,

and perpetuate knowledge about the practitioners Indigenous heritage, culture and identity, which (re)members their connection to this land, one another, and with our Native American relatives in the Southwest and Indigenous relatives in México.

Notes

[1] Jose Limón, *Américo Paredes: Culture and Critique* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012); and Limón *Dancing with the Devil* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).
[2] Flores, *Los Pastores*, 2.
[3] Elisa Huerta "Embodied Recuperations, 2009.
[4] Larco, "Encounters with the Huacas," 35.
[5] In this essay I use the terms Chicano(s) and Mexican American(s) interchangeably to indicate Mexican Americans' recognition of their indigeneity and resistance to hegemony. Importantly, during and after the Chicano movement not all Mexican Americans who recognize(d) their indigeneity and possessed an oppositional consciousness to hegemony identified as Chicano. This is the case for myself and for some of the practitioners of my ceremonial community today.
[6] Carol Hanisch, "The Personal is Political," in Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader, ed. Barbara A. Crow (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 113-114. Also see, bell hooks cited in Mary Louise Adams, "There's No Place Like Home: On the Place of Identity in Feminist Politics," Feminist Review, no. 31 (Spring 1989): 26.
[7] Charles Briggs, *Competence in Performance: The Creativity of Tradition in Mexicano Verbal Art*) Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988, 370).
[8] Briggs, *Competence in Performance*, 370.
[9] Michael Omni and Howard Winant 2nd Edition *Racial Formation in the United States*. New York NY: Routledge, 2015; Jack D. Forbes 2nd Edition. *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).
[10] Briggs, *Competence in Performance*, 370.
[11] Within my research, I consider Briggs's as well as other aforementioned academics' perspectives regarding notions of outsider researchers—scholars who are not members of the community in which they conduct research. Although I consider myself an insider of my ceremonial community, at the same time, I am cognizant of the ways in which my positionality as a researcher, sets me apart from some of my ceremonial community members. Such distinctions include: my level of education, age, gender, class and political views—all of which may contribute to differing views in which my informants and I hold.
[12] Richard Flores, *Los Pastores: History and Performance in the Mexican Shepherds' Play of South Texas* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995); Américo Parades, edited by Richard Bauman *Folklore and Culture on the Texas-Mexican Border* (Austin TX: Center for Mexican American Studies, University of Texas, 1993).
[13] See Richard Bauman, *Story, Performance, and Event*,1986; and Jose Limón, *Américo Paredes*, 2012, Jose Limón, *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American south Texas* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), and *American Encounters: Greater Mexico, the United States and the Erotics of Culture*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998); for conversations regarding the notion that performance has the ability to (re)imagine social dynamics beyond the performative space. Also see Alex Chávez, *Sounds of Crossing: Music, Migration and the Aural Poetics of Huapango Arribeño* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017); Richard Flores 1995; Elisa Huerta "Embodied Recuperations: Performance, Indigeneity, and Danza Azteca," In *Dancing Across Borders: Danzas y Bailes Mexicanos*, edited by Olga Nájera-Ramírez, Norma E. Cantu, and Brenda M. Romero (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Jose Limón, *Américo Paredes: Culture and Critique* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), *Dancing with the Devil* (1994), and "Carne, Carnales, and the Carnivalesque," *American Ethnologist* 16.3 (August 1989): 471-486; Roberto Rodríguez, *The X in La Raza: An Anti-book* (Albuquerque: Published by Author, 1996); Brenda A. Romero, "The Matachines Music and Dance in San Juan Pueblo and Alcade, New México: Contests and Meanings" (Ann Arbor: U.M.I, 1993); Américo Paredes "On Ethnographic Work among Minority Groups: A Folklorist's Perspective." In Richard Bauman ed. Folklore and Culture on the Texas-Mexican Border. Austin: CMAS Books, Center for Mexican American Studies, University of Texas at Austin, 1993; and Américo Paredes, *With a Pistol in His Hand* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1998; © 1958), for scholarship and assertions about the ways in which expressive cultural forms performed amongst Mexican American communities are inherently politically driven.
[14] Sophia has coined the term "healing justice" to refer to our right and ability to continue and share traditional ways of healing at no cost. She has also used the term "self-governance" to refer to our right and ability to continue traditional healing practices, and how we chose to self-identify culturally, ethnically, politically and socially.
[15] José E. Limón, *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American south Texas*.

Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994; 7.
[16] Limón, *Dancing with the Devil*, 165.
[17] Limón, *Dancing with the Devil*, 162.
[18] Limón, *Dancing with the Devil*, 162. Also see Bernard Siegel "Defensive Structuring and Environmental Stress", *American Journal of Sociology* 76:11-32, 1970, qtd. in Limón 1994, 162-3.
[19] Limón, 163.
[20] Limón, 163.
[21] Limón, 163.
[22] Flores, *Los Pastores*, 2.
[23] Flores, *Los Pastores*, 2.
[24] Flores, *Los Pastores*, 2.
[25] Elisa Huerta "Embodied Recuperations: Performance, Indigeneity, and Danza Azteca," In *Dancing Across Borders: Danzas y Bailes Mexicanos*, edited by Olga Nájera-Ramírez, Norma E. Cantu, and Brenda M. Romero (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).
[26] Elisa Huerta "Embodied Recuperations, 2009.
[27] Huerta, "Embodied Recuperations", 16.
[28] Huerta, "Embodied Recuperations", 16.
[29] See Laura Larco, "Encounters with the Huacas: Ritual Dialogue, Music and Healing in Northern Peru," *The World of Music*, Music and Healing in Transcultural Perspectives, 39.1. 1997: 35-59, for discussions on the ways in which she refers to the interculturally mixed Indigenous and Latino community of the northern coast of Peru as *mestizos*.
[30] Laura Larco, "Encounters with the Huacas: Ritual Dialogue, Music and Healing in Northern Peru", *The World of Music*, Music and Healing in Transcultural Perspectives, 39.1. 1997: 35-59., 37; 41; 46-47; 50; 53-54.
[31] Laura Larco, "Encounters with the Huacas: Ritual Dialogue, Music and Healing in Northern Peru", *The World of Music*, Music and Healing in Transcultural Perspectives, 39.1. 1997: 35-59., 37; 41; 46-47; 50; 53-54.
[32] Larco, "Encounters with the Huacas," 35.
[33] See Larco, "Encounters with the Huacas," 39 for her use of the term mestizo to describe the interculturally mixed Indigenous and Latino practitioners of *la mesa* ceremony.
[34] Larco, 56
[35] Larco, 56.
[36] Larco, 56.
[37] Larco, 56.
[38] Larco, 37.
[39] Larco, 37.
[40] Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart was one of the first scholars to research "historical trauma", also known as "generational trauma." Historical, or generational and intergenerational trauma refers to the trauma that a generation endures, which in turn, has repercussions throughout proceeding familial generations. See Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, Josephine Chase, Jennifer Elkins, and Deborah B. Altschul's "Historical Trauma Among Indigenous Peoples of the Americas: Concepts, Research, and Clinical Considerations," *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 43.4, October – December 2011. Also see Roberto Rodríguez, and Patrisia Gonzales, "Diagnosing Internalized Oppression", http://www.sjsu.edu/people/marcos.pizarro/maestros/Gonzales.pdf, *Colum of the Americas*, 2005. According to Rodríguez and Gonzales historical or generational traumas for American Indians include, the boarding school experience, where several hundred (at least) of native children were physically, sexually, and emotionally abused. The effects of these initially traumas transcend across generations. Rodríguez and Gonzales maintain that intergenerational or historical trauma are the result of various oppressions inflicted upon Indigenous peoples, and Peoples of Color. These experiences are "collective" traumas, which include land theft, rape, physical and cultural genocide, "the killing of our ancestors, forced religious conversion, boarding schools, the demise of many traditional ways of governance, languages, and cultural and spiritual teachings," which has caused a "soul wound" (Rodríguez and Gonzales, 2005, n.p.); Waltars qtd. in Gonzales 2006, n.p.; Gonzales 2006, n.p.; Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart et. al 2011, 282). The repercussions of the wound have been passed down from generation to generation through its effects of "substance abuse," and its related problems, codependent relationships with the addict, and domestic violence (*ibid*). The effects of intergenerational trauma include "disproportionate rates of suicide on the reservations, diabetes, and men of color in the prison system" (Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart et. al 2011, 282; Rodríguez and Gonzales 2005, n.p.). This trauma similar to PTSD, in that, generations can experience "unresolved grief," rage, or a sense of helplessness—See Patrisia, "In the Spirit of Our Ancestors: Reconciling Post Tribal Stress Disorder," in *Column of the Americas*,

http://www.sjsu.edu/people/marcos.pizarro/maestros/Gonzales.pdf, 2006; and, "Trauma, Love & History," in *Column of the Americas*, http://www.sjsu.edu/people/marcos.pizarro/maestros/Gonzales.pdf, 2006.
[41] Larco, 56.
[42] Larco, "Encounters with the Huacas," 35.
[43] Larco, "Encounters with the Huacas," 35
[44] Larco, 56.
[45] Larco, 56.
[46] Larco, 56.
[47] Larco, 56.
[48] Teresa Carr, "Too Many Meds? America's Love Affair With Prescription Medication", *Consumer Reports*, https://www.consumerreports.org/prescription-drugs/too-many-meds-americas-love-affair-with-prescription-medication/, August 3, 2017. Also see documentary film Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick? Documentary film. California Newsreel with Vital Pictures, Inc. Presented by the National Minority Consortia of Public Television; and Outreach in association with Joint Center Health Policy Institute, https://unnaturalcauses.org/, 2008; and documentary film, *Happy*, director Roko Belic, https://www.thehappymovie.com/, Wadi Rum Productions, USA, April 9, 2011, regarding America's higher value and money spent on the health care system, instead of actual human health.
[49] Teresa Carr, "Too Many Meds?", 2017. Also see documentary films *Happy*, 2011; and *Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick?* 2008.
[50] Sophia has coined the term "healing justice" to refer to a person's self-governance, in terms of continuing traditional healing modalities and self-healing practices.
[51] Betty Caponera, Ph.D., "Incidence and Nature of Domestic Violence In New Mexico XVII: An Analysis of 2017 Data From The New Mexico Interpersonal Violence Data Central Repository," Kim Alaburda, Cover Design, and Distribution, Albuquerque: New Mexico Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, and Lisa Meyer, Graphics and Design, 2018: see esp. ii.
[52] Personal conversation with Sophia, *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* ceremonial house, South *Angelitas*, February 15, 2017.
[53] Sophia, presentation, "Decolonizing Healing," May 16, 2017, downtown, *Angelitas*.
[54] Conversation with Sophia, *Angelitas*, April 8, 2017.
[55] Conversation with Sophia, *Angelitas*, April 8, 2017.
[56] Sophia, presentation, "Decolonizing Healing", downtown, *Angelitas*, May 16, 2017.
[57] Sophia, presentation, "Decolonizing Healing", downtown, *Angelitas*, May 16, 2017,
[58] Audre Lorde, *A Burst of Light* (Ann Arbor, MI, and Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, First Edition, 1988).
[59] *In Lak Ech*, translated by Roberto Rodríguez, in *Amoxtli: The XCodex*, 2010, 18.

Chapter Four*: Danzantes y Promotoras Tradicionales*, Spiritual, Community, Healing, and Teaching Warriors

Introduction

During the year I conducted my year research, I had a personal conversation with Sophia regarding her progression in the Chicano Movement from being a Brown Beret who marched with a rifle, to becoming a *promotora*.[1] Regarding this transition she asserted, "I have changed my *armas*. I used to carry a rifle, and now I have my *sahumador* and *la medicina* (the medicine) for protection."[2] With her *sahumador* and *medicina* Sophia is a spiritual, healing, community and teacher warrior who shares her healing and intuitive knowledge as a traditional healer and ceremonial leader to help people who come to her for healing, which includes, other members of our ceremonial community, and primarily working class and low-income Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants who reside in *Angelitas*. The various (dis)eases that she helps them process and overcome include stress and, or illnesses related to poverty, family strife, domestic violence, substance abuse, which either they or their loved one experience, such as racism, sexism, and conflicts at work, among other maladies. Through Sophia's embodiment of these roles she helps her patients and community become aware of and fortify the relationships between their mind, body, and spirit, which in turn, helps them to become agents of change and gain the strength needed to heal the (dis)eases that plague them.

In this essay, I illuminate my perception that the *danzantes* and *promotoras* of my ceremonial community embody, what I perceive as the spiritual, healing, community, and teaching warrior role models. Through these roles the practitioners implement and share Indigenous *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican cultural, religious, ceremonial, environmental beliefs and practices. In so doing, they ensure the continuity of these Indigenous ways of knowing and

being. For instance, they pass on Mayan perspectives such as "*Tu eres mi otro yo*/You are my other self,"[3] in order to demonstrate our belief that we are all interconnected and inter-dependent on one another and our environment. The practitioners share knowledge about the healing properties of *plantas* and about the importance of taking a holistic approach to healing. Moreover, these roles are not separate from one another. At times, practitioners could embody one role, multiple, or all of these roles at once. It depends on the need to enact the appropriate role(s) for the work the practitioners are conducting, and the effects they are trying to create through ritual. In addition, I demonstrate that the spiritual, healing, community, and teaching warrior roles and our ritual performances are spiritually and politically motivated, assert a decolonial positionality, and perpetuate hundreds of years of knowledge about our Indigenous heritage, culture, and identity, which (re)members our connection to this land, one another, and our Native American relatives in the Southwest and Indigenous relatives in México.

I begin this essay with a discussion of performance scholarship that demonstrates the ways in which performance conveys "alternative ways" of knowing and being, and cultural identity. I then discuss the everyday experiences and identity conveyed through performance, to illustrate the everyday social conditions experienced by the *danzantes* and *promotoras*, which includes their cultural, religious, social, political and economic positionality, and the oppression embedded within these social institutions that they are subjected by hegemonic society. Next, I illuminate the ways in which the *danzantes* and *promotoras* of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* challenge racial oppression. I then describe Indigenous *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican tenants the practitioners follow on a daily basis. I proceed by discussing. And, I demonstrate how the *danzantes* and *promotoras* (re)inscribed an "alternative" way of "belonging"[4] during the International Workers' Day Protest of 2017. In the following sections, I discuss the ways in which the practitioners

embody the spiritual warrior, community warrior, healing warrior, and teaching warrior roles. And, that through these roles the practitioners offer wisdom, healing, and strength for our ceremonial and ethnic community. I then discuss the *Nahuatl* perspective, "*La danza* is meant to protect the medicine,"[5] to further illustrate how the *danzantes* and *promotoras* are responsible for "protect[ing] *la medicina*—a responsibility that ensures that Mesoamerican traditional healing is passed down to future generations of *danzantes* and traditional healers. Finally, I discuss Sophia's community presentation and workshop "Decolonizing Healing" to demonstrate the warrior teaching she offered in her effort to ensure the continuance of *la medicina*, and to inspire agency within the community of *Angelitas*.

In each of these sections, I ultimately demonstrate the ways in which the *danzantes* and *promotoras* are informed by *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican cultural knowledge and traditions through ritual performance. Essentially I argue, that because of my ceremonial community's observance of *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies we organically embody, what I call, the spiritual, healing, community, and teaching warrior roles through our ritual performances. These roles enable the practitioners to pass on this knowledge and create the social justice and "healing justice"[6] they imagine[7] for our ceremonial and ethnic community, and greater community of *Angelitas*.

In what follows, I draw from performance scholarship to illustrate ways in which my ceremonial community adheres to *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican Indigenous principles, such as the face and heart,[8] which I discuss in greater detail at a later point in this essay, and the five ethics of Indigenous epistemology and ontology that inform our ritual ceremonies, conveys our social and political positionalities, and enable us to embody the spiritual, healing, community, and

teaching warrior roles in order to manifest the social and "healing justice" we imagine for our community.[9]

Performance as Expressive Cultural Forms in Everyday Life

Ethnographer Alex Chávez conducted on the folk performance of the *huapango arribeño* and its *topada*, a fandango and poetry performance in Xichú, Guanajuato, he found that the *huapango arribeño* and *topada* expresses "alternative ways of belonging,"[10] and, in the fandango space of Xichú, Guanajuato, the performance invokes "a counter-public."[11] I applied Chávez's understanding of "alternative ways of belonging" and notion that performance has the ability to invoke "a counter-public,"[12] toward my analysis of the opening *ceremonias* of the International Worker's Day Protest and César Chávez march. During these rituals, the practitioners recognized their intercultural heritage, and privileged their Indigenous identity. In so doing, they identified as Indigenous people, who disregard U.S. national narrations of blood quantum requirements, which determine one's ability to be recognized as a member of a federally recognized tribe. The practitioners are aware of their controversial political positionality, yet, they proudly perform these ceremonies despite these tense political and social contexts instigated by capitalism—a power that does not value them as a people. The *danzantes* and *promotoras* are aware of their Indigenous ancestral ties to the Southwest, and Mexico, which allow them to claim their indigeneity and this land as their original homelands. In doing so, the practitioners (re)inscribe "alternative ways of belonging" as a people with distinct Mesoamerican cultural identity who challenge discounting capitalist racial scriptings of them.[13]

The contention that performance conveys cultural identity is discussed by several folklorists, anthropologists and ethnographers, including Charles Briggs, Richard Bauman, Jose Limón, Brenda Romero, Sylvia Rodríquez, and Enrique Lamadrid, who maintain that Mexican

American and Indigenous dance traditions, such as the *Matachines* and *Los Comanches* dances assert an identity that acknowledges that they are at once, peoples of Indigenous and Mexican heritage when performed by Nuevo Mexicano performers.[14] I draw from these scholar's notion of Mexican American performance as a reflection of their everyday political, social, economic and racialized experience, to illustrate how the practitioners of my community enact performance, in the performance space and daily lives.

Within my research, I found that the everyday political and social locations of the practitioners and audience members of my ceremonial community are "imagined" through ritual performance.[15] During these cultural expressions, the practitioners embody agency by (re)constituting their identity and political and social positionality. Through this (re)configuration, individual and collective community, self-determination and self-identification is manifested and expressed. The possibility of healing physical, emotional and spiritual (dis)eases is conveyed. And, individual and collective positive change becomes realized, by the adherence of *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican thought and philosophy, and living every day in ceremony. In the following section, I demonstrate how the practitioners of my ceremonial community embody the spiritual warrior role.

Ritual Performance as Resistance

Performance scholars Américo Paredes, Jose Limón, Richard Flores, Charles Briggs, Elisa Huerta, Alex Chávez, and Enrique Lamadrid maintain that ritual performance conveys resistance toward hegemonic capitalism.[16] Examples of this opposition were evidenced through the ritual ceremonies performed at the 2017 Medicine for the People annual healing event, and International Worker's Day Protest with the *danzantes* of *grupos Fuego* and *Maguey*, *promotoras* of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca*, and *comadre* and *compadre* community healers. Together

we challenged the dysfunctions our community endures and injustices we face, which manifest as various (dis)eases, such as domestic violence, substance abuse, racism, classism, sexism and homophobia. The practitioners of my ceremonial community are spiritual warriors, because of their opposition toward these dysfunctions and injustices, and because of the collective battle they fight with our community against these social problems.

Spiritual Warriors

During my observations, I realized that the practitioners embody the spiritual warrior role, which benefits themselves and our ceremonial community and ethnic community. They embody this role by being protectors and keepers of *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican cultural and religious knowledge, by sharing this knowledge with the younger generations of *danzantes* and *promotoras* and their ethnic community, thereby ensuring its continuity. The practitioners' embodiment of the spiritual warrior role is informed by *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican Indigenous worldviews. Through the embodiment of the spiritual warrior, they are healers, teachers, and community advocates for the city of *Angelitas*. I perceive spiritual warriors much like Anzaldúa's and Ana Louise Keating's perception of "spiritual" activists and the *danzantes* and *promotoras* work as "spiritual activism."[17] Keating maintains,

> [S]piritual activism is a visionary, experientially-based epistemology and ethics, a way of life and a call to action. At the epistemological level, spiritual activism posits a metaphysics of interconnectedness and employs nonbinary modes of thinking. At the ethical level, spiritual activism requires concrete actions designed to intervene in and transform existing social conditions. Spiritual activism is spirituality for social change, spirituality that recognizes the many differences

> among us yet insists on our commonalities and uses these commonalities as a catalyst for transformation."[18]

Through the embodiment of the spiritual warrior, *danzantes* and *promotoras* promote "spiritual activism," which affects personal and social transformation. For instance, the practitioners know that there is strength in *unidad*. This is evidenced in the ways in which the *promotoras* of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* and the *comadre* and *compadre* community healers, some of which are *danzantes* of *Kalpulli Éter*, donated their time at annual Medicine for the People healing health in *Angelitas*, and other health fairs throughout New Mexico, such as northern New México. By providing primarily low-income and working-class communities access to traditional and natural healing via monetary "love donations"[19] they provide a gift to the community and create "healing justice," and social justice, since many people of low-income do not have health insurance, and working class people's health care providers do not offer what conventional medicine considers "alternative health care" options.[20] The embodiment of the spiritual warrior is an organic collective decolonial project, in that, the *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican principles such as "*Tu eres me otro you*/You are my other self," "face and heart," and the five ethics of Indigenous epistemology and ontology teach people to be innately compassionate, have integrity for ourselves and others, respect our dignity and that of others, and to revere our environment and all in it. To possess and follow such teaching, one must have the spirit of a warrior.

Through the practitioners adherence of *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican principles, the practitioners create a sacralized space and *unidad* through ritual performance. This was evident in the rituals of the opening *danza Azteca ceremonia* and procession of the 2017 César Chávez march, and International Worker's Day Protest, and in the 2017 *San Isidro* y *Santa Maria de la*

Cabeza and blessing of the *acequias* and fields *ceremonia*. During these ceremonies the community's spirit and mood uplifted. I also witnessed how our *ceremonias* motivate community members desire to learn more about Mesoamerican culture, as was evidenced by the amount of people who attended and reattended the *Mexica platica* workshops or *tequios* that *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* hosted in 2017 and 2018.

The community is spiritually affected by our ritual performances and *tequios*. For instance, during our healing treatments at various health fairs, I witnessed our patient(s) experience a release of some discomfort they appeared to experience at the onset of the treatment. Then after their treatment, their energy was lighter, and they appeared relieved from whatever stress they endured before the treatment. I witnessed this at the Reproductive Conference in Bernardo, New Mexico, when Sophia and Isabel where providing a group of women Acudetox.[21] At one point I noticed a young Latina woman crying, and she appeared to be releasing something painful. And, while I worked on African American woman she became so relaxed, she fell asleep and I had to gently wake her at the end of our session.

In addition, I witnessed the political effect our ritual performances had on the community, in that, our ceremonies, have influenced community members to increase their political activity for local and regional causes. This was evidenced by the large turnout of *danzantes*, *promotoras* and Mexican American participation in the above-mentioned performances, particularly in the International Workers Day Protest where there was a large population of Mexican Americans, immigrants, and Native Americans, and these populations were also present at the *Angelitas* Women's March. Through these *ceremonias* and *tequios* the practitioners embody the spiritual warrior role, because through the ritual performances and this role the practitioners influence collective work toward positive change that prioritizes "human

value" and genuineness, as opposed to superficial material gain. And, we have a fighting spirit that challenges individualism and separatism.

Los Pastores: Performance *con* "*mas devocíon*"[22]

In *Los Pastores*, Richard Flores describes the sentiments and motivation behind the performance of *los pastores* play. The author maintains that when the practitioners conduct this performance in their *barrio* (neighborhood), there is "*mas devocíon*" that conveys the performers' "social world."[23] In this play one of the performer's primary aims is "to fight the devil and bear gifts to the Christ Child."[24] Symbolically, this fight represents the conflict between the good and bad forces of the world, such as selflessness versus greed and capitalism. Gift giving is another element of the performance, which occurs between the performers and their audience. Flores draws from Lewis Hyde's conceptualization of the gifting of art and inter-personal gift-giving, and from Mary Douglas' understanding of the formation of "human solidarity" through gifting.[25] Through the social relations formed between "the performance of gratitude and the performance of labor," which both the performers and the audience participant in through the work required of the performers to conduct the performance, and the work of the audience, which involves preparing food and other means of labor. This exchange of gratitude and labor sustains and reinforces bonds based on "sociability."[26]

Essentially, this performance and the interpersonal exchanges that occur through it are all "gifts,"[27]—gratitude expressed from the heart. Hence, *los pastores* is done *con* "*mas devocíon*" (with more devotion) because, for the performers and *barrio* residents, it is done through "ritual gifting" which creates "human value."[28] In contrast, *los pastores* becomes a spectacle for tourists when it is performed at the mission, and it is treated as a 'commercial' performance and commodity exchange by the San Antonio Conservation Society that hosts this performance. The

spectacle, commercialization and commodification of this performance decreases the "human value" established in the *barrio*.[29]

In my study I drew from Flores's use of gift giving to demonstrate the ways in which "ritual gifting" and the honoring of "human value" is shared for the *invitacion* only ritual performances in my ceremonial community. For instance, during the *Dia de las Animas velacion* at *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca's* ceremonial house, and the February 2017 *danza por* (for) *Dia de la Candelaria* (Blessing of the Candlemas, which is a blessing of the seeds *ceremonia*—my definition), performed at *danzantes* Frank and Rochel's home in South *Angelitas,* these *ceremonias* were performed *con* "*mas devocíon*"[30] and involved ritual gifting, through the giving of *comida* (food) *y champurrado* (and hot chocolate and cornmeal), and *copal*, among other gifts.

Gifts are meant to be shared[31]

Ojibwe scholar Robin Wall Kimmerer discusses the significance of gift giving from an Indigenous perspective. She maintains that we all have gifts, including animals and nature, and that these gifts are meant to be shared.[32] Likewise, a traditional belief of the Mexican America and Mexican cultures, is that if you have a powerful gift, such as the ability to heal or the sight of clairvoyance, among other gifts, you have been given this gift by God or Creator and are considered "a *don*" or *dona*, and are responsible for sharing your gift with others to help them when they are in need.[33] *Danza Azteca* is a gift, because the practitioners offer our ceremonies as a gift in exchange for the gifts we receive from *Mexica* deities and guardians. For example, the *danzantes* and *promotoras* honor *La Virgen de los Remedios*/*Mayahuel* to express their gratitude for the healing *plantas* and *remedios* she gives us. And, we honor *San Isidro* and his wife *Maria de la Cabeza* and bless the *acequias* and fields to express our gratitude for the stewardship and

protection *San Isidro* provides, the healing work of *Maria de la Cabeza*, and the nourishment the water from the *acequias* gives to the fields. In my ceremonial community, gifts come in many forms, through the ability to help others heal, sharing knowledge and teaching others, and by being supporters of the community—protectors who offer prayers, blessings, comfort and strength—which are all gifts from the heart. The *danzantes* and *promotoras* embodiment of the Spiritual Warrior enables them to embody other aspects of a spiritual warrior, what I call the Community Warrior, Healing Warrior, and Teacher Warrior. The spiritual warrior enables the *danzantes* and *promotoras* to move in between each of these warrior roles and, or incorporate all of them simultaneously.

The *danzantes'* and *promotoras'* embodiment of the spiritual warrior through ritual performance is an enactment of decolonization, because they assert counter-hegemonic beliefs which challenge oppressive social and political conditions. These beliefs include the five ethics of Indigenous epistemology and ontology—a selfless holistic worldview that considers others and the environment, and tenets that oppose capitalistic individualism, and settler colonial agendas. For example, the five ethics of Indigenous epistemology and ontology motivate the *promotoras* to provide community healing events, where they do not charge patients, instead they abide by an energy exchange, in the form of "love donations."[34] Examples of these "love donations," can include supplies for *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca's* ceremonial house, the patient's labor such as mowing the *kalpulli's* front lawn, or providing wood for our *temazkallis*, or money. However, no one is ever turned away for their inability to offer a reciprocal exchange. In what follows, I describe the ways in which the *danzantes* and *promotoras* of my community embody the Community Warrior role, which enables them to fulfill the community of *Angelita's* needs.

Community Warriors

A community warrior is a courageous advocate that fights for the rights of the people of their community. As a community warrior the ways in which the practitioners work with the community is by providing political and spiritual support for the community of *Angelitas*. This support expresses itself as political protests, offering healing treatments for free or through "love donations," and through community workshops or *tequios* that educate the community about Mesoamerican cultural knowledge and philosophy. It is for these reasons that the *danzantes* and *promotoras'* embodiment of a community warrior merits a robust discussion.

The *promotoras* and *danzantes* of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca*, *danzantes* of *Kalpulli Éter*, and the *comadre* and *compadre* community healers assert the community warrior role by facilitating healing and advocating for the community of *Angelitas*. Their embodiment of the community warrior is decoloniality in action, because, this role challenges hegemonic political structures that oppress Mexican American and undocumented Mexican immigrant communities in *Angelitas*. Undocumented immigrants have to live and work in the shadows of *Angelitas* and elsewhere in the U.S. because of the possibility of being found out, or reported to border patrol or ICE, and then being detained or deported. Due to this fear, the undocumented often pay taxes, but do file their taxes, because they fear their undocumented status will be revealed. Therefore, they do not receive tax returns, which would benefit their low to working class income. In addition, they often work under the table cleaning houses or doing construction work and other manual labor jobs to better conceal their undocumented status—this I have observed with Catalina and her husband George, who are *danzantes* of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* and are undocumented immigrants.

The practitioners are community warriors because they support and advocate for vulnerable populations like the undocumented. For instance, when Catalina and George expressed their fears to their *comadres* and *compadre* of *danza grupo Maguey* about the possibility of being picked up by border patrol, Catalina asked if we would be willing to write letters, if need be, on their behalf to speak to their characters and to confirm that they are not criminals or a threat to society, but rather are individuals who contribute to the community as hard ethical workers and members of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* and *danza grupo Maguey*. All of us were willing to write these letters, and again, Jennifer stated, "Yes, of course, whatever you need." And, Sophia was willing to look into the possibility of making the *kalpulli* ceremonial house a sanctuary space (safe house,) for undocumented immigrants. Our support of Catalina and her family and of other undocumented Mexican immigrants, speaks to our concern for undocumented people and willingness to support and protect this vulnerable population in *Angelitas*. And, we defy conservative republicans who would contend that we are aiding and abetting "illegal[s]."[35]

Through the community warrior role, the *danzantes* and *promotoras* pass on *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican epistemologies and ontologies. Similar to the healing warrior role, the practitioners draw from a holistic *Nahuatl* worldview of our community and environment, and understand that an injustice toward the most vulnerable in our community, like undocumented immigrants, is an injustice toward us all. The *danzantes* and *promotoras* are aware of the ripple effects of injustice toward the Mexican American and Mexican immigrant community of *Angelitas*, because of this, they intentionally implement a decolonial consciousness to maintain equality for their community. In what follows, I illuminate Chicano scholars' contention that performance within Mexican American communities enacts "oppositional consciousness."[36]

Performance as Decoloniality

Elisa Huerta and Chela Sandoval maintain that "oppositional consciousness" resists social inequalities created by racism.[37] Lamadrid's research found that "a proud *mestizo*" identity, which disavows hegemonic Anglo society,[38] is conveyed through the ritual performances of *los Comanches* dances. And, Laura Larco asserted that Peruvians that practice the *mesa ceremonia* are preserving traditional healing ways in the face of hegemonic medicine that does not value traditional ways of healing.[39] I draw from Paredes's, Flores's, Limón's, Chávez's, Lamadrid's and Larco's perspective that performance asserts a counter-hegemonic stance that opposes marginalization and narrow ascriptions of culture and identity.[40] The practitioners implementation of "oppositional consciousness" during their rituals is an enactment of decoloniality. A decolonial positionality acknowledges the indigeneity of interculturally mixed peoples of Indigenous and Mexican descent. This acknowledgment is disavowed by the U.S. government and tribal governments that require proof, via official documents and, or of blood quantum of at least one quarter.[41] The practitioners' claims of indigeneity defies hegemonic narrations of identity, that have sadly been emulated by tribal governments. In addition, *promotoras* defy conventional medical perspectives that do not value natural *remedios*, and ceremonial practices that rely on the patient's will to heal themselves.

The practitioners ritual ceremonies are spiritually and politically motivating, assert decoloniality and acknowledge their indigeneity. Through my use of Sandoval's and Huerta's notion of "oppositional consciousness," and Anderson's concept of "imagined communities," I maintain that *danza azteca* and *curanderismo* (re)imagine a collective (re)conceptualization of being in the world, spiritually and politically.[42] Specifically, I find that performance within Mexican American communities is a site of imagined collective change, which, in the case of my

ceremonial community, motivates action for actual community transformation. For example, I witnessed the energy of this community transform during the *San Isidro y Santa Maria de la Cabeza* and blessing of the *acequias* and fields *ceremonia*, where I observed the spirits of the South *Angelitas* Mexican-American farming community change from a serious mood at the beginning of the blessing, to an uplifted and light-hearted mood as they smiled, laughed and conversated after the *ceremonia*. I will revisit this observation in more detail at a later point in this essay. The *danzantes* and *promotoras* embody the community warrior role through the spiritual and political support they provide the community of *Angelitas*.

In late April 2017, during the beginning stages of my field work, I participated in an opening ceremony for an annual community healing event in *Angelitas*. As the *promotoras* of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca*, *danzantes* and healers from *Kalpulli Éter*, and *comadre* community healers formed a circle to honor the four directions, we noticed the large amount of people who had come to receive healing. As one of my elders, Sophia began to honor the first direction to the east she expressed gratitude for the considerable amount of people who desired healing due to the stresses of the new presidential administration. After expressing this, Sophia exclaimed, "Thank God for Trump!"[43] to emphasize the crowd's willingness to receive healing at the point in time. The space that the healers held, and the words Sophia spoke, provided support and hope for the community of *Angelitas*, during a time when their spirits were weary because of the new conservative republican administration that took office.

Moreover, the treatments and workshops that the healers offered for free healing, provided the community support and guidance toward the healing of various (dis)eases. Some of the modalities of healing offered that day included, *limpias* (cleansings), holistic therapy,[44] *platicas*, reiki, massage, cupping,[45] crystal therapy, and accu-detox, among other modalities.

And, the information booths provided resources about various natural healing clinics in the community. Because of the healing work we do that often accompanies our community work, the *danzantes* and *promotoras* simultaneously embody the community and healing warrior roles at such times.

In 2017, *grupo Maguey danzante* Catalina, and her family, along with other undocumented immigrants in the *Angelitas* area formed a grassroots organization called *Los Dulcitos* to combat the social and political anti-immigrant sentiments that threatened their families. Catalina and her family act as community warriors as co-founders and leaders of *Los Dulcitos*. This grass-roots organization advocates for and informs the undocumented community of *Angelitas* about their civil and human rights. Catalina's family was not alone in their fear of deportation and having their family separated. Many undocumented residents of *Angelita* became concerned for their welfare after Donald Trump assumed office. And, many U.S. citizens and residents of *Angelita* felt angry regarding not only the anti-immigrant sentiments of the Trump administration, but also, its anti-Mexican, and anti-LGBTQ sentiments, and oppressive capitalist aims.

However, these concerned citizens and undocumented immigrants asserted their resistance toward the Trump administration at *Angelita's* International Worker's Day protest on May 1, 2017 at Tewa park in *Angelitas*. The protest participants included grass-roots, non-profit organizations and the undocumented and documented immigrant community of *Angelitas* that joined in solidarity. At the onset of this event, two *danza grupos Maguey* and *Fuego* performed a *danza Azteca* opening ceremony for this event. We danced in support of our Mexican immigrant community and other immigrants. After which, the *promotoras* of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* and *comadre* community healers created a circle in front of the park's bandstand and held space at

each of the four directions, while holding our *sahumadors*. The sacred copal that we burned on the hot coals inside our *sahumadors* created a sweet scent, which in the Mesoamerican tradition, is considered *medicina* and blesses the ceremonial space of negative energy, and the smoke carries our prayers to the spirit world. As we held space, we smudged people who walked toward and stood before us to receive a *limpia*. During this time, I found it poignant that for a considerable amount of time, as we held space, no one walked into or across the circle. It was as though the community knew that we had created a sacred space. And, they respected it.

Also, during this event, many speakers, including a prominent female immigrant rights activist and community leader vehemently opposed the current presidential administration's anti-immigrant sentiments and made statements that spoke to the immigrant community's refusal to be intimidated and remain in the shadows. The people in attendance that day included both citizens and undocumented immigrants of communities of color. The undocumented immigrants intentionally made themselves vulnerable to assert their human rights and oppose the current racist administration that threatens them and their families. Importantly, they felt safe, protected by the ceremonial community and activists who support and fight for them. But, something deeper occurred that influenced this sense of protection. Such a phenomena reflects Sylvia Rodríguez's assertion of how religious processions, like the *San Isidro* and the blessing of the *acequias ceremonias* in New México, "sacralizes a landscape."[46] As noted earlier, through our ritual ceremonies, the *danzantes* and *promotoras* also sacralize a space, in that, through our *ceremonias*, energy is created that ripples through the community, making people feel guarded by our gifts of prayers and blessings. The solidarity was palpable that day, and members of my ceremonial community—motivated by spiritual energy and political consciousness, were there to support immigrant workers and their families. We created a sacralized space where bridges of

understanding, communication and "human solidarity" was established and reaffirmed with others.[47] A place where "human value" is honored.[48] As supporters for the people of *Angelitas*, the *danzantes* and *promotoras* embody community warriors. By being sources of spiritual strength, guidance and healing for the community, the *danzantes* and *promotoras* are community warriors for their ceremonial and ethnic community, and for the greater community of *Angelitas*.

The *danzantes* and *promotoras* embodied the community warrior role at the 2017 International Worker's Day, by sacralizing a public space where the *Angelitas* community felt, safe, protected and strengthened by warriors who fight for them.

In a return to the concept of "sacralizing landscape," I will demonstrate the ways in which the *promotoras* of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca*, *danzantes* of *grupo Maguey*, and *danzantes* and healers of *Kalpulli Éter* "sacralize landscape" through the ritual performance of the *San Isidro y Santa Maria de la Cabeza* and blessing of the *acequias* and fields *ceremonia* by offering prayers and blessings to the Mexican American and Mexican community of South *Angelitas*.

San Isidro y Santa Maria de la Cabeza and Blessing of the Acequias and Fields Ceremonia

During one *San Isidro ceremonia*, I attend in May of 2017, the community of South *Angelitas* gathers at a grotto and *altar* at a Catholic church. There, the ceremony starts with a priest who offers his prayers, then the *promotoras* of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* offer an opening ceremony by honoring the seven directions of the east, west, south, north, the heavens, the earth, and center—our hearts. Next, the *promotoras* smudged flower petals, which they depetaled for the *ceremonia*. After which, community farming families came toward the *promotoras* and *comadre* healers to have them smudge their gardening tools and seeds with our copal smoke burning in our *sahumadors*. After the smudging was complete and the priest finished offering his prayers, matachines *danzantes* offered blessings through their dances. After their *danzas*, the

community walked in a procession lead by the priest and *promotoras*. During the procession, the practitioners and community periodically stopped for the matachines to offer a dance. We also stopped to bless the *acequias* by having the community bless the *acequias* by placing the flower petals on the water within an *acequia*. Then, we proceeded to a large old oak tree beside an *acequia*, where the matachines danced and the *padrinos* or keepers of the Statue of *San Isidro* and *Santa Maria de la Cabeza* created an altar on the earth by placing a white lace material under a huge oak tree and then placed the statue upon it. There the *padrinos* offered prayers in Spanish, and a male Mexican guitarist offered some *cantos* in Spanish. After this, we proceeded to two community member's fields, which the *promotoras* blessed, and then children planted seeds. After this, we walked back to the grotto, where the *promotoras* offered a closing *ceremonia* and the matachines offered a final *danza*, then we all walked to the Church auditorium and enjoyed refreshments and each other's company as we ate Mexican food and watched a film created by a local community member about the importance of *acequias* in *Angelitas*.

During this ritual, the *danzantes* and *promotoras* embodied the community warrior role by spiritually and energetically affecting the community. I witnessed people's spirits transform, in that, in the beginning of the ceremony everyone seemed quite serious, most likely due to their hopes that this ceremony would bring abundance to the waters of the *acequias* and their fields. However, after the ceremony every one's energy was lighter, people joked, laughed, and conversed. They appeared happy. It was as though their faith had been renewed now that their fields and spirts had been blessed by collective prayer. This collective assembly and rejuvenation of spirts I speak of, reflects Durkheim's concept of "*représentation*" which includes "symbols, categories, concepts, legends, and myths" that are fundamental to social life.[49] The ritual

performances conducted by the practitioners are examples of what Durkheim calls “collective representations,” enacted through ritual gives society “cohesion.”[50] W.S.F Pickering via Durkheim maintains that “effervescent assemblies” within community stimulates “strong emotions” and ‘ecstatic psychic exaltation.’[51] The “collective representations” provided by prayer, copal, *flores, danzantes* and blessings are part of this “effervescent assembly” led by the *danzantes* and *promotoras* in the blessing of the *acequias ceremonia*. Through this “collective” representation “strong” emotions are involved, and “effervescent” assembly gives the community hope and faith in their crops prosperity and renewed happiness. By leading this collective representation and effervescent assembly in all the ritual performances performed by the *danzantes* and *promotoras* of my ceremonial community we are community warriors.

In addition, through the blessing of the *acequias*, I too realized that this *ceremonia* helps “people create and recreate their community identity, their identity,” and links between the past and present.[52] This is accomplished through the community’s participation in a ritual that was originally Indigenous, but with the colonization of the Spanish, it was borrowed by peoples of Mexican and Indigenous descent in New Mexico. Today, this ceremony continues through the *danzantes’, promotoras’* and community’s commitment to come together every year in mid-May to participant in a tradition of giving thanks to the *acequia* waters. And, a collective engagement of ritual gifting is offered through prayers, *flores,* and good hearts. The practitioners and community’s prayers are for the abundance of water, and for a healthy earth, *plantas*, and community.

Through the practitioners performance of this ritual, the tradition of honoring their reciprocal relationship with the environment and the responsibility to continue this veneration is palpable. This is an enactment of the five ethics of Indigenous epistemology and ontology, and

"ritual gifting." In essence, we teach the community by example. But, we do not share this teaching alone. The South *Angelitas acequia* board members, church and neighborhood community also practice this teaching—it is a collective community effort. Because the *danzantes* and *promotoras* act as teachers during the blessing of the *acequias*, they also embody the teacher warrior role during this *ceremonia*. Together, we honor an intercultural Indigenous, Mexican American/Mexican *ceremonia*—a past tradition that is just as important today as it was hundreds of years ago. Together, we observe *Nahuatl* thought and philosophy during the blessing of the *acequias ceremonia*, as we honor Indigenous values of "respect, reciprocity, relationship, responsibility, and renewal."[53]

Sophia, the Community Warrior

At the onset of this essay, I shared a Sophia's perception that she has exchanged her *armas*, from carrying a rifle as a Brown Beret during the Chicano Movement to carrying a *sahumador* today as a healer to protect herself and her community from the onslaught of racism, discrimination, stress, and historical trauma,[54] among other (dis)eases. Because of her fighting spirit and her conviction to create "healing justice" and social justice,[55] I perceive her as a community warrior. The healing, and social-political justice she creates is manifested through the spiritual activism and transformative work she does, as a ceremonial leader who leads ceremonies, such as the *temazkal* and passes this knowledge on to others, like me and *grupo Maguey danzante* Sarah. Sophia's commitment toward the healing work she does, which ranges from giving presentations about decolonizing healing, giving *limpias* to people and their homes, helping to organize the *Angelitas* Women's March, and hosting *tequios* at the *kalpulli's* ceremonial house, where we host workshops about *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican *cultura*, environmental and healing knowledge for the community via "love donations." All of this work

contributes to individual and collective spiritual activism and transformation, which inspires people to become agents of their own spiritual growth.

Sophia, along with members of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* and our extended *comadre* and *compadre* ceremonial community, are also community warriors, because of the healing and socio-political justice work that they do. Past and continuing workshops include teaching how to make *medicina*, such as tinctures, chap sticks and cough syrup, among other *medicinas*, and workshops, such as *Tloque Nahuaqu*, which was provided via love donation by Mexica knowledge keeper Carlo. This workshop discussed *Mexica* sacred geometry and the foundational philosophical and religious thought that contributed to the conceptualization and construction of *Mexica* pyramids. The workshops pass on Mesoamerican cultural knowledge and thought, which is empowering, especially to the Mexican American and Mexican participants. This work is socio-political, because, as a Mesoamerican knowledge keeper, Sophia, ensures the continuity of sacred, non-capitalistic perspectives that value interdependence and collective work, as opposed to individuality. And, she has emphasized the importance of the integral relationships we have with others and the environment, instead of perceiving ourselves as separate from one another and the environment. This knowledge carries social and political power because its precepts sustained the peoples of the Americas for thousands of years. As a knowledge keeper and ceremonial leader, Sophia is a community warrior who fights for the community's wellbeing and encourages them to find the inner strength and knowing to heal themselves and maintain wellness.

Sophia and Anabel, a member of the *kalpulli's concilio* (council), or lead organizing team, post invites on Facebook for these events, and will text the community *danzantes*, *promotoras* and *comadre* and *compadre kalpulli* community healers regarding upcoming

workshops as well. The Mexican American and Mexican immigrant community of *Angelitas* are the majority of those in attendance at the workshop. However, a minority of other PoC and non-PoC also attend.

Transcendence through Ceremonia

During our ritual performances the practitioners experience a transcendental state. This occurs in ceremonias, such as the *temazkal*, *danza Azteca*, *curanderismo* and rite of passage ceremonies. This transcendental state is stimulated by the ritualistic components of the ceremonies, such as the *unidad* that is created, the copal smoke, the *atekokolli*, the *huehuetl*, *sonajas*, prayers, *cantos*, and during transitional phases of the *ceremonia* as they intentionally offer their mind, body and spirit to the ritual.[56]

Danzantes y Promotoras, Spiritual and Political Agents of Change

The *danzantes'* and *promotoras'* ritual performances of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo* are counter-hegemonic enactments of decolonization that manifest "healing justice," and social and political change. During these ceremonies, the performers become bearers of *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican thought and philosophy, and agents of social change. In so doing, they inspire the community of *Angelitas* to become spiritual and political agents of change and to advocate for vulnerable populations of the community, such as people with low income, and women. For instance, I have witnessed ceremonial community members increase their spiritual and political agency with *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca*, which has been the case with Lucia, a young Mexican American woman who lives in South *Angelitas*. Lucia and her family were aware of the *kalpulli*, prior to Lucia's increased involvement. Lucia learned of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* from her mother, who was involved with the *kalpulli* several years ago. Lucia has a desire to maintain the knowledge and practice of *curanderismo*, so much so, that soon after she began volunteering

with the *kalpulli* in 2017, she spent several months with a *curandera* her family knows in México. I first met Lucia in late spring 2017, when she came to the *kalpulli* for a *temazkal*. The second time I saw her was in June 2017, when she volunteered with the *kalpulli* to help organize healing sessions the *promotoras* and *comadre* healers offered at a reproductive justice conference in *Bernardo*, New Mexico, a countryside city near north east *Angelitas*. The attendees of this conference were primarily Latina and African American women—populations of women who endured coerced sterilization throughout the 20th century in the U.S. and Puerto Rico—a policy that was enforced by congress.[57]

Many Latina and African American women also endure low income, and therefore, inaccessibility to health care. Given these factors, Lucia would not have volunteered her time if she did not have convictions about the disadvantages that these women face. After the conference, I saw Lucia at several *tequios* hosted by the *kalpulli*.

Another example of a practitioners increased spiritual and political agency, was with Anabel's involvement with *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca*. Anabel is a Mexican American woman from northern New Mexico. I first met her in 2016 at *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca's* ceremonial house in South *Angelitas*. During the summer of 2017, Anabel was a student of an annual two-week *curanderismo* program that occurs every summer in *Angelitas* at a major university. While a student, she also volunteered her time as a healer for the program's traditional healing health fair. Of this experience, she informed me that a conflict arose between her and two of the organizers regarding the in-depth amount of time she was spending with each patient and of the intuitive thoughts she expressed to her patients, which the organizers disagreed about. It is important to note that intuition is part of the healing process during a *limpia,* so it is odd that the organizers were against it, so much so, that written guidelines against it is included in permission slips,

which Anabel contested. After this experience, Anabel began spending more time with *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca*. During the several years that I've known her, she has increased her involvement with the *kalpulli*. For example, she has attended several *tequios*, has become a healer with the *kalpulli* and a member of the *kalpulli's concilio* and is an administrator for the *kalpulli's* Facebook page. In 2018, I had two *limpia* treatments with Anabel. For my second *limpia*, I went to her house. Before my healing session, we had a *platica* and she informed me that her grandfather was a medicine man and that she belongs to a family that has passed down Mesoamerican traditional medicine and Traditional Indigenous medicine intergenerationally, as such, based on our conversation and the healing work she does on her own and with the *kalpulli*, it is evident that she has faith in *curanderismo* and conducts this tradition with the conviction that it is an important tradition to continue.[58]

The *danzantes* and *promotoras* of my ceremonial community are community warriors because they inspire individual and collective community action, and they give the community hope and encouragement to manifest transformation and abundance in their lives, as is evidenced by Lucia and Anabel who became members of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* after witnessing the healing work that we do through *danza Azteca*, *curanderismo*, and *tequios*.

I now turn to the ways in which the *danzantes* and *promotoras* embody the healing warrior role and the ways in which *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican thought and philosophy enables the practitioners to enact the warrior role. And, I discuss ways in which the healing warrior role benefits our ethnic community, and greater community of *Angelitas*.

Healing Warriors

Through my observations, I began to perceive the *danzantes* and *promotoras* as healing warriors, because as practitioners of ritual, we believe the processes of ceremony as forms of prayer that effect healing and a desire to balance one's mind, body, spirit and, relationships with others in the physical and spirit world, and the environment. As healing warriors, the practitioners abide by *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican thought and philosophy as we draw upon an Indigenous view of the sacred, namely, the holistic conceptualization of the ceremonial space. Through the ritual of ceremony, as previously stated, we reach a transcendental state—a meditative state, where time, perceived differences and separations within and between the physical and spiritual world become non-existent.[59] The practitioners create a "sacralize[d]" state of being with our selves, others and the environment—where mental, emotional, physical and psychological wounds are healed and a stronger sense of being is manifested.[60] The following section evidences this.

During a *curanderismo* session, such as a *limpia*, the patient's psychological, emotional and physical states of being are treated. In the spring of 2013, during my first *curanderismo* treatment which I received from Sophia, she helped me heal emotions I was feeling due to an abusive experience I had with a colleague at my university. During my treatment, she expressed that the university is a colonial institution that recreates colonial abuse and violence, such as emotional and psychological wounds caused by patriarchy, discrimination and racism. She continued, "This abuse, makes us feel *(dis)membered,*" like *Coyolxauhqui*.[61] During our everyday experiences, we can also feel "(dis)membered" by other emotional issues that trouble us, such as conflict with family members, a loved one, or co-workers, for example. From an Indigenous Mesoamerican and decolonial point of view, a sense of (dis)memberment can also be

attributed to inter-generational trauma, or racial trauma that is past down across generations, even into a present generation.[62]

Ritual Ceremony and Historical Trauma

According to Rodríguez and Gonzales, intergenerational or historical trauma are the result of various oppressions inflicted upon Indigenous peoples, and PoC. These experiences are "collective" traumas, which include land theft, rape, physical and cultural genocide, "the killing of our ancestors, forced religious conversion, boarding schools, the demise of many traditional ways of governance, languages, and cultural and spiritual teachings," which has caused a "soul wound."[63] The repercussions of these wounds have been passed down from generation to generation and have manifested as "substance abuse," for example, and its intersecting problems, such as codependent relationships with the addict, and domestic violence.[64] The effects of intergenerational trauma include "disproportionate rates of suicide on the reservations, diabetes, and men of color in the prison system."[65] This trauma is similar to PTSD, in that, generations can experience "unresolved grief," rage, or a sense of helplessness.[66]

Critiques of Historical Trauma

Although there has been numerous publication on the origins and effects of historical trauma, there are some scholars who oppose this concept and maintain that it pathologizes American Indian (AI) peoples and obfuscates "colonial systems and structures that reproduce AI hardship."[67] These scholars argue that an alternative term which "does not invoke trauma or injury," such as "postcolonial distress" should be applied to American Indians who endure the effects of historical trauma.[68] Postcolonial distress would provide a better "understanding of AI hardship, health and wellness."[69] The notion of "postcolonial distress," is problematic, because it minimizes the "trauma and injury" that Native Americans and other marginalized people have

faced in the past, which effects their present, "*trauma and injury*" (italics my emphasis), that they continue to face every day in America.[70] My ceremonial community understands intergenerational trauma in this way, we and our ancestors have experienced historical and racial trauma, which are the "psychological and health" impacts of "racial violence and oppression" on "ethnic/racial minorities" intergenerationally.[71] It is part of our everyday lives. As such, we understand the need for healing on a deep multi-layered holistic level. And, the need to make such healing available to vulnerable communities—those who live in low income or in poverty and cannot afford conventional mental health therapy or cannot afford to pay for a naturopath. In my community, we receive healing and strength through *temazkallis* that are offered at *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca's* ceremonial house, for example, in which a reciprocal exchange is offered through love donations. And, if a participant does not have the means to provide such a donation, in exchange for healing, they will not be turned away.

Indigenous Insight About Historical Trauma

Diné professor of health science Jenna John also disagrees with the use of historical trauma theory to understand various maladies that Native Americans endure. On July 31, 2019, I conducted a telephone interview with John. During our conversation, she stated that not all Native Americans had the same experience in the boarding schools, which some scholars argue contribute to historical trauma. John stated, "My grandparents had a different experience than my parents, and I had a different experience than my parents."[72] Instead of blaming the maladies Native Americans experience as historical trauma, "I think it's poverty" that is to blame.[73] This poverty is structural and has an extensive connection with colonialism and legacy of displacing Native Americans from their homelands, communities and natural resources; relocating Native Americans onto reservations, where they were/are isolated from urban areas and there is a lack of

educational and employment resources. Due to this reality, many Native Americans residing on the reservation and those who have relocated off the reservation are disenfranchised and endure poverty, which contributes to substance abuse, domestic violence and crime.

During my interview with John, I asked, "How do you feel historical trauma—these maladies can best be treated and *healed* that are experienced by Native Americans or other marginalized peoples—Mexican Americans? She responded,

> I think if you're going to help somebody, you look for the positive things that you carry and enforce, and really encourage. I think that's the problem, when you get into pathology. . . . I think the kinds of intervention and *prevention* models really should start saying, maybe these people are healthy, they're bright. Maybe they live a very high-risk life, but it was a life, an environment that they were in . . . make it adaptable for them. And, that they are as worthy and as intelligent. They have discovered many things, invented many things. So, you put together a very positive picture of really the trust behind the curtain, it's the same thing if you have a child that grew up in England, they have all their history. It's the basic curriculum, the schools, books, media, that reinforces that they discovered so and so, and Einstein did this, blah, blah, blah. And, to some extent, I think the African Americans are using that to talk about [their] scientists did this and that, and the people that really lift up the lives of the culture of African Americans. We are so behind. We haven't done much of that. So, I think that lifts everybody up, in some sense if you develop not only curriculum, but the way you do media, and really zero in on the positive. Unfortunately, those of us who do research and get grants from programs, we are forced to always talk about pathology.[74]

I asserted, "There's money in victimry."[75] She contemplated my comment. I also stated that my *kalpulli* hosts community workshops that inform the Mexican American community of South *Angelitas* about *Nahuatl* sacred geometry, and other cultural knowledge, which she spoke of, such as our cultural history and contributions Indigenous Mesoamericans made to science, which is similar to the knowledge Gregory Cajete shares in his book *Native Science*.[76]

In my conversation with John, I affirmed,

> By the practitioners learning about their Indigenous heritage, becoming aware of and continuing our ancestors' ceremonies, we *heal* the historical trauma and racial trauma that we've endured and continue to endure on a frequent basis. . . . I have seen transformations in people, even in myself, we become more politicized. . . . And, we're very inclusive . . . we see Native Americans as our relatives and some of them take part in our ceremonies and vice versa, such as *Hamblechas* (vision quests), the Sundance, Moondance, *Xilonen*,[77] and other pan-Indian ceremonies.[78] Native Americans participate in *all* these ceremonies, like the Lakota *Inipi* and Mesoamerican *temazkal*.[79]

I concluded by asserting, "there's just so much healing and solidarity that goes on, and *all of that* is *very empowering*, it's strengthening, it's *very healing*."[80] John agreed.

In my interview with her, she stated that Indigenous people need to initiate the social up lift of their communities, by focusing on the contributions their people have made to society, instead of focusing on the adversity they experience, and by perceiving themselves as agents of change, instead of victims of circumstance. This, she affirmed, was a way Native people can heal the historical trauma and maladies they face. I agreed, and stated ways in which my ceremonial community does exactly what she spoke of by recognizing our Indigenous heritage and by

honoring the contributions our ancestors made throughout Mesoamerica and the Southwest. Through my ceremonial community's identification with our indigeneity, culture and traditions, we recognize our Indigenous ancestry, and take initiative in continuing our traditional ceremonies.

In addition, learning about the sophisticated intellectual and spiritual knowledge our ancestors shared through our *tequios* motivates a sense of pride within us. The *tequios* and ceremonies in that the practitioners participate in with federally recognized Native Americans disavows hegemony, which aims to keep us victims, subordinated and disempowered. Together—the *danzantes*, *promotoras* and Native Americans have a different vision, we see ourselves as relatives, as agents united in ceremony, strong, willing and able to overcome the injustices dominant society subjects us to. The practitioners of my ceremonial community acknowledge our Mexican heritage, yet privilege our indigeneity through our ritual ceremonies, *tequios*, collaborative ceremonies with Native Americans, and by keeping sacred Indigenous knowledge alive within our ceremonial and ethnic community. In so doing, we pass on Indigenous *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican epistemology and ontology and create a community we imagine—a community that is able to heal from their historical and racial traumas, and thereby, become stronger and healthier human beings.

"*La danza* is meant to protect the medicine"[81]

Importantly, the most essential reason why I perceive the *danzantes* and *promotoras* of my ceremonial community as healing warriors, is because through ritual performance, they continue *Nahuatl* traditions. Sophia expressed this during our interview, when she showed me a book by Gabriel Hernández Ramos, *jefe* of the *Danza Azteca-Chichimeca de Conquista Grupo* in Amecameca, México. Sophia informed me that this work was his dissertation, which he

published and titled *Cantos Ceremoniales* in 2007. This book contains a collection of *Conchero danza Azteca* songs, and in it, Sophia stated, "He says that *la danza* is meant to protect the medicine."[82] As keepers and protectors of *la medicina*, the *danzantes* and *promotoras* are healing warriors. Both *Conchero* and *Mexicayotl danzantes* learn knowledge about Mesoamerican medicinal plants, *remedios* and *ritual* (ritual). And, together, we act as healing warriors that fight for "healing justice," share this belief with the community *Angelitas*.

The *danzantes* and *promotoras* embody warrior roles through our decolonial spiritual activism that helps our ceremonial community, ethnic community and greater community of *Angelitas* heal from the racial traumas caused by white supremacy, racism, racial discrimination and violence. And, the practitioners fight for positive social change, equity and equality for their community and other marginalized peoples, such as undocumented immigrants and the LGBTQ community. By embodying the healing warrior role, *danzantes* and *promotoras* pass on *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican Indigenous epistemology and ontology which values sharing our healing gifts. I now turn to a discussion of the ways in which the practitioners embody the teacher warrior role and the ways in which this role is significant to our ceremonial and ethnic community, and greater community of *Angelitas*.

Teacher Warriors

Within my ceremonial community a teacher warrior is a practioner that is knowledgeable of *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican thought and philosophies and protects and shares these sacred epistemologies and ontologies. The teachings which the *danzantes* and *promotoras* share are derived from Mesoamerican religion, cosmology, environmental knowledge, *ceremonias* and *remedios*. Importantly, through our teachings and *consejos*, we draw from the *Nahuatl* concept of

face and heart. The face and heart concept come from a *Nahuatl* teaching, *In ixtli in yóllotl*/a face and a heart, or 'finding one's face and heart.'[83]

According to Yolanda Leyva, Miguel León-Portilla, and Gregory Cajete through the *Mexica Calmecac* schools, *Nahuatl* sages would teach their students how to be self-reflective, through a holistic approach of learning and expression.[84] Through this approach, the sages taught their students ethics and values that would enable them to connect their conscience and heart. These teachers informed the students about the interconnected and interdependent relationships they have with one another and their environment, and how humans thoughts and actions impact these relationships.[85]According to Mesoamerican philosophy, "to develop a strong face and heart was to acquire intellect, morality, and a sense of community."[86] Hence, developing one's face and heart inspires inner growth and a sense of responsibility to contribute to the betterment of humanity.

In a community workshop Sophia provided, titled, "Decolonizing Healing" she demonstrated the ways in which *danzantes* and *promotoras* embody the teacher warrior role. This workshop took place on May 16, 2017, and was hosted by the *Angelitas* Organizing Project, a nonprofit organization, located in downtown *Angelitas*, which serves marginalized communities in the city. I discuss my observation in what follows.

"Decolonizing Healing": *A Warrior Teaching*

The majority of the workshop participants were Mexican American, although there were some Anglo people and a Mexican American transgender man, who is a *danzante* of *Kalpulli Etér* and a *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* community *comadre* healer. At the beginning of the workshop, Sophia created an *altar* on a table, near where she was going to give her presentation. On the table she placed a red handkerchief, the *Nahuatl* four sacred elements of water, earth, air and fire.

Sophia also placed her *sahumador*, a lit candle, and white cotton bag on her *altar* that had the words "DECOLONIZE YOUR HEALING" written on it. Sophia asked the attendees to take a few deep breaths.

After a few moments, Sophia led the audience in honoring the seven directions. Afterwhich, she began her power point. The first image she displayed was of *Coyolxauhqui*, which was drawn in color by her daughter Adelita, who is an artist. Sophia kept this image displayed throughout her presentation. Sophia stated that the colonial institution of conventional medicine is "huge."[87] As she said this, she expanded her arms out to her sides to emphasize how expansive it is. She then asked the audience, "Where are some places where we learn about conventional medicine?"[88] Several audience members raised their hands, and Sophia wrote a list of their answers on a dry erase board. Here are the answers which the audience proposed: 1) "with our parents"; 2) "in our community"; 3) "at work" and 4) in "societal institutions." By conducting this exercise and creating this list, Sophia demonstrated where we first learned hegemonic forms of healing, and of sites where we can decolonize healing. She then did an exercise to further demonstrate the magnitude in which colonial thinking has upon us. She said, "Here's an exercise that we do in my undoing racism workshops."[89] Sophia then drew a box with dots upon each of the sections of the box, which included three dots on each of the four sides of the box and three in the center of the box. She then asked the audience to take out a piece of paper and a pen and draw the image that she drew on the dry erase board on a piece of paper and try to connect each of the dots without lifting our pens off the paper or moving our pens in a reverse direction. Everyone struggled with this task.

After a few minutes Sophia asked, "How did y'all do? Did anybody do it?"[90] The audience responded with disappointed exhales and were obviously perplexed by the exercise. I

too was perplexed. She then said, “Here let me show you.”[91] Sophia went back to the box she had drawn on the board and began to draw a large triangle which went through and outside the lines of the box, and she connect all the dots without lifting the her marker off the board or moving it in a reverse direction. Everyone was amazed. Some of the participants said out loud, “Ooohh!” And, some laughed at the simplicity of it, which they had failed to imagine. When she was done, she asked, “How many of you tried to make a box by connecting the dots?”[92] This was in fact the task everyone, including myself, had attempted. Sophia then stated, “This is how colonial institutions have us thinking.”[93] I stated out loud, “Think outside the box.” Sophia laughed and said, “Yes! Think outside the box to decolonize healing.”[94] Sophia then drew an atom on the board and asked, “Does anyone know what this is?”[95] An audience member raised their hand and said, “An atom.” Sophia said “Yes. It is the most basic part of life. It is a part of all of us. And, it connects us all.”[96] Sophia then stated, “This symbol is known by the *Nahuatls* as the *Nahui Ollin*, a symbol of constant movement and change.”[97] Sophia talked about the atom and *Nahui Ollin* to demonstrate their similarities and to emphasize the greater influences we have on one another to decolonize our healing.

The next power point Sophia displayed was a black and white image of two precolonial *Nahuatl* women aiding another *Nahuatl* woman give birth to her child. Sophia stated that in precolonial times birthing was a ceremony and that women would help each other in the birthing process, which was done in a *temazkal*. Sophia then reexhibited the image of *Coyolxauhqui* and expressed that for the *Nahuatl* people *Coyolxauhqui* is a metaphor for the ways in which we sometimes feel “dismembered.”[98] And, that “traditional medicine heals the mind, body and spirit. Conventional medicine does not recognize that. It only treats the body in certain sections. The doctors just say, ‘Oh, here’s this prescription for this or that.’ It is *de-spirited* medicine.”[99]

Through the embodiment of the teacher warrior, Sophia shares *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican medicinal, cultural, cosmological, and environmental knowledge. Drawing from this knowledge in her "Decolonizing Healing" workshop she taught the community of *Angelitas* about the differing approaches of *Nahuatl* and conventional medicine, demonstrated how the hegemonic "health care system is a sick institution,"[100] in that, it disavows the mind, body and spirt connection, and instead makes people dependent on prescribed medication, which does not allow people to develop an intuitive relationship with their mind, body and spirt.[101] This (dis)connect makes a person a stranger to themselves and prevents them from realizing that they "can heal themselves."[102] In contrast, the *Nahuatl* approach to healing aims to re-balance the mind, body and spirit in order to cure the individual of their (dis)eases and return to a state of wellbeing. Through Sophia's teachings she helped community members of *Angelitas* realize the importance of personal agency in one's approach to maintain health and wellness and that they *can choose* the best form of healing for themselves. As a keeper of Mesoamerican traditional medicine, who selflessly shares this knowledge and practices for the benefit of others, Sophia is a teacher warrior. Through her workshops, she shares the *Nahuatl* philosophies of face and heart and value of maintaining a connection with one's heart, mind, body, spirit and environment, which betters one's state of being and that of humanity.

Through my ceremonial community's adherence of *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican epistemologies and ontologies they inherently embody the Spiritual, Community, Healing, and Teacher Warrior Roles. In so doing, we acknowledges our Mexican heritage, and privilege our Indigenous identity. These roles and responsibilities draw from Indigenous thought and philosophy, medicinal practices, cosmology, religion and deities that guide us in our relationships with ourselves and our environment. Such a responsibility necessitates a

(re)imaging of our community. This (re)imagining manifests as we help one another with our innate gifts, help one another heal through mental, spiritual, and physical (dis)eases, and join in solidarity to fight against social injustice. Through *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican cultural ethics and practices, the practitioners embody spiritual, community, healing and teacher warrior roles that benefit our ceremonial and ethnic community, and greater *Angelitas* community socially, politically, and spiritually.

At the end of my interview with Sophia I asked, "How do you see yourself?" She responded, "I'm and elder."[103] I replied, "I see you as a spiritual warrior."[104] She humbly smiled and laughed. Despite all the knowledge and strength Sophia possess and the transformative impact she has on others, she remains a humble warrior.

Conclusion

The spiritual, healing, community, and teaching warrior roles enable the practitioners to pass on *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican knowledge, which in turn, inspires us to create the social justice and "healing justice" that we imagine for our ceremonial community, ethnic community, and greater community of *Angelitas*. Our "imagined community" also encompasses an existence, where healing our historical and racial traumas is possible, as well as developing an elevated condition for humanity.

Our ritual performances are spiritually and politically motivated, assert a decolonial positionality, and constitute traditional *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican knowledge about our Indigenous heritage, culture, and identity, which (re)members our connection to this land, to one another, and to our Native American relatives in the Southwest and Indigenous relatives in México.

In the chapter five, I create a dialogue between Chicano scholars and scholars of Critical Indigenous Studies, Latino Studies, and Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies, among others, regarding the complex tensions surrounding Mexican American's claims of indigeneity and their relationship to Indigenous peoples in the Americas. I also include my ceremonial community's perspective of this debate, as well as my own view.

Notes

[1] Sophia, Interview, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, December 19, 2017.
[2] Sophia, Interview, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, December 19, 2017.
[3] *In Lak Ech*, translated by Roberto Rodríguez, in *Amoxtli: The XCodex*, 2010, 18.
[4] Teresa Carr, "Too Many Meds? America's Love Affair With Prescription Medication", *Consumer Report*s, https://www.consumerreports.org/prescription-drugs/too-many-meds-americas-love-affair-with-prescription-medication/, August 3, 2017. Also see documentary film Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick? Documentary film. California Newsreel with Vital Pictures, Inc. Presented by the National Minority Consortia of Public Television; and Outreach in association with Joint Center Health Policy Institute, https://unnaturalcauses.org/, 2008; and documentary film, *Happy*, director Roko Belic, https://www.thehappymovie.com/, Wadi Rum Productions, USA, April 9, 2011, regarding America's higher value and money spent on the health care system, instead of actual human health.
[5] Interview, Sophia, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, December 19, 2017; and Gabriel Hernández Ramos, *Cantos Ceremoniales*, 2007.
[6] Sophia, "Decolonizing Healing" presentation and workshop, downtown *Angelitas*, New Mexico. May 16, 2017.
[7] See Benedict Anderson Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism (London and New York: Verso, 1991), for his notion of "imagined communities": see esp. 6-7.
[8] See Gregory Cajete, *Look to the Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education* (Durango: Kivakí Press, 1994; Yolanda Chávez Leyva, "In ixtli in yóllotl/ a face and heart: Listening to the Ancestors," *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, series 2. 4 ¾ (Fall 2003/Winter 2004), 96-127; Miguel León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, translated by Jack Emory Davis (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 3-13.
[9] For my implementation of the 3"Rs", and 5Rs", I drew from Rosemary Ackley Christensen's, "Cultural Context and Evaluation: A Balance of Form and Function," *National Science Foundation*, www.nsf.org, 2003; Patrisia Gonzales, Lecture, the 5 "Rs," University of Arizona, Tucson, January 26, 2010; her book *Red Medicine: Traditional Indigenous Rites of Birthing and Healing* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012); and Roberto Rodríguez's class lectures: January 26, 2012, and January 17, 2011; and his book *Our Sacred Maiz Is Our Mother, Nin Tonantzin Non Centeoltl: Indigeneity and Belonging in the Americas* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014).
[10] See Chávez, "The Space of Affect, 547; and Renato Rosaldo "Cultural Citizenship and Educational Democracy", *Cultural Anthropology*, 1994. 9(3):402-11; and Adelaide Del Castillo, "Illegal Status and Social Citizenship: Thoughts on Mexican Immigrants in a Postcolonial World", in Women and Migration U.S.-Mexico Borderlands: A Reader, edited by Denise A. Segura and Patricia Zavella, 92-103 Durham: Duke University Press, 2007, qtd. in Chávez 2015, 547.
[11] Chávez, "The Space of Affect, 560.
[12] Chávez, "The Space of Affect, 560.
[13] See Chávez, "The Space of Affect, 547; and Renato Rosaldo "Cultural Citizenship and Educational Democracy", *Cultural Anthropology*, 1994. 9(3):402-11; and Adelaide Del Castillo, "Illegal Status and Social Citizenship: Thoughts on Mexican Immigrants in a Postcolonial World", in Women and Migration U.S.-Mexico Borderlands: A Reader, edited by Denise A. Segura and Patricia Zavella, 92-103 Durham: Duke University Press, 2007, qtd. in Chávez 2015, 547.
[14] See Brenda A. Romero, "The Matachines Music and Dance in San Juan Pueblo and Alcade, New México: Contests and Meanings" (Ann Arbor: U.M.I, 1993); Sylvia Rodríguez, *The Matachines Dance: Ritual Symbolism and Interethnic Relations in the Upper Río Grande Valley* (Albuquerque: University of New México Press, 1996); and Enrique R. Madrid, *Hermanitos Comanchitos: Indo-Hispano Rituals of Captivity and Redemption*, (Albuquerque: University of New México Press, 2003).
[15] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006) qtd. in Huerta 2009, 14.
[16] See Américo Paredes, *With a Pistol in His Hand* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1998; © 1958); Jose Limón, *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American south Texas* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994; Charles Briggs *Competence in Performance: The Creativity of Tradition in Mexicano Verbal Art*) Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988; Richard Flores, *Los Pastores: History and Performance in the Mexican Shepherds' Play of South Texas* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995; Elisa Huerta "Embodied Recuperations: Performance, Indigeneity, and Danza Azteca," In *Dancing Across Borders: Danzas y Bailes Mexicanos*, edited by Olga Nájera-Ramírez, Norma E. Cantu, and Brenda

M. Romero (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Alex Chávez "The Space of Affect, Or the Political Anatomy of Contemporary Fandango Performance in México" (*Música oral del Sur: Revista Internacional. Españoles, Indios, Africanos y Gitanos. El Alcance Global del Fandango en Música, Canto y Danza*) 12. 2015:545-562; Alex Chávez, *Sounds of Crossing: Music, Migration and the Aural Poetics of Huapango Arribeño* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017); and Enrique R. Madrid, *Hermanitos Comanchitos: Indo-Hispano Rituals of Captivity and Redemption*, (Albuquerque: University of New México Press, 2003.

[17] Gloria Anzaldúa and Ana Louise Keating draw from Ramona Ortega and Jacqui Alexander's conceptualizations spiritual activism, see Jacqui M. Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, eds. *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (New York: Routledge, 1997); and the "Introduction: Genealogies, Legacies, Movements in Alexander and Mohanty (xiii-xlii) of this text. Also see Ana Louise Keating 2002, 18-20, in Gloria Anzaldúa, ed. Ana Louise Keating, *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* (New York: Routledge, 2002); and Gloria Anzaldúa 2000, 178 in Anzaldúa, ed. Ana Louise Keating, *Interviews/Entrevistas: Gloria E. Anzaldúa* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

[18] Keating, *This Bridge We Call Home*, 18.

[19] Sophia and the *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca concilio* (council) conceived of "love donations" as a form of ritual gift exchange.

[20] Sophia and the *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca concilio* (council) conceived of "love donations" as a form of ritual gift exchange.

[21] Acudetox is a form of acupuncture, where needles are placed in the earlobe. This treatment was initially used to aid the recovery process for heroin addicts in the 1960s and 1970s. Over the years it has developed into a holistic healing modality to treat various.

[22] See Don Leandro qtd. in Richard Flores, *Los Pastores: History and Performance in the Mexican Shepherds' Play of South Texas* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995, 115-18). Also see Flores, *Los Pastores*, 117-18; 151.

[23] See Don Leandro qtd. in Richard Flores, *Los Pastores: History and Performance in the Mexican Shepherds' Play of South Texas* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995, 115-18). Also see Flores, *Los Pastores*, 117-18; 151. See Don Leandro qtd in Richard Flores, *Los Pastores: History and Performance in the Mexican Shepherds' Play of South Texas* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995, 115-18). Also see Flores, *Los Pastores*, 117-18.

[24] See Don Leandro qtd in Richard Flores, *Los Pastores: History and Performance in the Mexican Shepherds' Play of South Texas* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995, 115-18). Also see Flores, *Los Pastores*, 117-18.

[25] See Lewis Hyde, *The Gift* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983); and Mary Douglas Forward to *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, by Marcel Mauss, translated by W. D. .Halls (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), qtd. in Flores, *Los Pastores* 150-53.

[26] See Roger Abrahams, "Christmas and Carnival on St. Vincent, *Western Folklore* 31. (1972): 275-89 qtd. in Flores, 153.

[27] Flores, *Los Pastores*, 149-53.

[28] Flores, *Los Pastores*, 148-50.

[29] Flores, *Los Pastores*, 148-50.

[30] Flores, *Los Pastores*, 148-51.

[31] Robin Wall-Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Minneapolis: Milkweed, 2013, 34-35; 346-47).

[32] Robin Wall-Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Minneapolis: Milkweed, 2013, 34-35; 346-47).

[33] Julissa, personal conversation, Socorro, New Mexico, August 31, 2017.

[34] Sophia and *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca's concilio* conceptualized "love donations" as a form of ritual gift exchange.

[35] See Jorge Cancino. "Helping undocumented immigrants now a crime under Trump." https://www.univision.com/univision-news/politics/helping-undocumented-immigrants-now-a-crime-under-trump, January 27, 2017, n.p. Retrieved October 2, 2019; and Kristie De Peña, "Can You Go to Jail for 'Assisting' Your Undocumented Neighbor?" https://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/can-you-go-to-jail-for-assisting-your-undocumented-neighbor/, May 8, 2017, n.p. Retrieved October 2, 2019.

[36] Huerta, 6.

[37] See Huerta borrowed Chela Sandoval's conceptualization of "oppositional consciousness", in *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000). Also see Huerta, 6.

[38] Lamadrid, *Hermanitos Comanchitos*, 202-05.

[39] Laura Larco, "Encounters with the Huacas: Ritual Dialogue, Music and Healing in Northern Peru", *The World of Music*, Music and Healing in Transcultural Perspectives, 1997.

[40] Paredes, *With a Pistol in His Hand*, 1998; Flores, *Los Pastores*, 1995; Jose Limón, *Dancing with the Devil*, 1994; Alex Chávez, "The Space of Affect," 2015, and *Sounds of Crossing*, 2017; and Lamadrid, *Hermanitos Comanchitos*, 2003.
[41] It is important to state that each federally recognized tribe determines the specific amount blood quantum necessary to be eligible for tribal enrollment. This amount can be less or more than twenty five percent.
[42] Sophia and the *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca concilio* (council) conceived of "love donations" as a form of ritual gift exchange.
[43] Sophia *Angelitas'* Healing Event, April 29, 2017.
[44] *Limpias* and holistic therapy are both energy healings, which treat the mind, body and spirit.
[45] Cupping is a pre-colonial Mesoamerican and Asian form of healing that incorporates small glass containers that are heated up and then firmly placed on one's skin. This treatment is a form of hot acupressure, which decreases inflammation and discomfort in the area of the body affected by inflammation.
[46] Sylvia Rodriguez, "Honor, Aridity, and Place", in *Expressing New México: Nuevomexicano Creativity, Ritual, and Memory*, edited by Phillip B. Gonzales (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007, 38).
[47] See Lewis Hyde, *The Gift*, 1983; and Mary Douglas Forward to *The Gift*, 1990), qtd. in Flores, *Los Pastores* 150-53.
[48] Flores, 148-50.
[49]See Olaveson "Collective Effervescences," 96; Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology*, 278, 293; and Pickering, *Durkheim and Representations*, 37.
[50] See Tim, Olaveson, "Collective Effervescences and Communitas: Processual Models of Ritual and Society in Emile Durkheim and Victor Turner", *Dialectical Anthropology* 26. 2001; W.S.F. Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology of Religion: Themes and Theories* (Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth Press, 2009); Emile Durkheim qtd. in Olaveson 2001; and Durkheim qtd. in Pickering *Durkheim and Representations* (London: Routledge, 2000).
[51] See Tim Olaveson "Collective Effervescences", 96-7; and Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology*, 2009.
[52] Laura Larco, "Encounters with the Huacas: Ritual Dialogue, Music and Healing in Northern Peru", *The World of Music*, Music and Healing in Transcultural Perspectives, 39.1. 1997, 35.
[53] See Rosemary Christensen Ackley, "Cultural Context and Evaluation", 2003, 23-24, for the 3 "Rs," and Patrisia Gonzales, Lecture, the 5 "Rs," January 26, 2010; *Red Medicine*: 2012; Roberto Rodríguez, class lectures: 2012, and 2011; and his book *Our Sacred Maiz Is Our Mother*, 2014 for discussions about the 5"Rs."
[54] Diagnosing Internalized Oppression", http://www.sjsu.edu/people/marcos.pizarro/maestros/Gonzales.pdf, *Colum of the Americas*, 2005; and Patrisia Gonzales in: "In the Spirit of Our Ancestors: Reconciling Post Tribal Stress Disorder", Column of the Americas, http://www.sjsu.edu/people/marcos.pizarro/maestros/Gonzales.pdf 2006; and "Trauma, Love & History", *Column of the Americas*, http://www.sjsu.edu/people/marcos.pizarro/maestros/Gonzales.pdf, 2006.
[55] Sophia, Interview, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico December 19, 2017.
[56] See Jennie M. Luna. "Danza Mexica: Indigenous Identity, Spirituality, Activism, and Performance." Dissertation, ProQuest Publishing: Ann Arbor, 2012.
[57] Sophia and the *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca concilio* (council) conceived of "love donations" as a form of ritual gift exchange.
[58] Sophia and the *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca concilio* (council) conceived of "love donations" as a form of ritual gift exchange.
[59] Jennie M. Luna, "Danza Mexica: Indigenous Identity, Spirituality, Activism, and Performance." Dissertation, ProQuest Publishing: Ann Arbor, 2012.
[60] Rodríguez, "Honor, Aridity, and Place", 38.
[61] Sophia, Mama's Healing Day, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, May 11, 2013.
[62] See Roberto Rodríguez and Patrisia Gonzales regarding inter-generational, generational and historical trauma in: "Diagnosing Internalized Oppression", http://www.sjsu.edu/people/marcos.pizarro/maestros/Gonzales.pdf, *Colum of the Americas*, 2005; and Patrisia Gonzales in: "In the Spirit of Our Ancestors: Reconciling Post Tribal Stress Disorder", Column of the Americas, http://www.sjsu.edu/people/marcos.pizarro/maestros/Gonzales.pdf 2006; and "Trauma, Love & History", *Column of the Americas*, http://www.sjsu.edu/people/marcos.pizarro/maestros/Gonzales.pdf, 2006.
[63] Rodríguez and Gonzales, "Diagnosing Internalized Oppression", n.p.; Karina Walters qtd. in Gonzales, "Trauma, Love & History," 1; Gonzales, "In the Spirit of Our Ancestors", n.p.; and Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart et., "Historical Trauma Among Indigenous Peoples of the Americas: Concepts, Research, and Clinical Considerations" *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 43.4, October – December 2011: see esp. 282.

[64] See Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart et. al, "Historical Trauma", 282; and Rodríguez and Gonzales "Diagnosing Internalized Oppression", n.p.
[65] See Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart et. al, "Historical Trauma", 282; and Rodríguez and Gonzales "Diagnosing Internalized Oppression", n.p.
[66] See Gonzales, "Trauma, Love & History," 1; and Gonzales, "In the Spirit of Our Ancestors", n.p.
[67] See Aaron R. Denham, "Rethinking Historical Trauma: Narratives of Resilience", *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 45.3 (2008): 392 -414; Joseph P. Gone, "Reconsidering American Indian Historical Trauma: Lessons from an early Gros Ventre war narrative", *Transcultural Psychiatry* 51.3 (2014); 387-406; and Krista Maxwell, "Historicizing Historical Trauma Theory: Troubling the Trans-generational Transmission Paradigm", *Transcultural Psychiatry* 51.3 (2014): 407-435, qtd. in William E. Hartmann et. al, in "Anti-colonial Prescriptions for Healing, Resilience and Survivance", *American Psychologist* 74.1 (2019): 6-19, see esp. 11.
[68] Laurence J. Kirmayer, Joseph P. Gone, Joshua Moses, "Rethinking Historical Trauma", Transcultural Psychiatry, 51.3, (2014): 299-319, qtd. in Hartmann et. al, "Anti-colonial Prescriptions", 12; and Hartman et. al, "Anti-colonial Prescriptions", 12.
[69] Laurence J. Kirmayer, Joseph P. Gone, Joshua Moses, "Rethinking Historical Trauma", Transcultural Psychiatry, 51.3, (2014): 299-319, qtd. in Hartmann et. al, "Anti-colonial Prescriptions", 12; and Hartman et. al, "Anti-colonial Prescriptions", 12.
[70] Roberto Rodríguez, "Fighting Law Enforcement Brutality While Living With Trauma in a World of Impunity", *Genealogy Journal* 2.56, December 15, 2018: see esp. 1-4.
[71] Thema Bryant-Davis, Carlota Ocampo Racist Incident–Based Trauma," *The Counseling Psychologist* 33.4, (2005): 479-500; Robert T. Carter, "Racism and Psychological and Emotional Injury: Recognizing and Assessing Race-Based Traumatic Stress," *The Counseling Psychologist* 35.1 (2007): 13-105; and Lillian, Comas-Díaz, L. "Racial Trauma Recovery: A race-informed therapeutic approach to racial wounds," in A. N. Alvarez, C. T. H. Liang, & H. A. Neville (Eds.), *Cultural, Racial, and Ethnic Psychology book series*. *The cost of racism for people of color: Contextualizing experiences of discrimination* (p.249–272), American Psychological Association, qtd. in Hartmann et. al, "Anti-colonial Prescriptions", 15.
[72] Interview via telephone, Dr. Jenna John, Southern Arizona, and *Angelitas*, New Mexico, July 31, 2019.
[73] Dr. John, Interview, July 31, 2019.
[74] Dr. John, Dr. John, July 31, 2019.
[75] Interviewer, Dina Barajas, interview with Dr. John, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, July 31, 2019.
[76] Gregory Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence* (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 2000).
[77] The Hamblecha is a vision quest ceremony. The Sundance is a masculine renewal ceremony. The Moondance is a female ritual that celebrates feminine energy. According to the *Codex Borgia*, the Moondance is the counter part of the Mesoamerican Sundance ceremony, which celebrates masculine energy and is a renewal ceremony, https://networks.h-net.org/node/232891/pdf. see esp. images 39 and 40, September 18, 2017. The *Xilonen* ritual is a female coming of age ceremony. All of these ceremonies are Mesoamerican rituals. Also see Elisa Facio, and Irene Lara, eds., *Fleshing the Spirit: Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women's Lives* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2014) for information regarding the significance of these ceremonies.
[78] Interviewer, Dina Barajas, interview with Dr. John, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, July 31, 2019.
[79] Interviewer, Dina Barajas, interview with Dr. John, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, July 31, 2019.
[80] Interviewer, Dina Barajas, interview with Dr. John, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, July 31, 2019.
[81] In the following interview with Sophia, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, December 19, 2017, she showed me Gabriel Hernández Ramos', *Cantos Ceremoniales: Alabados de la Tradición Popular y de las Danzas y Concheros en Amecameca, Tepetlixpa, Huexoculco, San Rafael and Xalixintla; pueblos de arena y Piedra/Ceremonial Songs: Praised of the Popular Tradition and the Dances of Concheros in Amecameca, Tepetlixpa, Huexoculco, San Rafael and Xalixintla; sand and stone villages* (Printed in México: Librería Luz de Morelia, 2007), and stated that this book was his dissertation, and that in it he affirms that "*La danza*" is meant to protect "*la medicina*."
[82] Interview, Sophia, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, December 19, 2017; and Hernández Ramos, *Cantos Ceremoniales*, 2007.
[83] See Leyva, "In ixtli in yóllotl", 2003/2004; León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, 1963; and León-Portilla qtd. in Cajete, *Look to the Mountain*, 35.
[84]See Leyva, "In ixtli in yóllotl", 2003/2004; León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, 1963; and León-Portilla qtd. in Cajete, *Look to the Mountain*, 35.
[85]See Leyva, "In ixtli in yóllotl", 2003/2004; León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, 1963; and León-Portilla qtd. in Cajete, *Look to the Mountain*, 35.

[86] See Leyva, "In ixtli in yóllotl", 2003/2004; Cajete, *Look to the Mountain*, 1994; J. Guillermo Domínguez Yañez, "*In Ixtli in Yóllotl: La Educación en Mesoamérica*" *Logo* 1996, 12, qtd. in Leyva "In ixtli in yóllotl", 101; León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, 1963.
[87] Sophia, "Decolonizing Healing" presentation and workshop, downtown *Angelitas*, New Mexico, May 16, 2017.
[88] Sophia, "Decolonizing Healing" presentation and workshop, downtown *Angelitas*, New Mexico, May 16, 2017.
[89] Sophia, "Decolonizing Healing" presentation and workshop, 2017.
[90] Sophia, "Decolonizing Healing" presentation and workshop, 2017.
[91] Sophia, "Decolonizing Healing" presentation and workshop, 2017.
[92] Sophia, "Decolonizing Healing" presentation and workshop, 2017.
[93] Sophia, "Decolonizing Healing" presentation and workshop, 2017.
[94] Sophia, "Decolonizing Healing" presentation and workshop, 2017.
[95] Sophia, "Decolonizing Healing" presentation and workshop, 2017.
[96] Sophia, "Decolonizing Healing" presentation and workshop, 2017.
[97] Sophia, "Decolonizing Healing" presentation and workshop, 2017.
[98] Sophia, "Decolonizing Healing" presentation and workshop, 2017.
[99] Sophia, "Decolonizing Healing" presentation and workshop, 2017.
[100] Sophia, "Decolonizing Healing" presentation and workshop, 2017.
[101] Sophia, "Decolonizing Healing" presentation and workshop, 2017.
[102] Sophia, "Decolonizing Healing" presentation and workshop, 2017.
[103] Interview with Sophia, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, December 19, 2017.
[104] Interviewer, Interview with Sophia, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, December 19, 2017.

Chapter Five: Mexican American Claims of Indigeneity and Criticisms of their Identity

Introduction

During the spring 2011 semester, I asked my Blackfoot colleague Dawn, "What do you think about Johnny Depp claiming he's Native [American]?" Dawn responded, "There's a difference between saying you're Native and *being* Native."[1] Given that Dawn is a member of the Siksika Blackfoot Nation in Alberta, which straddles the Canadian-U.S. border, and she is aware of her Blackfoot heritage and lifeways, I contemplated the depth of her meaning. For me, to *be* a native, one can live among their community on a reservation, live as an urban Indian, or be "culturally mixed, detribalized Indigenous " people, as Patrisia Gonzales refers to Chicanos and Mexican Americans.[2] I draw from Gonzales perspective in my view of the mixed-race practitioners of my ceremonial community as peoples of detribalized Indigenous ancestors. As such, they too are Indigenous.

This essay demonstrates that my ceremonial community's claims of indigeneity come from a place of "being native" through their ritual performances and decolonial work. Our claim of indigeneity and decolonial work challenges academics who criticize Mexican Americans for making such claims, and also, critiques Mexican Americans' relationship with Indigenous peoples. Specifically, these scholars argue that Chicanos and Mexican Americans appropriate indigeneity, are "descendants of Indigenous peoples," are "arrivants" to and "settler colonizers" of the Americas, and that decolonization should not be applied to social justice issues, or the revamping of educational curriculums.[3] I will clarify each of the above mentioned scholars' contentions at a later point in this essay.

In this essay, I discuss the complex intercultural identity of the practitioners of my ceremonial community, as well as other Mexican Americans who face resistance toward their

claims of indigeneity. I conclude this essay with a contemplation regarding the implications of Mexican Americans who claim their indigeneity, particularly, how this recognition may or may not affect federally recognized tribes.

In addition, I put into conversation differing perspectives about Mexican Americans' relationship with Native American and First Nations peoples to create a better understanding of my ceremonial community's claims of indigeneity and other Mexican Americans' acknowledgments of their indigently. The voices I include are some of the Native American scholars interviewed, Chicano academics who assert their indigeneity and support other Mexican Americans who do so, academics who critique Mexican American claims of indigeneity and their relationship with Indigenous peoples of the Americas. And, the voices of the practitioners of my ceremonial community.

The scholars that support Mexican Americans' and Mexicans' claims of indigeneity include Jack D. Forbes, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, Roberto Rodríguez, Patrisia Gonzales, Gloria Anzaldúa,[4] and Cherríe Moraga.[5] These authors underscore that interculturally mixed peoples of Mexican descent possess Indian and European heritage, and, in many cases, also black. For Mexican Americans in the Southwest, this racial mixture indicates that our Indigenous relatives are both, in particular, the Native Americans of the Southwest and Indigenous peoples of México.

I also incorporate views from Latin American Studies, American Studies, Anthropology, and Indigenous Science scholars María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, Nicole Guidotti-Hernandez, Romario Bautista, and Jessica Hernandez (respectively), and Critical Indigenous Studies, Critical Race Studies, Ethnic Studies, Equity Studies, Indigenous Studies, and Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies scholars Jodi Byrd, Eve Tuck and K, Wayne Yang, and Bonita Lawrence and

Enakshi Dua (respectively), who criticize Chicanos' and Mexican American's claims of indigeneity, and critique their relationship with Native Americans and First Nations peoples.[6] I interrogate these scholar's disavowal of Mexican Americans indigeneity, with perspectives from practitioners of my ceremonial community and contentions from Native American scholar Jack Forbes, Mexican Anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, Mexican American Studies professors Roberto Rodríguez, and Patrisia Gonzales, and Chicana scholars Gloria Anzaldúa, and Cherríe Moraga, who assert Mexican Americas and Mexicans Indigenous heritage and support their claims of indigeneity. In addition, I include my perspective regarding these complex tensions. I conclude this essay with *consejos* from Paul which speaks to accusations made by authors Saldaña-Portillo and Guidotti-Hernandez, regarding how the practitioners of my ceremonial community and other Mexican Americans can arm themselves from accusations of Indigenous "appropriation."[7] And, I provide a discussion of the ways in which my ceremonial community's (re)cognition of their Indigenous heritage heals them of the ethnic and cultural genocide and generational trauma, and racial trauma—which they continue to suffer today, because of the U.S. government and dominant society's refusal to acknowledge their indigeneity.

Ultimately, I argue that the practitioners of my ceremonial community *are* Indigenous, because they possess Indigenous ancestry, are aware of this heritage and of their Indigenous ancestors who were the original inhabitants of the Southwest and México. And, their ritual performances, everyday lives, and Indigenous identifications are informed and guided by Nahuatl and Mesoamerican epistemologies and ontologies.

My intervention underscores that the Mexican American *danzantes* and *promotoras* of my ceremonial community are educated about and conscious of their Indigenous heritage and we acknowledge this ancestry with integrity and respect for ourselves and federally recognized

Native Americans. The practitioners have "body memory" that (re)members our Indigenous ancestors and connection to this land.[8] As such, we claim our indigeneity with integrity and ethics. Importantly, through my intervention, I hope to create a better understanding of the *danzantes', promotoras',* Chicano scholar's, and indigenist scholar's respective positions. I aim to create an understanding that respects the dignity and humanity of Native Americans and peoples of Mexican descent in the Southwest. Through this essay, I hope to build a bridge of understanding between the oppositional views discussed herein. And, a means of understanding that is respectful toward the dignity and relationships of Mexican Americans and Native Americans. In the following section, I provide Chicano and Mexican American scholars' perspectives and support of Mexican Americans' indigeneity.

Chicano Scholarship on Mexican Americans' Indigeneity

Chicano scholars, including myself, assert that Mexican Americans who recover their Indigenous identity and culture, do so because they maintain an obscure positionality of being and belonging neither here, nor there, they reside within a liminal space along the "borderlands."[9] As such, they are "*nepantleras*," residing in an in-between state—consciously, spiritually, physically, politically and socially.[10] Mexican American *danzantes* and *promotoras* who have recovered and are recovering their Indigenous heritage and culture, have realized that in so doing, they are decolonizing these multiple in-between states of being and strengthening themselves by creating self-defining positionalities of belonging, which involve "re-rooting" themselves consciously, spiritually, physically, politically and socially within the Southwest and Mesoamerica—the land of their Indigenous ancestors.[11] The ways in which we re-root ourselves is by learning about our Mesoamerican culture, philosophy, cosmology, medicinal knowledge and practices, and through our participation in ritual, such as *danza azteca, curanderismo* and

other Mesoamerican or pan-Indian forms of ceremony, like the *temazkal*, *Inipi* sweat lodge, *Hamblecha*, Sundance, Moondance, and *Xilonen*.[12]

In this section, I discuss Native American Studies, Mexican American Studies, and Chicano Studies scholars Jack Forbes's, Roberto Rodríguez's, Cherríe Moraga's, and Mexican anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla's perspectives regarding Mexican Americans' and Mexicans' Indigenous heritage, their claims of indigeneity, and I respond to the scholars that do not view Mexican American's as Indigenous.

Jack Forbes's *Aztecas del Norte: The Chicanos of Aztlán* stated that "Mexicans and Chicanos are perhaps eighty percent [N]ative" American decent, "while only twenty percent of their ancestry is of European-North African, African and Asian descent."[13] Their native heritage and legacy to the Southwest, as the author argued during the early 1970s, was a primary reason peoples of Mexican descent deserved social and political equality. The author additionally contended that Mexican American's heritage consisted of peoples of *Nahua* and non-*Nahua* cultures, including the Yaqui, Tarascan, Mayas, and Mixtecs.[14] Forbes, also maintained that the Hohokam of Arizona, prior to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, were Mexican Indigenous peoples.[15] And, that these peoples shared intercultural exchanges and inter-relationally mixed for hundreds and thousands of years with Indigenous peoples of the Southwest, including the Mogollon (300 B.C. – A.D. 1100), Pioneer Gila River (B.C./A.D. – A.D. 700), and Pueblo and Anasazi (B.C./A.D.—present).[16] In addition, the Hohokam and Pueblo peoples, as well as other Indigenous ancestors of peoples of Mexican descent participated in ceremony together at Chaco Canyon, and established intricate trading routes between what is now the U.S. and México, and throughout North America.[17] Importantly, my ceremonial community continues the Mesoamerican tradition of practicing ceremony with other Native peoples today.

Forbes affirmed that Mexican Americans and many Indigenous peoples, whom are considered Native North American Indians, have Indigenous Mesoamerican heritage.[18] The author underscores the relational connection between the Hohokam and Pueblo peoples, namely, the relationship between the Hohokam and Hopi, who are descendants of the Anasazi. The Hopi are also related to the Aztecs, who are believed to be "descendants of the Toltecs and quite possibly the Olmecs."[19] These relational ties exhibit the connections between Indigenous peoples within the Southwest and México.

Forbes asserted that after the colonization of México, perhaps the most significant result of Hispano-Mexican northward movement was "the process of unification, whereby many tribes were amalgamated into the Hispanicized Mexican community."[20] An integration which "was as much a result of intermarriage and assimilation with Mexicans as it was a conscious policy of the Spanish crown."[21] Moreover, many of these Hispano-Mexicans and Mexican-Indians resided in the Southwest prior to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. However, after the formation of the treaty, many of these peoples, such as the Yaqui and Pima were separated from their native relatives by the creation of newly established U.S. national boundaries within the Southwest. As a result, Indigenous peoples residing within the newly distinguished U.S.-Mexico region were separated from their relatives along the borderlands and forced to deny their indigeneity to obtain U.S. citizenship, which they were denied for years to come.[22] Hence, the historical reality of racial intermixture among Native Americans, Mexicans, Europeans and Blacks has contributed to the creation of interculturally mixed peoples of Mexican descent. It is critical to state that Rodríguez, like Forbes, also speaks to the nonconsensual, and consensual relationships that formed between Indigenous peoples and culturally mixed Mexicans of Mesoamerica—interrelationships that continue today.

Forbes and Rodríguez underscore that Mexican Americans and American Indians not only share Indigenous heritage, they also experienced similar struggles.[23] Such as, cultural genocide, displacement from their original homelands lands, detached from their Indigenous relatives, and forced to deny their indigeneity.[24]

Bonfil Batalla and Rodríguez contend that Mexicans and Mexican Americans have been "de-indianized" or "de-Indigenized."[25] De-indigenization was a process of colonization in which peoples of Mexican decent were "de-ceremonialized,"[26] in that, the Spanish colonizers separated them from their "culture, kinship, ceremonies, story, and narratives,"[27] all of which was a part of their everyday ritual life. Essentially peoples of Mexican descent were coerced to deny their Indigenous heritage during the colonial assimilation processes of colonized peoples.[28] De-indigenization was practiced throughout the Spanish, Mexican, and American colonial eras and continues today. This practice continues to work to disempower Mexican Americans, while benefiting the colonizer.

As such, the de-indigenization processes worked/works to coerce interculturally mixed peoples of Mexican descent to deny and forget their awareness and self-perception of their indigeneity, and biologically dilute one's Indigenous genes through *mestizaje*.[29] These processes worked to disempower Indigenous and interculturally mixed Mexican peoples and assimilate them into hegemonic colonial society.

Interculturally Mixed Peoples of Mexican Descent

Roberto Rodríguez and Patrisia Gonzales maintain that during the precolonial and colonial eras, Indigenous peoples of the Americas traveled, migrated, immigrated, and traded throughout the continent, including the peoples of Mesoamerica, which resulted in inter-Amerindian cultural and relational mixtures.[30] Scholars, Laura Gomez, Martha Menchaca, and

Deena González, similarly contend that the Mexican Americans of New Mexico and the Southwest possess various Indigenous and European mixtures, including Spanish, Tlaxcalan, Tarascan, Pueblo, Diné, Apache, Comanche, Ute, and Kiowa, among other European and American Indian mixtures, and black, which in New México occurred during the latter part of the Spanish and American colonial eras in the Southwest.[31] This intercultural mixture is the result of the Spanish slave trade during the Spanish colonial era, which overtime both Native and Mexican peoples took part as slave traders. This violent colonial legacy also resulted in detribalized Indigenous, and interculturally mixed *genízaro* communities of New Mexico and southern Colorado, which I will expand upon in the proceeding section.

During the two centuries that the Spanish controlled what is now New Mexico and the Southwest, interracial mixtures, particularly between the Spanish and Native peoples occurred due to the practice of *mestizaje*. During this era, *mestizaje* was a normalized practice of raping native women in order to, as the Spanish believed—dilute native blood in the colonies for the purpose of creating a "*sangre puro"* (pure blood) Spanish society.[32] In conjunction with the practice of *mestizaje*, the Spanish established the *casta* system within their colonies throughout the Americas. This system is a racialized social hierarchy that placed the Spanish colonial *penninsulares* (pure blood Spaniards, born in Spain) atop of this hierarchy. The *criollos* (Spaniards born in the Americas) were placed below the *penninsulares*. And, the *mestizos* were beneath the *criollos*. As a result of this social hierarchy and racial violence, *mestizos* possessed limited rights and were treated less than by the colonizers. This dehumanizing treatment continued into the American colonial era, and contributes to the racial constructs that exist today.

It is critical to note that both Forbes and Rodríguez underscore that Mexican American population was developed from both *mestizaje*—a violent tool of colonization, and through

loving, consensual forms of inter-cultural mixture between peoples of Indigenous and Mexican descent.

Genízaros

The increase in the Mexican population was also greatly due to the Spaniards introduction of the slave trade in the late 1600s. This violent economy was borrowed by nomadic Indians, such as the Ute, Comanche and Apache, among others, that became raiders as a means of survival during the Spanish, Mexican, and American colonial eras.[33] During the 1700s a new demographic of peoples was created as a result of *mestizaje* and detribalized Indians who the Spanish called *genízaros*.[34] These peoples were taken captive by Spanish slave traders and nomadic Indian raiders that kept or sold the captives at trade fairs in villages, such as Abiquiu and other locations within in the Southwest.[35] The Spanish used *genízaros* as domestic servants and, or for sexual and personal companionship.[36] The Spanish also used *genizaro* communities as buffers against raiding Indians.[37] Today, many *genízaros* live in communities that are also known as "Indo-Hispano" communities,[38] and they are often mistakenly labeled as simply "Mexican," peoples. However, as I previously stated, *genízaro* heritage and culture is a diaspora of indigeneity, ranging in degree, if at all, of other cultural mixtures, such as Mexican and European heritage.

Limited Rights of Mexicans During the American Colonial Era

The increase in the culturally mixed peoples in New Mexico played a key role during and after the 1848 signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.[39] The treaty originally stipulated that Mexicans who decided to remain in the newly created U.S. territory of New Mexico and other acquired regions within the Southwest, would be afforded citizenship after one year of residence in these U.S. territories.[40] However, from the onset of the treaty's ratification the U.S. began

stripping Mexicans of their civil rights and placed racialized stipulations on their ability to obtain citizenship. Due to their "*mestizo*" heritage, namely their Indigenous heritage, Mexicans were deemed an inferior race, not suitable for citizenship, the ability to own land, hold political positions, or become doctors and lawyers.[41] According to Anglo United States politicians "white" Spanish Mexicans were preferred candidates for citizenship.[42] The discrimination peoples of Mexican descent endured forced them to deny their Indian heritage and proclaim that they were Caucasian, due to their European heritage. This stipulation was the only way they could obtain U.S. citizenship and the material and capital gains that accompanied this privilege. Rodríguez, Gonzales, Gomez and Menchaca contend that Mexicans and American Indians endured racial discrimination, terror and violence during the Spanish, Mexican and American colonial periods.[43] And, during the American colonial era, this discrimination and racial violence increased toward Mexicans, if they were perceived to be Indian.[44] In the following section, I draw from Martha Menchaca to discuss how the Mexicans residing in the Southwest endured discrimination and were refused citizenship rights after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. During this era, Mexicans were pressured by the U.S. government to deny their Indigenous heritage in order to become U.S. citizens, own land, and obtain professional degrees.

In the text *Recovering History, Constructing Race*, Menchaca informs us that after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the U.S. government debated whether Mexicans were to be bestowed the citizenship rights of white citizens, or be treated as the Indian inhabitants. Most government officials asserted that "Mexicans of predominantly Indian descent should be extended the same legal status as the detribalized American Indians."[45] Mexicans contested that under the Treaty, "the U.S. government agreed to extend all Mexican citizens-regardless of their race, the same political rights enjoyed by white citizens."[46] However, U.S.

legislators determined that Mexicans were ineligible for citizenship because of the Indian ancestry in which they possessed.[47]

As a result of these biased de jure practices, the Mexican population learned that it was politically advantageous to assert their Spanish ancestry. Not to do so, would make them "susceptible to being treated as American Indians."[48] At the same time, it became politically beneficial for American Indians to willfully pass as "Mexican mestizos," which enabled them to escape severe anti-Indian discrimination.[49] As a result, many Christianized Indians in the Southwest were absorbed into Mexican communities. This absorption is evidenced by the Yaqui in Tucson, Arizona, who in the early 1900s absorbed themselves into *barrios*, such as *Barrio Belén* and *Barrio Libre*, which today include a mix of Yaqui and Mexican American residents, and intercultural mixtures of these populations.[50]

Mexicans and Indians that concealed their indigeneity were agents of their own political gains that were able to move in and out of their indigeneity. Such opposition, no doubt, enabled many Mexicans and Indians to avoid the racial violence inflicted upon them with impunity. Indians also evaded forced relocation, and being placed on reservations by passing as Mexican. And, this concealment allowed Mexicans to be granted, albeit in limited degrees, rights afforded to U.S. citizens. Importantly, Mexican and Indian resistance enabled them to move in and out of indigeneity through their own agency. This agency enabled them to be Indian with their families and community, while concealing this identity to hegemonic society.

Due to the racial biases Mexicans experienced during the American colonial period, as a measure of self-protection, many Mexicans residing in New Mexico and the greater Southwest denied their Indigenous heritage by maintaining that they were Caucasian, "Españoles" or Spanish,[51] so that they could be accepted as "white" Spaniards.[52] In fact, because of this colonial

legacy of violence and the shame it inflicted upon peoples of Mexican descent, many Mexican Americans residing in New Mexico today continue to deny their Indigenous heritage. Instead, they identify as Spanish and proclaim that they are "completely," or "mostly Spanish." Such recognitions are part of the Spanish fantasy myth that exists in New Mexico.[53] This violent legacy also created divisive sentiments of belonging and un-belonging, that continues to affect Mexican American's conceptualization of their identity and whether they recognize their Indigenous heritage. For example, in New Mexico, some Mexican Americans only claim their Spanish or Hispanic heritage and do not acknowledge their *mestizo* or Indigenous heritage.[54] In the proceeding section, I discuss academician's that critique Mexican American's claims of indigeneity and their relationship with Indigenous peoples of the Americas.

The Shared Indigeneity of Mexican Americans and Indigenous Peoples of the Southwest and the Americas

First and foremost, it is important to clarify the viewpoints of scholars that critique Mexican American's claims of indigeneity and their relationship with the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. These scholars do not consider the historical and present kinship ties, ceremonial practices, and political enactments, which are bonds of solidarity between Indigenous peoples and Mexican Americans—solidarity evidenced within my ceremonial community, as well as other examples of solidarity of this kind throughout the nation. The academic critics discussed herein, draw from and, or share Race and Settler Colonial Historian Patrick Wolfe's conceptualization of "settler colonizers," and "settler colonialism."[55] Wolfe contends that settler colonialism's primary aim is the acquisition of new territories, and the achievement of "territoriality."[56] Moreover, settler colonialism logics involve the "summary liquidation of

Indigenous people," and physical and cultural 'structural genocide,' or "elimination" of native societies.[57] Wolfe contends,

> [S]ettler colonialism has both negative and positive dimensions. Negatively it strives for the dissolution of native societies. Positively, it erects a new colonial society on the expropriation land base—as I put it, settler colonizers come to stay; invasion is a structure not an event. In this positive aspect, elimination can include officially encouraged miscegenation, the break-down of native title into alienable individual freeholds, native citizenship, child abduction, religious conservatism, resocialization in total institutions such as missions or boarding schools, and a whole range of cognate biocultural assimilations. All of these strategies, including frontier homicide, are characteristic of settler colonialism.[58]

According to Wolfe, the above processes "dismantled tribal sovereignty"—a process, that was reinforced through converting native peoples to Christian conservatists, and through native peoples resocialization in the missions and boarding schools, which effectively 'attack[ed] every aspect of native life—religion, speech, political freedoms, economic liberty, and cultural diversity.'[59] Furthermore, many native peoples have been effectively absorbed and assimilated into mainstream society, through inter-racial mixing, and native citizenship and blood quantum requirements, influenced by the federal government,[60] all of which accomplishes the settler colonizer's aim to effectively eliminate natives.[61] Hence, settler colonialism is an ongoing structure that is perpetuated not only by the settler colonizer, but by the colonized natives who continue "to structure settler-colonial society."[62] It is important to state that Wolfe does not place Chicanos and Mexican Americans in divisive, counter positions toward Indigenous peoples, as these academic critics I discuss. In what follows, I discuss these scholars' critiques of Chicanos

and Mexican Americans' relationship with Indigenous peoples, and the ways in which, as they argue, participate in settler colonialism.

Bautista, and Hernandez contend that Chicanos and Mexican Americas are not Indigenous, rather, they are "descendants" of Indigenous people. Tuck and Yang, and Lawrence and Dua assert that Mexican Americans are "settler colonizers," and Jodi Byrd conceptualizes Mexican Americans as "arrivants," who participate in settler colonialism by taking part in capitalism. In this section, I interrogate these critics by creating a dialogue with contentions made by Tuck and Yang, Lawrence and Dua, and those underscored by Jack Forbes, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, and Roberto Rodríguez.

I begin with Bautista and Hernandez who maintain that Chicanos and Mexican Americans that claim their indigeneity appropriate this identity, because they are not Indigenous and do not fight the same struggles as Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas. They contend that Chicanos and Mexican Americans have Indigenous ancestors, but, they themselves are not Indigenous. And, as such they do not have the right to claim that they are Indigenous. Rather, they should claim that they are "a person of Indigenous descent," and "Indigenous descendants."[63] Bautista maintains, "BEING NATIVE ISN'T SOLEY BASED ON BLOOD QUANTUM!"[64] And, both scholars maintain that in order to claim an Indigenous identity an Indigenous community or tribe has to claim you.[65] Hernandez asserts that, "[m]any Native American and Indigenous scholars + activists advocate that being Indigenous is more than a genetic test, as it is also related to cultural customs, traditions, language, etc."[66] These scholars further assert that when Chicanos' and Mexican Americans' claim that they are Indigenous they take up space that should be reserved for actual Indigenous peoples. In so doing, they silence the voices of Indigenous peoples. And, when Chicanos' and Mexican Americans' claim indigeneity,

they do not consider the multiple struggles that Indigenous people face in the Americas, such as "literally fighting for their communities,"[67] and they do not have to deal with "the threats and violence that comes" with this claim.[68]

Likewise, Guidotti-Hernandez, and Saldaña-Portillo argue that Chicanos such as Gloria Anzaldúa who draw from *Nahuatl* cosmology, claim it as their own, and claim to possess *Mexica* heritage, appropriate indigeneity, because not all Chicanos possess *Nahuatl* blood. And, these Chicanos do not permit Indigenous people to represent themselves, nor do they fight the same struggles as Indigenous people—all of which commits the act of appropriation.

Tuck and Yang do not acknowledge Mexican Americans' interculturally mixed heritage. Instead, they maintain that they are PoC who are not Indigenous to the Americas. Lawrence and Dua state that Indigenous peoples are considered autochthonous, because they are a part of tribal nations that have formed treaty agreements with the United States—a statement which implies that those who are considered Indigenous are *only* those who are a part of federally recognized tribes that have treaty agreements with the U.S. I respect the fact that many Native Americans created treaties with the United States and have worked hard to sustain themselves as nations while their sovereignty and self-determination are under constant attack by the U.S. I am aware that there are ethnocentric U.S. citizens that have racist biases toward Native Americans and their cultural traditions. I also acknowledge that Mexican Americans have been "de-indigenized. De-indigenization ideology and practices are structural and system, and therefore, are present in all aspects of American colonial society and institutions, such as educational institutions and academic scholarship. For instance, curriculums and academic articles which maintain that Mexican Americans are "descendants" of Indigenous peoples and Europeans,[69] and are not Indigenous themselves, are examples of de-indigenization. Rather than encouraging Mexican

American students to embrace their Indigenous heritage, they are influenced to believe that their ancestors were Indigenous, but they are not, and therefore, their Indigenous heritage does not apply to them in the present.

In addition, academic critics of Mexican Americans' and Chicanos' claims of indigeneity maintain that those who claim their indigeneity, do so without out having to endure struggles that Indigenous peoples face, or partake in the battles they engage in to protect their sovereignty, self-determination and very lives. And, that we are not conscious of our settler colonial positionality and the ways we have historically usurped Indigenous lands and resources.[70] These authors make these assertions without acknowledging that the theft in which they speak of was mandated by the colonizers. The Spanish incorporated this theft along with the *casta* system, which maintained distinct racial categorizations and separated the Spanish from *mestizo* and Indigenous peoples. The ideology and practice of racialized categorization and separation continues to disadvantage Indigenous peoples and Mexican Americans today. These critics' arguments, namely, that Mexican Americans are "descendants" of Indigenous peoples, essentially states that Mexican Americans' Indigenous heritage is no longer relevant, and therefore, Mexican Americans cannot claim their indigeneity. Further, the claim that Mexican Americans do not face the same atrocities that Indigenous people do, is to partake in the "oppression Olympics."[71]

The practitioners of my community *are aware* of the atrocities Indigenous peoples face and combat. The Mexican Americans/immigrants of my ceremonial community, may not experience the exact injustices that Indigenous people endure, but, we *too* experience discrimination, racial trauma, environmental racism, and "ethnocide" every day in this country, *because* we are brown.[72] More importantly, because we do not face the exact injustices that Indigenous people do, does not negate our indigeneity.

What does convey our indigeneity is our adherence of Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies, such as participation in ritual *performances* of *danza Azteca*, *curanderismo*, and *tequios*, among other performances, like providing *ceremonia* for community protests like the 2017 International Worker's Day. And, living according to *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican philosophies, such as the face and heart, five ethics, and *Tu eres mi otro yo*—all of which intend to improve humanity, and create and sustain a ceremonial community with ceremonial kin relationships. That said, when we claim our indigeneity, we do so with the conscience of an Indigenous person, albeit interculturally mixed Indigenous peoples.

The de-indigenization of culturally mixed Mexican Americans and Mexicans is present in our social and political institutions today. For example, the U.S. census does not have a culturally mixed Mexican American category. Instead, the options are, Hispanic or Latino, which does not distinctly recognize Mexican Americans' Indigenous heritage. And, The other options are Native American, Alaskan Native, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. Mexican Americans cannot choose any category that acknowledges their mixed-race status. And, they cannot select an Indigenous category, because they are not part of a federally recognized tribe. As a result of U.S. governments stipulations, which require a person to have, a minimum of one-quarter blood quantum, for example, in order to be legitimately acknowledged as federally recognized people, many Mexican Americans are not able to become a part of federally recognized tribes or benefit from the resources that accompany this recognition.

It would not be ethical for any ethnic group, in this case Mexican Americans, to be able to legally claim their Indigenous heritage just by being able to become a part of a federally recognized tribe and then take advantage of the resources that accompany this recognition. However, if these Mexican Americans were to hypothetically become tribal members, and take

part in Indigenous lifeways, like adhere to Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies and participate in ceremony individually or collectively with their community, even a pan-Indian community, and were to discover the tribe they belong to, then it would be ethical for them to be able to receive federal tribal recognition, and claim their indigeneity.

Importantly, being able to claim Indigenous identity is not simply dependent on one's ancestral heritage. What matters is the way a person lives. Again, are they a part of their culture and community, do they take part in ceremony, and how do they live their lives every day? Perhaps with these convictions, I too am acting as an Indigenous "identity police"? However, I maintain these convictions, because for the practitioners of my ceremonial community, it is critical for us to know who we are and assert our Indigenous identity, because we live and breathe this cultural identity every day. We do not romanticize about a cultural identity that we have no connection with other than through our biology. For example, my great, great, great maternal grandmother was Arabic. She married my Spanish maternal great, great, great grandfather. The children they bore resulted in my ancestors. As such, I have Arabic heritage and it is apparent in my features, so much so, that people often ask me what if I am eastern Indian. This feature is also apparent in my aunt, uncle, and cousin, yet, I, and we, do not identify as Arabic. It would go against my self-integrity to claim a heritage that I know little of and did not grow up in. When asked, I do acknowledge my Arabic descent. However, I self-identify with the two cultures that I grew up with a greater awareness of, which is my Mexican American and Hopi heritage. In other words, I solely identify as Mexican and Hopi. I refuse to say that I am Mexican American, because, for me this connotes a boundary between myself and the Mexican nation where many of my ancestors are from. I now turn to the ways in which "Xicana" scholar

and activist Cherríe Moraga perceives Indigenous identity and politics, and expresses the implications of Mexican Americans' recovery of their Indigenous heritage.

In *A Xicana Codex*, Moraga, like Forbes and Rodríguez, affirms "Xicanos'" indigeneity.[73] The author maintains that the letter X in the term *Xicanas/os* is derived from the *Nahuatl* spelling of the 'ch' sound and is used to "indicate a reemerging política, especially among young people, grounded in Indigenous American belief systems and identities."[74] Moraga draws from Rodríguez's use of the *X* in *The X in La Raza*, which signifies "the Indian identity that has been robbed from us through colonization."[75] Moraga contends that, "many Raza may not know their specific Indigenous nation of origin, the *X* links us as Native people in diaspora."[76] Moraga, like Forbes, Rodríguez, Menchaca and Gomez, understands that the processes of colonization and modernity have denied *Xicanos* their ability to claim their Indigenous identity, relatives, and culture. Moraga exclaims that the denial of Mexican Americans' indigeneity is a form of cultural genocide—a genocide, which is shared with American Indian relatives. Moraga, like Rodríguez, contends that Mexican Americans' reclamation of their Indigenous culture and identity is decoloniality.[77]

Moraga explains some of the controversy surrounding Mexican American claims of indigeneity. She states, "from the perspective of some less informed North American Indian activists, *Xicanos* do not hold rights to their Indigenous identity by virtue of their Mexicanism. This perception is aggravated by the fact that the majority of Mexicans in the United States and México have historically denied their Native identities.[78] Perhaps this history has influenced academics who critique Mexican American claims of indigeneity and their relationship with Indigenous peoples? Moraga aims to educate Mexican Americans about their Indigenous heritage, encourage them to embrace it, and reclaim a heritage and identity that is rightfully

theirs. She also aims to educate critics of Mexican Americans who claim their indigeneity.[79] Moraga also refers to migrants from the Americas as "Native American," because she acknowledges their indigeneity.[80] She hopes that this reclamation will inspire other "Xicanas/os" and Mexican Americans to learn about their Indigenous heritage, cultural, history and relationships with the Indigenous peoples of North America. In addition, Moraga, hopes for an uprising that will end injustices inflicted upon all Indigenous peoples of the Americas.[81]

Mixed race Mexicans, as Moraga, Rodríguez and Forbes argue, share a legacy with Native Americans as the original inhabitants of the Americas, who also share experiences, such as being dispossessed of, and displaced from their original homelands, and detached from their native relatives. Mexican Americas share experiences of trauma due to cultural genocide, the denial of human and civil rights and, denial of equal participation in, and representation within American political, social, economic and educational institutions.

A Native American Scholar's and an "Indigenous" Woman's Perception of Indigeneity[82]

In what follows, I demonstrate similar sentiments about what it means to be Indigenous, as expressed by a Native American scholar Leon and Sophia. In my conversations with Leon and Sophia I asked, "what does Indigenous mean to you?" To which Diné scholar, Leon responded:

> It's a term to really recognize, the original peoples of the Americas, of their land, of their home. It's a term that tries to build bridges of relations. . . . [I]ndigenous is a term that tries to really bridge *all* of the peoples of the Americas. And, in terms of their homeland, of their originality to the place and to a space and, really reflect[s] a building of relations, because, in the past that's how it was done. When you look at the history between Indigenous peoples, they built relations, and it helped create new clan systems . . . new societies, it helped build a trade

> network between peoples, it helped build *their communities*. And, in that sense, you have that history of networks and bridges and relations. And, so now, because of the colonization and imperialism, *that* has been disruptive, and in many cases severed Indigenous peoples. And now, just recently, you're starting to see those bridges built again. And, the term Indigenous reflects that.[83]

Leon's words speak to the assertions made by Forbes, Rodríguez, and Gonzales regarding the relationships that Indigenous peoples have as the original inhabitants of the Americas, and that relationships were formed between various Indigenous peoples of the Americas, through trade and intentions of expanding their communities, which included intermixing with other Indigenous and interculturally mixed peoples.[84] An example of this is evident in the Diné people's intent to increase their society by mixing with the Indigenous peoples of México, which created the Nakai clan.[85] Leon emphasized the importance of "build[ing] bridges of relations" through these intercultural relations and exchanges, how colonization and imperialism has disrupted these relationships, and that these bridges are being rebuilt today.[86]

This re-building of relations is being done through solidarity between Indigenous peoples efforts, such as the recent NODAPL protests, where Indigenous peoples of various nations, both nationally and internationally supported the Lakota in their efforts to thwart the Dakota access pipeline, through the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and through pan-Indian ceremonies where Indigenous peoples and Mexican Americans supported one another through prayer and camaraderie, as is done in my ceremonial community and extended ceremonial circles. I now turn to Sophia's response. She stated,

> [B]eing native, or having an origin to a particular place—to the earth. . . . And not claiming a specific tribe or group [as in the U.S. designating Indigenous peoples

> to specific tribes], like the colonizers has tried to do, like to a nation or to Native Americans. . . in that sense. . . . [T]hat you're Indigenous to this continent. For me, here, home to this continent and Indigenous to the earth and the land, and everything else that we're connected [to]. And *we have* that connection. So, by saying, 'I'm Indigenous,' is saying, I have my connection here. . . . [A]s we go through a healing process to rehumanize [ourselves/humanity], that's where we have to go, to those connections and recognize that we're part of those connections to everything, even with all the different names [of Indigenous nations] and all the different clans and tribes, as Indigenous people—people of this land.[87]

According to Leon and Sophia, being Indigenous means being a people that have ancestral ties to the Americas. Part of that ancestry involves understanding that Indigenous peoples have a connection to their original ancestral homelands, their environment and other Indigenous peoples that are our ancestors, peoples who together, formed relations and "communities."[88] Leon and Sophia did not differentiate between peoples who were of mixed-heritage, which underscores that they have an awareness of the legacy of the intercultural relations Indigenous peoples have created throughout the Southwest and the Americas. Leon and Sophia affirmed this understanding in their responses to my interview question, what does the term *mestiza* and *mestizo* mean to you? Leon responded, "[F]or me it's really the mixed heritage in communities and individuals, but, also the history behind it. . . both the violent traumatic history, as well as the history of families, in terms of their interactions with different peoples and their building of their relations.[89]

Sophia likewise responded,

> "[I]t's people of mixed blood. . . . a Spaniard mixed with an Indian. . . . the importance of claiming my Indigenous side and not say [*mestiza*], because if you're a *mestiza,* you can be aware and recognize that (being Indigenous) by blood and lineage. But, [in] my mind and my heart—I have that relationship [with the] geography, my place, my relationship with the natural world, the land, the humanity, and all those other things that are Indigenous. So, to me Indigenous is who we *really* are."[90]

According to Leon, the term *mestiza/o* connotes the "mixed heritage" of individuals and "communities," and the history behind this mixture—a history that involved a "violent traumatic history," with the Spanish slave trade economy, and a history of Indigenous peoples interacting with "different peoples," namely, Europeans, Indigenous peoples of México, *genizaros*, and Mexicans, and the building of relations with all of these peoples. Sophia's response reflects the cognitive journey that the *danzantes* and *promotoras* of my ceremonial community take in their recovery and (re)cognition of their Indigenous heritage, which influences them to identity as Indigenous, if they have not done so in the past. Sophia maintains that a *mestiza* is a person of mixed Indian and Spanish blood. And, she asserts, that if you are a *mestiza* that has an Indigenous worldview, as she does, then you ethically identify as Indigenous. This worldview includes having a "relationship" "with the land," with "place," "space," "humanity" and "the natural world."[91]

Importantly, Leon's and Sophia's perspectives regarding indigeneity reflect the epistemologies, ontologies and lifeways in which the *danzantes* and *promotoras* live every day. Their responses additionally reflect the cognizance the *danzantes* and *promotoras* have regarding their indigeneity, which is expressed with integrity, ethics, and an acknowledgement of the

historically violent and loving ways in which Indigenous peoples interculturally mixed with Europeans and other peoples, and formed familial and community relationships, and networks comprised of intercultural communities. In what follows, I demonstrate the significance of the *Nahui Ollin* mandala or symbol that the *danzantes* and *promotoras* of my ceremonial community create during specific *velaciones*, like *Dia de las Animas*.

The construction of the *Nahui Ollin* is usually made during the late evening. It is made with a white sheet, which is used as the *Nahui Ollin's* platform. The sheet is laid on the floor, simultaneously by the *sahumadoras*. The *Nahui Ollin* is made with four people, including two *sahumadoras* who guide its construction, and two people who create this symbol with *flores* and *romero*. Once completed the *Nahui Ollin* was *beautiful*. It was multicolored, with red, orange, pink, and white *flores*. And it was bordered with *romero* (rosemary). The *Nahui Ollin* is an Indigenous *Nahua* symbol, which represents movement in action, transition, and change. The *Nahui Ollin* symbol is used in *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca's velaciones*. It represent movement in action, and transitions that we, the *animas*, spirit guides *y todo elementos del universo* experience during the *ceremonia* and throughout eternity. This Indigenous worldview reflects all of life, such as the change in seasons, the good and trying times in life, or changes that occur with cultures, such as inter-relational mixtures that happen over time. The practitioners consider the *Nahui Ollin* a sacred symbol, which during the Spanish colonial era was syncretized with the Catholic cross, and as such it "represents a cross in motion."[92]

Sophia has informed me that the laying down of the *Nahui Ollin* "represents Jesus being laid on the cross."[93] The *flores* used to make the *Nahui Ollin* symbolize the prayers put into the *flores* as they are smudged, and then laid upon the platform. And, the lifting of the *flores* to make the *bastones* (staffs) for the *limpias* toward the end of the *ceremonia* signifies "the resurrection

of Christ."[94] It is significant that *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* uses the Indigenous *Nahui Ollin* symbol for this syncretized ritual, because other *danza grupos,* such as *Tonantzin* use to use the symbol of *la cruz* (the cross), made of *flores*. However, with *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca's* help *grupo Tonantzin* started creating the *Nahui Ollin* for their annual *velacion* in July to honor *Señor Santiago*, their *grupo's* guardian.

It is important to state that my ceremonial community's *velaciones* are invitation only *ceremonias*. These *velaciones* are private rituals in the intimate space of the *kalpulli's oratorio*—a space that we respect and consider sacred. The *velaciones* are also *tequios* of decolonial work, in that, these ritual performances unite mixed-race and Indigenous peoples, instead of perpetuating difference and factionalization as the scholarship of academic critics discussed herein do.

The Mexican American/Mexican *danzantes* and *promotoras* of my ceremonial community acknowledge their Mexican American and Mexican heritage, and privilege their Indigenous identity through the ritual performances of *danza azteca* and *curanderismo*, through a conscious embracement of their intercultural mixture, syncretization of their Mesoamerican and Catholic religious deities and practices, such as *Coatlicue, Tonantzin* and *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, and the community *tequios*, which *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* hosts that focus on Indigenous *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican thought, philosophy, culture, medicinal practices, and how this knowledge benefits us in the present. All of this work is decolonial, in that, my ceremonial and ethnic community draw from this knowledge and maintain Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies and ceremony to solidify and further strengthen who we are and what we are capable of, individually and collectively—a sense of knowing and being that respects our self-dignity and that of others, during in ceremony and in our everyday lives. This work counters

modern capitalist individualistic and self-interested ways of knowing and being. Importantly, the Chicano scholars noted in this chapter demonstrate their support of Mexican Americans' claims of indigeneity, because they too are aware of Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies of kinship and community, of the violent colonial legacies that displaced and (dis)membered peoples of Mexican descent from their Indigenous kin, and they too are aware of Native Americans' and Mexican Americans' efforts to (re)member one another through spiritual, political, and community solidarity.

Danzantes' and Promotoras' Conceptualization of their Mexican Heritage and Indigenous Identity

In this section, I provided excerpts from interviews with *danzante, jefe* and ceremonial leader Felipe, and Vanessa, a Mesoamerican scholar and ceremonial leader, *Conchero danzante*, and at the time of the defense of my dissertation, a former *promotora* and *sauhmadora* of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca*. The following discusses their views regarding what the terms Indigenous and *mestizo/a* mean to them. In addition, I discuss ways in which they identify. Both Felipe and Vanessa are Mexican immigrants, who have lived in New Mexico for several years. They speak in a manner that reflects that their first language is Spanish, and their second language is English.

I begin with my conversation with Felipe, specifically with his response to my interview question, "what does the term Indigenous mean to you?" To which Felipe responded,

> Indigenous means to me, refer[s] to something old, ancient that is connected with *la tierra* (the earth), with a heritage, with all culture. To focus particularly [with] this part of the continent, for me it's all our *abuelos, abuelas* (grandfathers, grandmothers) . . . from a thousand years ago [meaning, thousands of years ago], *nuestro antepasados* (our ancestors). . . . *Gente de la tierra* (People of the earth).[95]

Felipe understands, "Indigenous," as referring to "our" "ancient" grandparents and "*antepasados*," and that for thousands of years, our Indigenous ancestors had a connection with the earth. And, he and I, and our ceremonial community are Indigenous, and are part of this "heritage," he spoke of.

When I handed Felipe my list of identifiers and asked, "which of these would you use to describe your identity?" He replied,

> [M]y identity's very complex, and it's not define[d] by words . . . for me identity goes beyond words. You can make references, that connects with, o[r] help to build whatever we call identity . . . but, at this time of my life I assume my *existencia* (existence) and life. . . . I don't feel there is some [word], that *describe[s]* my identity. It's very complex. It has to do more with, energy, and maybe with silence, with movements, than with words.[96]

Based on Felipe's expressions, he views identity as "energy," on "*existencia*," "and life." Identity has more to do with "energy," "silence," and "movements." In other words, identity has to do with how one lives their life. How one is and interacts in the world toward themselves and others. It involves, what one does in their life. Identity is about *being* in the world. For Felipe, this being in the world involves being with his family, *comadres*, *compadres*, and ceremonial and ethnic community.

In my conversation with Vanessa, upon asking her, "what does Indigenous mean to you?" She responded,

> Indigenous, that can be someone who is one hundred percent Indigenous blood. . . . in a biological way, people who are descendant[s] of Indigenous people. . . . I'm thinking now, for example, the Indigenous knowledge. I think what still exists

that was creat[ed] from the Indigenous people that were here, so, . . . all this cosmovision started 3,000 [years] before the Spaniards arrive[d]. . . . some of that knowledge is still alive. It's passed by oral tradition. [So,] not only Indigenous people, but the Indigenous knowledge is still there. . . . I'm not Indigenous, I'm mixed, but my great-grand parents were indigenous, almost full blood[ed]. I don't consider myself Indigenous. And, people [think], even my physical appearance looks Indigenous, but I don't call myself Indigenous, because my other part is, *mestizo*. . . . But, I don't feel that is honest, because it's kind of denying the other part [of my heritage]. . . . But, I claim for myself the Indigenous knowledge. And, I think that a lot of *mestizos* are doing that with different traditions, like for example, the *temazkal*. When I was growing up there was no *temazkallis*. The tradition was almost lost in México City. I knew about these places [with *temazkallis*], but I never had access, because [I] was prohibited. People were not trusting in their medicine, but now people like me—*mestizos* are bringing that tradition alive again. . . .

[T]hat's something that's change[d] a lot. . . . [P]eople that [are] not full-blood Indigenous, but they feel the call to re-connect with their roots, the Indigenous roots are bringing that tradition alive again. So, I think the Indigenous knowledge is still there, very present. . . . So, who ever feel[s] the call, because I feel that is in the blood. In the soul you will feel the call with that Indigenous knowledge. . . . [W]e can be mixed, but it's still there . . . so, I [am] embracing more that Indigenous part of me. . . . . [R]ight now I'm choosing to honor the Indigenous part of México, that is in me.[97]

Vanessa's thought process of denying and later recovering her Indigeneity conveyed the effects of "de-Indianization," and "de-Indigenization," which Bonfil Batalla and Rodríguez argue peoples of Mexican descent experienced during the Spanish and American colonial eras in México and the American Southwest.[98] In a conversation I had with Vanessa, she informed me that she has Mayan heritage. Vanessa's reclamation of her indigeneity demonstrated the "re-Indigenization"[99] process that accompanies decolonizing one's mind, through the recuperation of Indigenous knowledge and ceremony.[100]

Importantly, Vanessa's discomfort in acknowledging her Indigenous identity, and later embracing this identity, illuminates her concern appropriating indigeneity. Perhaps Vanessa was processing an inner-conflict, or perhaps she feared criticism from other Mexicans or Indigenous people who might disavow her claim of indigeneity? Such conflict and concern of appropriation was underscored by Anzaldúa's final work *Light in the Dark /Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality and Reality*. In this text Anzaldúa asserts:

> Chicanas [and I add Mexicanas] silence indigenous woman, and indigenous women lambast Chicanas for appropriating Indian identity. We hurt an 'other' for their identity [and] race. . . . [D]espite living in overlapping worlds, un-conscious forces and unspoken desires divide us.[101]

Vanessa's mixed heritage and Indigenous ways of thinking, knowing and being embodies the "overlapping worlds" in which Mexicans, Mexican Americans and Indigenous peoples are situated. Her overlapping world of identity is similar to the relationship between the practitioners and Indigenous people who participate in ceremony and political and social struggles. Together, their worlds intersect and overlap.

When I handed Vanessa the list of identifiers and asked, "which of these would you use to describe your identity?" Vanessa responded,

> Mexican. . . . [W]ell, I could call myself a *mestiza*, [as a person] coming from different people, Indigenous people, Spanish people, who knows what else in México. I could use *mestiza*, but, I will say Mexican. . . . [A]s Mexicans, when we say that we are Mexican, we are assuming that we are *mestizos*. It's part of the connotation of the word for us as Mexicans.[102]

Through Vanessa's assertion of being "Mexican," she acknowledged her indigeneity by way of her *mestiza* heritage. Vanessa demonstrated a *mestiza/o* consciousness,[103] which she states, is a common understanding among Mexicans in México. For Vanessa, and other Mexicans, she and they know that they are peoples of mixed Indigenous heritage. Vanessa's words also reflected Anzaldúa's assertion that "identity is a process," "relational," "multilayered," and dependent on our surroundings, our interactions with our surroundings, "environments," and "old and new narratives.[104] Vanessa processed her identity in our conversation. This process involved conflicting perceptions between what dominant Mexican society told her about her identity, versus her own understanding of identity. Vanessa bases her Indigenous identity upon the connections and relationships she has her Indigenous ancestors, others, and her environment, whether that environment is a sacred archeological site in México during her annual trips to conduct ritual with other women, or at *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca's* Mesoamerican *temazkal* style sweat lodge in South *Angelitas*, where she led ceremony. Hence, Vanessa's identity is embedded in biological heritage, and, to a significant degree, it is based on her Indigenous Mesoamerican cultural and ceremonial knowledge and practices. Vanessa's

identity is also connected to how she interacts with others as a Mesoamerican healer and ceremonial leader.

The ways in which Vanessa understands ritual performance and conveys her Indigenous identity is similar to the ways in which the other practitioners of ceremonial community convey their Indigeneity, through re-ceremonialization, through elder knowledge and its continuance,[105] and through the recuperation of *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican ceremonial, cultural, cosmological, and healing knowledge and practices. And, through the transference of this knowledge and practice to younger generations of *danzantes* and *promotoras* in *Angelitas*. For the *danza Azteca grupos, promotoras* and *kalpulltin* in my ceremonial community, identity is a process, like decoloniality, it is a lifelong state of becoming.

In a return to conversations I had with Paul and Sophia, I will re-emphasize how they view their identity. For instance, in my list of identifiers Sophia selected, "Mexican American," "*Mestiza*," "Indigenous," and "*Tejana/o*." Both Paul and Sophia identified with a few of these terms. For instance, Paul identified as "Mexican American," "*Mestizo*" and "Indigenous." And, Sophia identified as "Mexican American," "*Mestiza*," "Indigenous," and "*Tejana*," because she is originally from Texas. As previously stated, both Paul and Sophia are knowledge keepers of *Mexica* thought, philosophy and ceremony. And, they are aware of their Indigenous and Mexican heritage. For example, in a conversation with Paul, he stated that he is "Purépecha," and that his family was "One of the original founding families of" *Angelitas*.[106] Paul has European and Indigenous heritage. However, during some of his *platicas* and *Mexicayotl* presentations or performances, he has stated that he is "Indigenous." During personal conversations I have had with Sophia, she has stated "I'm *Tejana*"; "I'm Mexican and Apache;" "I'm Apache," or "were Mayan" [meaning she and her family].[107] Sophia has made each of these assertions, depending

on the context of our conversation. For example, once we were discussing Mexican American's mixed heritage and I stated, "Some of our *comadres* are aware of and acknowledge their mixed-race roots. Rosa is Mexican [American] and Mescalero Apache." Sophia replied, "I'm Apache too!"[108] Sophia's maternal grandfather was Mayan. And Sophia's maternal family believes they are also Apache, "from Coahuila,"[109], an area that is now part of Texas. Her European and Indigenous heritage comprises her *mestiza* racial mixture. Depending on the context, Sophia may admit her Spanish blood, such as when the topic of colonization arises, but, she does not identify as "Hispanic" or "Spanish." In fact, when she is asked what her ethnicity is, or when she introduces herself during her anti-racism workshops, she asserts, "I'm Indigenous"[110]

Danzantes and *promotoras* of my ceremonial community, such as Paul and Sophia demonstrate their knowledge of and identification with their Indigenous heritage. Paul and Sophia continue their Indigenous ancestor's ceremonial traditions and live their daily lives based upon Indigenous worldviews. They recognize both their mixed-race and Indigenous heritage and identity. And, understand themselves as Indigenous through Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies of kinship and community. Rather than through blood quantum and federally recognized tribal affiliation—colonial constructed paradigms of identity. Importantly they teach their *danzantes, promotoras,* and greater community of *Angelitas* such perspectives, which is embraced.

Mexican Americans are not Indigenous: Academic Critics' Perspectives of Indigeneity

In this section, I discuss scholars' claims that Mexican Americans are "settler colonizers."[111] Throughout the twentieth and twenty first centuries, scholars from Indigenous Studies, Ethnic Studies and Latino Studies have shared Indigenous perspectives that determine who has the right to claim indigeneity. Scholars, such as Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua state

that all non-Native people and migrants from the Americas are "settler colonizers," and assert that the Indigenous peoples of North America are those who made treaties with the United States and, are peoples of federally recognized tribes.[112] Tuck and Yang argue that all immigrants and non-Native PoC are "settler colonizers," whether or not they arrived upon the Americas against their will as slaves, or as a consequence of colonization. This includes Mexican Americans and blacks, among other PoC.[113] In what follows I discuss academics' view of Mexican Americans' relationship with Native Americans and First Nations peoples, and Mexican Americans' claims of indigently. These academics assert that American Indian's possess a distinct identity as the autochthonous peoples of the Americas. Moreover, they maintain that all non-Native PoC are settler colonizers, including Mexican Americans.

I begin with Bonita Lawrence's and Enakshi Dua's article "Decolonizing Antiracism."[114] Lawrence is a professor of Equity Studies at York University in Ontario, Canada, and is of Mi'kmaw descent. Her scholarship resides in Native Studies and antiracism work. Enakshi Dua is a professor of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies. And, both Lawrence's and Dua's work resides in antiracist feminist theory and postcolonial studies. Their collaborative essay drew from Indigenous perspectives in their contention that Indigenous people are understood as part of Indigenous nations that have treaty relationships with the United States,[115] and that PoC and non-Native peoples that occupy settled land in the Americas are settler colonists. The authors also maintain that antiracism theory and PoC participate in settler colonialism.[116] They assert that antiracism theory participates in colonial agendas by ignoring the ongoing colonization of Aboriginal peoples in the Americas, and "fails to integrate an understanding of" first world nations—"colonialist state[s] into antiracist frameworks."[117] Lawrence and Dua desire to "decolonize antiracism theory."[118] In so doing, they hope to create a space in which antiracist

and Aboriginal activists can dialogue.[119] The authors assert that the ongoing colonization of the Americas is achieved through societal structures that work to maintain settler colonist agendas and that "[s]ettler states in the Americas are founded on and maintained through policies of direct extermination, displacement, or assimilation," which ensures the ultimate disappearance of Indigenous peoples "*as* peoples, so that settler nations can seamlessly take their place."[120] The authors underscore that PoC participate in the "displacement" of Indigenous peoples by occupying Indigenous lands.[121] The authors contend that scholar James Clifford demonstrates this displacement through his juxtaposition of "Indigenous and 'diasporic' claims to identity."[122] Clifford asserts that, in Canada "Indigenous claims are primordial" and emphasize "continuity of habitation, Indigeneity, and often a 'natural' connection to the land,' whereas, 'diaspora cultures, constituted by displacement, may resist such appeals on political principal.[123] Lawrence and Dua respond to Clifford's claim in the following point, "Such a characterization of Indigenous claims ignores the contemporary political, social, and economic realities of Indigenous peoples, and fails to address the ways in which diasporic claims are premised on a colonizing social formation. . . . [and] multiple projects of colonization and settlement on Indigenous lands."[124] Lawrence and Dua assert that claims to indigeneity in First World nations such as Canada and the U.S. are disavowed and appropriated by diasporic communities. Such narratives reduce Indigenous peoples to "small groups of racially and culturally defined marginalized individuals drowning in a sea of settlers—who do not need to be taken seriously."[125] In other words, essentializing Indigenous peoples, equates them to "just another minority," rather than "distinct" peoples.[126]

Scholars Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang similarly contend that PoC, including immigrants and émigrés that relocate to the Americas are settler colonists, because, they too are settling upon

stolen Indigenous land.[127] And, replicate a settler colonial agenda that perpetuates the dispossession and displacement of Indigenous peoples. Lawrence and Dua contend,

> At the core of Indigenous survival and resistance is reclaiming a relationship to land. Yet, within antiracist theory and practice, the question of land as contested space is seldom taken up. From Indigenous perspectives, it speaks to a reluctance on the part of Non-Natives of any background to acknowledge that there is more to this land than being settlers on it, that there are deeper, older stories and knowledge connected to the landscapes around us. To acknowledge that we all share the same land base and yet to question the differential terms on which it is occupied is to become aware of the colonial project that is taking place around us.[128]

In regard to the authors assertion about the "reluctance" of "Non-Natives of any background" to acknowledge Indigenous people's legitimacy to this land or the "differential terms" and "colonial" conditions upon which the Americas are occupied.[129] With their use of "Non-Natives of any background," they imply that Mexican Americans are included as "Non-Native."[130] Lawrence and Dua, like Tuck and Yang, elide the fact that Mexican Americans are interculturally mixed with Indigenous heritage, and as such, possess an inherent "legitimacy to this land."[131] Still, as Lawrence and Dua write, "there are, deeper, older stories and knowledge connected to the landscape around us."[132] However, and to add greater complexity, Mexican Americans also share, sometimes the same "older stories and knowledge connected to the landscape around us."[133] Furthermore, the Mexican American *danzantes* and *promotoras* within my ceremonial community are conscious of the "differential terms" on which this land is "occupied."[134] As interculturally mixed peoples of Indigenous and Mexican descent, we share

ancestry with Native Americans. At times, during our ritual *ceremonias,* including interpersonal and community *platicas,* we discuss the ways in which Native and Mexican American peoples continue to be colonized, and believe it is our responsibility to personally and collectively decolonize our hearts, minds, and humanity through ceremony and by living in ceremony every day.

Mi Testimonio as a Mexican American Indígena Ceremonial Practitioner[135]

As a *danzante* and *promotora* I, along with other practitioners of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo,* apply decolonial epistemologies and ontologies in our ritual performances to improve our mental, spiritual, social and political conditions. Through our intentions, verbal and nonverbal enactments during *ceremonia* and as we live in ceremony every day, we work to improve cultural, social and political conditions for Mexican American and Native Americans, and for others we know and encounter in our everyday lives. We work toward decoloniality through the various ways we partake in activism for Mexican Americans and Native Americans, through empowering interpersonal and collective conversations, which discuss the ways in which we can challenge heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, racism, discrimination and inequality in social, political, economic and educational institutions within New Mexico, the Southwest and greater U.S. This counter-hegemonic consciousness, is further evidenced through our offerings of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo ceremonias* at public community protests, participating in political activism by signing petitions and letters, through invitation only *ceremonias* and public community *platicas* and workshops. And, through the continuation of our Mesoamerican *ceremonias,* such as the Moondance, Sundance, *Xilonen, temazkallis* and, pan-Indian *Inipi* sweat lodges and pipe *ceremonias,* which we perform with our Native American relatives and extended ceremonial communities throughout New Mexico, southern Texas, and central California.

It is important to state that some of the practitioners of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* are Moondancers who were gifted tobacco pipes by *abuela* Bea, a leader of the Moondance in southwest Texas and *comadre* of *abuelita Tonalmitl*, a highly revered elder and ceremonial leader who is responsible for recuperating the Moondance in México, which has now spread throughout the Americas. *Abuela* Bea received her Moondance ceremonial staff from *abuela Tonalmitl* after a nine year consecutive commitment participating in this ceremony with *abuela Tonalmitl* as her ceremonial leader in central México. The Moondance nine year ceremonial staff represents a leadership role as an *abuela* of this ritual. Once *abuela* Bea received this staff, she wanted to, as ceremonial participants say, "*Siembra un circulo"* or *"Siembra la semillas,"* (to sow or plant a [ceremonial] circle, or to sow or plant [the] seeds of ceremony).[136] As a result, she created a Moondance *circulo* in southwest Texas, and gave the new participants, including myself, a pipe for ceremonial use. The Moondance is a Mesoamerican ritual that is hundreds, if not thousands of years old. It is the counterpart to the Sundance ceremony—both of which are documented in the Codex *Borgia*. All of these ritual performances and political enactments speak my ceremonial community's truths through an Indigenous worldview that challenges and speaks truth to power.

In these ceremonial spaces, my ceremonial community publicly and interpersonally acknowledge and discuss the importance of Indigenous people's presence, rights, the infringement upon their rights and land, and how this infringement relates to and affects Mexican Americans today. My ceremonial and extended ceremonial community do not decenter Indigenous people's rights, but rather, they see Native Americans' fight for natural resources, social justice and civil rights as interconnected battles in which we fight side by side. An example of this solidarity was evidenced during the No Dakota Access Pipe Line (NODAPL)

protest. For instance, during this time, one of my mentors Roberto Rodríguez sent out a mass group message though Facebook messenger, on behalf of some of the elders who were a part of the protest. Roberto sent the message to many people, including myself, and people who are a part of my extended ceremonial community in southern Arizona and northern California. He asked if we could pray in unison at a specific time for Lakota water protectors' victory. I resent the message to members of my *kalpulli, danza grupo Maguey*, and to a *danzante* of *grupo Fuego*. As a result, everyone who was included in the original and resent message prayed in unison during the stated time. The following day, the Lakota people had a victory, because the construction for the pipeline was temporarily halted. Unfortunately, their victory was short lived, but it may have been enough to lift their spirits, and give them hope to continue their fight. And, their fight may have inspired others to continue fighting with them, and still others to join them, and others to become more politicized in other protests toward injustice.

In January 2018, I observed another example of my ceremonial community's recognition of Indigenous people and their land. This recognition was demonstrated at the 2018 Women's march in central New Mexico. Sophia was a part of the organizing community for the opening prayer and *danza Azteca ceremonias* in which *grupos Maguey* and *Fuego* and other *comadritas y compadritos* participated in. A few weeks before the march, Sophia and I were discussing the logistics of the opening prayer. She stated, "We [the organizing committee] want to have a Pueblo person offer the opening prayer, to honor them and their land." I replied, ask Tia from Paul's *grupo*, she's Pueblo. Sophia thought about my suggestion for a few seconds, and said, "Well they [organizing committee] might want someone who is a part of the [non-profit] organizations." I responded, "It wouldn't hurt to suggest it. Talk to Paul about it." She looked at me pensively. As a result of our conversation, Tia did give the opening prayer at the Women's

March. I was so happy! During the opening prayer I whispered to my *comadre* Janice who was standing beside me, smiled and said, “I’m so happy. I suggested to Sophia to have Tia give the opening prayer and she did.” Janice smiled and replied, “Oh, see what happens when you manifest.”

Essentially, the practitioners of my ceremonial community may not experience challenges in the same way as Native Americans, but, we do share similar dilemmas, such as the fight to be seen, heard, and acknowledged, like the way we ensured that Tia and Pueblo and Native American peoples of *Angelitas* and the state of New Mexico were honored by Tia’s presence and blessing. We also fight side by side with Native Americans, as we did during the NODAPL protests. We prayed with and for each other during these protests, and in pan-Indian ceremonies. And, in June 2020, as I watched the evening news I witnessed practitioners of my ceremonial community join in solidarity with Native Americans, PoC and non-PoC as they protested to have the Juan Oñate statue taken down from the grounds of a Museum in *Angelitas*. As the protesters chanted, “Take the statue down!” one of the *comadres* and former *promotoras* of *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca* was smudging the protest site with her *sahumador*. This conjoined protest with Native Americans against a historical colonial figure demonstrated our awareness and opposition of a *conquistador*, who caused atrocious violence and injustice toward the Pueblo peoples of New Mexico. It also illuminated our awareness of the ways in which Oñate forced Mexican Indigenous peoples to settle the lands of and take resources from Native Americans. And, how this resettlement created tensions between the proceeding generations of peoples of Mexican descent and Native Americans. Our conjoined solidarity in protests, illustrated how we fight for the causes of both Mexican Americans and Native Americans.

And, I, as a ceremonial practitioner and social justice activist scholar applies decolonial epistemology and ontology while performing ritual performances and within my scholarship to advocate for social justice, improve the civil rights of Mexican Americans and Indigenous peoples, and the mind, hearts and actions of humanity.

Mexican Americans' Claim of Indigeneity

Paul, Sophia, and other *danzantes* and *promotoras* of my ceremonial community who perceive themselves as Indigenous through Indigenous heritage, epistemology, and ontology. In doing so, they are not replicating colonialism, "appropriating" indigeneity or "playing Indian." Nor are they "settler colonizers," or "arrivants," due to the fact that their Indigenous ancestors *are the original inhabitants* of this continent, which scholars, such as Guidotti-Hernández, Saldaña-Portillo, Tuck and Yang, Lawrence and Dua, and Byrd fail to recognize. The *danzantes* and *promotoras* of my ceremonial community disavow narrow colonial frameworks of identification and belonging, as they self-define their identity for themselves in ways that honor their Indigenous relatives of the past and present.

The interculturally mixed *danzantes'* and *promotoras'* assertions of indigeneity, and their continuance of Mesoamerican cultural knowledge and ceremonies, affirms their legacy to this land and connections with Native Americans of the Southwest and Indigenous peoples of México, in ethical, respectful and dignifying ways. Importantly, Mexican American claims of indigeneity are enactments of decolonization, because this acknowledgment disavows limiting hegemonic narrations of their identity that do not recognize their Indigenous ancestry and connection to this land. As Sophia has said, "Reclaiming your indigeneity is decolonial work."[137] In *unidad* the practitioners of my ceremonial community, as well as other Mexican Americans

who live according to Indigenous worldviews, ethically recognize their indigeneity, because we continue Indigenous Mesoamerican culture and traditions in the present.

Arming Oneself Against Accusations of "Appropriation"

I leave the reader with a few counter perspectives to consider. Some critics of Mexican Americans who assert their indigeneity, accuse them of appropriating indigeneity or "playing Indian." For instance, Latin American Studies scholar María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo and Latino Studies scholar Nicole Guidotti-Hernández argue that Mexican Americans who draw from *Aztec* cosmology and assert their indigeneity do so in the absence of a native presence.[138] Therefore, they appropriate indigeneity.[139] In the article "Speaking Across the Divide," Anzaldúa responded to Saldaña-Portillo's accusation that she appropriates indigeneity. Anzaldúa stated that Saldaña-Portillo "misread or has not read enough of my work."[140] Anzaldúa also asserted that Saldaña-Portillo's contentions were regurgitations of colonial rhetoric that marginalizes people, and that Chicanos are Indigenous peoples who are "re-rooting" themselves with their Indigenous heritage.[141] Roberto Rodríguez also responds to accusations of Indigenous appropriation. He contends that Mexican Americans are a "de-tribalized" peoples, who are subjected to de-humanization by colonial powers that force us to deny our indigeneity. As such, our recognition of indigeneity is a decolonizing, re-humanizing and re-indigenizing process.[142]

In response to the accusation that Mexican Americans' "appropriate" indigeneity, I will paraphrase and quote Paul. In two separate conversations with Paul, I informed him that there are some Indigenous, and Latino Studies scholars, such as Lawrence and Dua, Guidotti-Hernandez, Saldaña-Portillo, and Byrd that contend that Chicanos are "settler colonizers," or "arrivants" who appropriate indigeneity by asserting this identity.[143] In response, Paul affirmed that people who accuse us of appropriating are "insecure" about their identity and cultural heritage,[144] and that

such accusations reflect *Mexica* perspectives about *"Tezcatlipoca"*—the concept of the obsidian smoke and mirror which forces us to look at ourselves, including the parts that we do not want to acknowledge.[145] Paul asserted that these accusers "are refusing to see a part of themselves that they despise."[146] If we apply Paul's perspective, toward Guidotti-Hernández and Saldaña-Portillo, we can ascertain that perhaps if they would look into their own *Tezcatlipoca's*, they would perceive themselves guilty of appropriating indigeneity, because of their contempt for Mexican Americans' acknowledgment of this identity, and because of their own de-indigenized positionality— perspectives that mimic colonial rhetoric and structure of colonized peoples.

In addition, Paul informed me of rules to follow that would act as *arma* against accusations of appropriation. He asserted, "First, when you are taught a tradition, you practice it until it becomes your own. Second, you don't share that tradition until you have made it your own. Third, when you chose to share that tradition, be discerning. And fourth, give credit to who taught you that tradition. And, if people continue to accuse you, you tell them to come talk to me!"[147]

Paul's last comment reflects an additional view which he shared with me, that, "The responsibility of the knowledge your elders share with you falls on them" and the Indigenous perspective that your elders are teachers and sources of protection, in that, they and the knowledge they share act as *arma* to those who attack them and their students.[148] In addition, elders like Paul are willing to protect and defend their students, as many Indigenous leaders did in the past and continue to do today. Paul's *consejos*, gave me knowledge and *arma* with which to protect and defend myself against those who may accuse me appropriation. *Gracias* Paul.

Paul's *consejos* healed any self-doubt I had about my and other Mexican Americans' claims of indigeneity. When we honor our elders, family and community who taught us this

knowledge, when we learn about our Indigenous culture and give credit to those who taught us, we avoid appropriating indigeneity. Through these principles, the practitioners of my ceremonial community understand that our identity is embedded in our culture and cultural expressions, such as *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo ceremonias,* and *tequios*. Our Indigenous identity is also manifested in how we are in the world toward our families, friends, *comadres*, *compadres* and community, whose face and hearts are connected. Our indigeneity is embedded in our adherence to the five ethics, philosophy of *Tu eres mi otro yo*, and the ways in which we live every day. Through these Indigenous worldviews and interdependent relationships with others and our ancestral homelands, we ethically claim our indigeneity, as our federally recognized relatives do.

Conclusion

A respectful dialogue needs to be had between Chicano scholars and academics that critique Mexican American claims of indigeneity and their relationship to Indigenous peoples. Such critics need to be open to hearing the voices of *danzantes*, *promotoras* and Native American peoples whom we join in solidarity, in order to better understand one another's positionalities. My hope is that through such dialogues and this study, healing will transpire that honors the dignity and humanity of Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and Mexicans of the Southwest.

Forbes, Moraga, and Rodríguez provide critical examples regarding conflicting perceptions about Mexican American claims of indigeneity. To be clear, I am not advocating that Mexican Americans endeavor to obtain federal or state tribal recognition or Native American resources. Rather, I suggest that the critics of Mexican Americans who acknowledge their indigeneity, learn the history about the shared indigeneity that exists among Mexican Americans and Native Americans. In addition, I suggest that the shared colonial history of land

dispossession and displacement that exists among Mexican Americans and Native Americans be recognized. Finally, I propose that the history of community and kinship that exists between Mexican Americans and Native Americans also be (re)membered. In this way, my hope is that we can begin to accept and include one another more in our shared assertions of indigeneity and fight for decolonization.

In my second intervention, I argue that both interculturally mixed Indigenous peoples and academics who criticize Mexican American claims of indigeneity need to consider that blood quantum and federal recognition are not the only markers of indigeneity. For instance, during my dissertations defense, my committee member Dr. Manley Begay Jr. who is Diné and Jemez Pueblo, challenged me to expand my perception of what constitutes Indigenous identity. He told me of an actual story of a man he knows whose biological mother is Mexican, and therefore, this man is also biologically Mexican. However, this man's mother could not raise him, and when this man was a child his mother asked a Pueblo family if they would raise him, and they agreed. As a result, this man learned the Pueblo language fluently. He practices Pueblo lifeways, including cultural and ceremonial traditions. As a matter of fact, he speaks the language even better than his Pueblo siblings.

After telling me this story, Dr. Begay asked me, what identity is this man is? To which, I responded "Pueblo." I then spoke of the significance of Indigenous adoptions and traditions of creating kin based on interpersonal and community relationships. Essentially, regarding this Pueblo man and my ceremonial community, identity formation is not dependent on blood quantum alone, or even at all, as evidenced by this Pueblo man's life story. Indigenous identity, or any other form of identity, for that matter, can include biological heritage, but, it is not dependent on it. Indigenous identity is based on cultural affiliation and expression. Indigenous

identity is based on cultural, ceremonial and healing knowledge and practices that have been passed down by our elders, and continued into futurity by the present generation. Ultimately, identity is based on ways of *being* in the world and one's relationships with their family, community and environment.

I leave this essay with poignant words shared by Gloria Anzaldúa, which I hope will "de-polarize potential allies" and inspire change in the hearts and minds of critics of Mexican Americans' claims of indigeneity.[149]

> We may feel threatened by those who possess a different viewpoint or different kinds of knowledge/conocimiento. . . . Fear and ignorance produce conflict.
>
> . . . [W]e must dismantle identity markers that promote divisions. . . . otherwise we'll be so busy asserting and promoting those identities that we'll miss what's really going on, miss the opportunity to become or gain allies.[150]

In the concluding essay, I offer final thoughts regarding my ceremonial community's (re)cognition of their indigeneity and provide suggestions for further research.

Notes

[1] Conversation with American Indians Studies colleague Dawn, March 4, 2011.
[2] Patrisia Gonzales, *Red Medicine: Traditional Indigenous Rites of Birthing and Healing* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014, xxv).
[3] See Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," (2012).
[4] It is critical to state that in Gloria Anzaldúa's earlier work, *Borderlands: La Frontera, the New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999) and *Interviews/Entrevistas* ed. Analouise Keating (New York: Routledge, 2000) Anzaldúa identifies as Indian, and promotes Chicanos and Mexican Americans' embracement of their Indian heritage and identity. It is from. It is from these earlier works that I draw from her claim of indigeneity, and that of other Chicanos and Mexican Americans. However, in her final work, ed. Ana Louise Keating, *Light in the Dark, Luz en lo Oscuro Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015) Anzaldúa and Keating are more critical about her own and other Chicanos and Mexicans claim of indigeneity, in order to avoid "indigenous appropriation" (xxxiii). And, in this final work Anzaldúa does not claim to be 'Native American' (xxxiii). Yet, Anzaldúa still acknowledges the Indigenous ancestry Chicanos and Mexican Americans possess.
[5] Jack D. Forbes, 2nd Edition, *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples* (University of Illinois Press, 1993), and *Aztecas Del Norte: The Chicanos of Aztlán* (Greenwich: Fawcett Publications, 1973); Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, *México Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization*, translated by Philip A. Dennis (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996); Roberto Rodríguez, *Our Sacred Maiz Is Our Mother, Nin Tonantzin Non Centeoltl: Indigeneity and Belonging in the Americas* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014) and Roberto Rodríguez and Patrisia Gonzales, DVD, *Amoxtli San Ce Tojuan, We are One, Nosotros Somos* (San Fernando, CA: Xicano Records and Film, 2005); *Red Medicine: Traditional Indigenous Rites of Birthing and Healing* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012); Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: La Frontera, the New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999); and Cherríe Moraga, *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness: Writings 2000-2012* (Durham Duke University Press, 2011).
[6] See Nicole Guidotti-Hernandez, *Unspeakable Violence: Remapping U.S. and Mexican National Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Sandra Soto, *Reading Chican@ like a Queer the De-mastery of Desire* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010); and María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) for discussions on Chicanos' appropriation of indigeneity and negation of Indigenous peoples struggles. Also see Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1.1 (2012): 1-40; Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua, "Decolonizing Antiracism," *Social Justice* 32.4 (2005):120-43; Jodi Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); and Bautista and Hernandez for discussions on Mexican Americans being "settler colonizers," "arrivants," and "descendants of Indigenous peoples."
[7] See Guidotti-Hernandez, *Unspeakable Violence* (2011); and Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination* (2003), for their contention that Chicanos and Mexican Americans who claim their Indigenous heritage appropriate" indigeneity.
[8] Gonzales, *Red Medicine*, 2012, xxv.
[9] See Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 1999; and Anzaldúa and Ana Louise Keating, ed., *Light in the Dark, Luz en lo Oscuro Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).
[10] Sophia and the *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca concilio* (council) conceived of "love donations" as a form of ritual gift exchange.
[11] Sophia and the *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca concilio* (council) conceived of "love donations" as a form of ritual gift exchange.
[12] The Hamblecha is a vision quest ceremony. The Sundance is a masculine renewal ceremony. The Moondance is a female ritual that celebrates feminine energy. According to the *Codex Borgia*, the Moondance is the counter part of the Mesoamerican Sundance ceremony, which celebrates masculine energy and is a renewal ceremony, https://networks.h-net.org/node/232891/pdf. see esp. images 39 and 40, September 18, 2017. The *Xilonen* ritual is a female coming of age ceremony. All of these ceremonies are Mesoamerican rituals. Also see Elisa Facio, and Irene Lara, eds., *Fleshing the Spirit: Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women's Lives* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2014) for information regarding the significance of these ceremonies.
[13] See Jack Forbes, "The Mestizo Concept: A Product of European Imperialism," www.mexica.org, date accessed, June 4, 2020. See also Forbes, *Aztecas del Norte*, "The Mestizo Concept: A Product of European Imperialism," 178-205.

[14] Forbes, *Aztecas del Norte*, 20.
[15] Forbes, *Aztecas del Norte*, 20.
[16] Jack Forbes, *Aztecas del Norte: The Chicanos of Aztlán* (Greenwich CN: Fawcett Publications, 1973, 20).
[17] Roberto Rodríguez and Patrisia Gonzales, *Amoxtli San Ce Tojuan*, (2005).
[18] Forbes, *Aztecas del Norte*, 20.
[19] Roberto Rodríguez, Personal conversation, Tucson, Arizona, April 7, 2010. Also see Miguel León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind*, translated by Jack Emory Davis (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963).
[20] Forbes, *Aztecas del Norte*, 27.
[21] Forbes, *Aztecas del Norte*, 27.
[22] Forbes, *Aztecas del Norte*, 28.
[23] See Forbes, 1973; and Rodríguez, *Our Sacred Maiz*, 2014; and Rodríguez, "Fighting Law Enforcement Brutality While Living With Trauma in a World of Impunity," *Genealogy Journal* 2. 56 December 15, 2018), for discussions on cultural genocide, being displaced from their original homelands lands, detached from their Indigenous relatives, and forced to deny their indigeneity.
[24] See Forbes, 1973; and Rodríguez, *Our Sacred Maiz*, 2014; and Rodríguez, "Fighting Law Enforcement Brutality," 2018, for discussion on cultural genocide, being displaced from their original homelands lands, detached from their Indigenous relatives, and forced to deny their indigeneity.
[25] See Rodríguez, *Our Sacred Maiz*, 2014; Rodríguez and Gonzales, *Amoxtli San Ce Tojuan*, 2005; Rodríguez, *The X in La Raza* (Albuquerque: Published by Author, 1996); and Forbes, 2nd Edition, *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples* (University of Illinois Press, 1993); and *Aztecas Del Norte*, 1973.
[26] See Rodríguez, *Our Sacred Maiz*, 2014, 10; 53.
[27] See Rodríguez, *Our Sacred Maiz*, 2014, 10; 53.
[28] See Bonfil Batalla, *México Profundo*, 1996; and Rodríguez, *Our Sacred Maiz*, 2014, 10; 53.
[29] See Bonfil Batalla *México Profundo*, 1996; and Rodríguez, 2014.
[30] Rodríguez and Gonzales, *Amoxtli San Ce Tojuan*, 2005.
[31] Laura Gomez, *Manifest Destinies: The Making of the Mexican American Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2007); Martha Menchaca, *Recovering History, Constructing Race: The Indian, Black, and White Roots of Mexican Americans* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001); and Deena González, *Refusing the Favor: the Spanish Mexican Women of Santa Fe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
[32] Forbes informs us of the term *Sangre puro* (1993). This term was used during the Spanish colonial era and for generations thereafter. This term resulted from the process of *mestizaje* which was implemented to dilute Indigenous blood and create a more Spanish blood peoples in the colonies. Through *mestizaje* the mixed-race population that was created as a result. However, today, the sentiment of the term *mestizaje* is determined by the context in which it is being used, because, consensual relationships also existed amongst Indigenous peoples of North America prior to the Spanish invasion, and Indians and mixed-races also had consensual relationships, during and after the Spanish colonial era; see (Rodríguez and Gonzales 2005).
[33] Ned Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2006): see esp. 55-70.
[34] Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land*, 55-70.
[35] Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land*, 55-70.
[36] Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land*, 55-70.
[37] Blackhawk, 55-70.
[38] See Enrique Lamadrid, *Hermanitos Comanchitos: Indo-Hispano Rituals of Captivity and Redemption* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2003), for discussions of *genízaros* as Indo-Hispano peoples.
[39] See Gomez *Manifest Destinies*, 2007; Menchaca, *Recovering History*, 2001.
[40] See Gomez *Manifest Destinies*, 2007; Menchaca, *Recovering History*, 2001.
[41] See Menchaca, *Recovering History*, 2001.
[42] Menchaca, "Chicano Indianism: A Historical Account of Racial Repression in the United States," *American Ethnologist* 20. 3, (1993): 583-603, see esp. 590-91.
[43] Rodríguez, "Fighting Law Enforcement Brutality," 2018; Rodríguez and Gonzales, *Amoxtli San Ce Tojuan*, 2005; Gomez, *Manifest Destinies* 2007; Menchaca, *Recovering History*, 2001; Menchaca, "Chicano Indianism: A Historical Account of Racial Repression in the United States," *American Ethnologist* 20. 3 (1993): 583-603, contend that Mexicans and American Indians endured racial discrimination, terror and violence during the Spanish, Mexican and American colonial periods.

[44] Rodríguez, Gonzales, Gomez, and Menchaca (2018; 2005;1993; 2001; 2007).
[45] See People v. De La Guerra, 40 Cal. 311-344 (1870); United States v. Joseph, 94 U.S. 614-619 (1 876); United States v. Lucero, 1 S.Ct. Territory N.M. 423-458 (1869); United States v. Santistevan, 1 S.Ct. Territory N.M. 593-602 (1874), qtd. in Menchaca 1993, 584.
[46] See Martha Menchaca, "Chicano Indianism: A Historical Account of Racial Repression in the United States," *American Ethnologist* 20. 3 (1993): 583-603; see esp. 584.
[47] See Menchaca, "Chicano Indianism," 1993, 584.
[48] See Padilla, Fernando, "Early Chicano Legal Recognition, 1846-1897," *Journal of Popular Culture* 13:564-574, 1979, qtd. in Menchaca "Chicano Indianism," 1993, 587.
[49] See Jack D. Forbes, *Aztecas del Norte: The Chicanos of Aztlan* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Publication,1973) qtd. in Menchaca 1993, 587.
[50] See Edward Holland Spicer, *Pascua, a Yaqui village in Arizona* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, [1984], ©1967).
[51] Rodríguez, Gonzales, Gomez, and Menchaca (2018; 2005;1993; 2001; 2007).
[52] Deena González, 1999.
[53] See Moises Gonzales, "Descendants Of Native American Slaves In New México Emerge From Obscurity," npr.org/2016/12/29/505271148/descendants-of-native-american-slaves-in-new-México -emerge-from-obscurity, December 29, 2016.
[54] See Gonzales, "Descendants Of Native American Slaves," 2016; and Deena González, *Refusing the Favor,* 1999.
[55] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research,* 8.4 (2006), 387–409. see esp. 387-88 for his conceptualization of invasion and settler colonialism as a "structure not an event." My inclusion of Wolfe's article, is not a negative critique of his work. I respect his work. Rather, my intention to include it was only for the purpose of providing a context for the academic critics I speak of who draw from this article in order to build upon their arguments.
[56] See Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," 388.
[57] See Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism," 388; 392; 402-04.
[58] See Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism," 388; and Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*: *The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*, (London: Cassell, 1999, see esp. 2; and Wolfe, "Nation and miscegeNation: Discursive Continuity in the Post-Mabo Era," *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice*, 36. (1994), 93-152; see esp. 96.
[59] See John R. Wunder, *"Retained by the People": A History of American Indians and the Bill of Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 17, 39; and Wunder qtd. in Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism," 206, 400.
[60] See Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism," 399-400.
[61] See Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism," 399.
[62] See Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism," 390.
[63] See Romario Bautista, "My Thoughts on Indigeneity, as an Indigenous Person," Dichos de un Bichos, http://dichosdeunbicho.com/my-thoughts-on-indigeneity-as-an-indigenous-person/?fbclid=IwAR3KMexmT4kCdb2FfD8yDtyhjokSqGKHoAJvIODfZbC9QcTKpT7uRXacIok, February 24, 2019, for his claim that Chicanos and Mexican Americans are "person[s] of indigenous descent," n.p.; and see Jessica Hernandez, "How the Chican@ Discourse Silences Indigenous Peoples from México + Central Americans." A Medium Corporation, https://medium.com/@jessicabhdz/how-the-chican-discourse-silences-indigenous-peoples-from-México -central-americans-b72b5897ad26?fbclid=IwAR3Y5-MKN_IWMJ7SSori0v4aojcKN8EXF7ZMXelPArOtrGkQGIj1kPA91fQ, February 18, 2019, for her assertion that Chicanos and Mexican Americans are "indigenous descendants," n.p.
[64] See Bautista, "My Thoughts on Indigeneity, as an Indigenous Person," 2019, n.p.
[65] See Bautista, "My Thoughts on Indigeneity, as an Indigenous Person," 2019, n.p.; and Hernandez, "How the Chican@ Discourse Silences Indigenous Peoples from México + Central Americans," 2019, n.p.
[66] See Hernandez, "How the Chican@ Discourse Silences Indigenous Peoples from México+ Central Americans," 2019, n.p.
[67] See Bautista, "My Thoughts on Indigeneity, as an Indigenous Person," 2019, n.p.
[68] See Hernandez, "How the Chican@ Discourse Silences Indigenous Peoples from México+ Central Americans," 2019, n.p.
[69] See Bautista, "My Thoughts on Indigeneity, as an Indigenous Person," Dichos de un Bichos, http://dichosdeunbicho.com/my-thoughts-on-indigeneity-as-an-indigenous-person/?fbclid=IwAR3KMexmT4kCdb2FfD8yDtyhjokSqGKHoAJvIODfZbC9QcTKpT7uRXacIok, February 24, 2019; and Hernandez, "How the Chican@ Discourse Silences Indigenous Peoples from México+

Central Americans." A Medium Corporation, https://medium.com/@jessicabhdz/how-the-chican-discourse-silences-indigenous-peoples-from-México-central-americans-b72b5897ad26?fbclid=IwAR3Y5-MKN_IWMJ7SSori0v4aojcKN8EXF7ZMXelPArOtrGkQGIj1kPA91fQ, February 18, 2019.
[70] See Bautista "My Thoughts on Indigeneity," 2019; Maylei Blackwell, Floridalma Boj Lopez and Luis Urritia Jr. "Special Issue: Critical Latinx Indigeneities," *Latino Studies* 15. (2017): 126-37, see esp. 130-33; and Hernandez, "How the Chican@ Discourse Silences Indigenous Peoples," 2019; and Laura Pulido, "Geographies of Race and Ethnicity III: Settler Colonialism and Nonnative People of Color," *Progress in Human Geography*, 2017, 1-10.
[71] See Qumich, "Chicanx, Indigeneity, and Mocosxs," https://sixthsunridaz.com/chicanx-indigeneity-and-mocosxs/?fbclid=IwAR2dhfpWaV60Hp7CZcWs1oKqkVCwD7fCOvLEyKTGKQqXyVORFeYiDQGYag, February 28, 2019.
[72] Rodríguez, 2018; Quimich, "Chicanx, Indigeneity, and Mocosxs," 2019; José E. Muñoz, "Preface: Fragment from the Sense of Brown Manuscript." *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies*, 2018; and "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latino Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Condition," *Signs* 31. 3, *New Feminist Theories of Visual Culture* Spring, 2006.
[73] Moraga, *A Xicana Codex*, 2011.
[74] Moraga, *A Xicana Codex*, xxi.
[75] Rodríguez, *The X in La Raza*, 1996, xxi.
[76] Moraga, xxi.
[77] See Moraga, *A Xicana Codex*, 2011; and Rodríguez 2014.
[78] Moraga, 7.
[79] Moraga, 7-8.
[80] Moraga, 7-8.
[81] Moraga, 7-8.
[82] In this use of" Indigenous," I am quoting Sophia, who stated in my interview with her and in several conversations that she identifies as Indigenous, among other ethnic and cultural identifiers, such as *Tejana*, and Mexican American.
[83] Leon, interview, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, December 7, 2017.
[84] Interview with Leon, December 7, 2017; Rodríguez and Gonzales 2005; Rodríguez 2014; Forbes 1973.
[85] Gonzales, personal conversation, via telephone, September 15, 2012; Jennifer Denetdale, personal conversation, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, December 14, 2013).
[86] Leon, Interview, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, December 7, 2017.
[87] Sophia, Interview, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, December 19, 2017.
[88] Leon, Interview, December 7, 2017.
[89] Leon, Interview, December 7, 2017.
[90] Sophia, Interview, December 19, 2017.
[91] Sophia, Interview, December 19, 2017.
[92] Sophia, personal conversation, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, July 16, 2019. In our conversation, Sophia stated that her *maestro* Andres Segura told her that the *Nahuas* syncretized the *Nahui Ollin* with the Christian cross during the Spanish colonial era. Segura told her that the *Nahui Ollin* "represents a cross in motion."
[93] Sophia, personal conversation, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, June 26, 2019.
[94] Sophia, personal conversation, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, June 26, 2019.
[95] Felipe, Interview, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, November 15, 2017.
[96] Felipe, Interview, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, November 15, 2017.
[97] Vanessa, Interview, *Esplanada*, New Mexico, December 11, 2017.
[98] See Bonfil Batalla, *México Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization*, translated by Philip A. Dennis (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996); and Rodríguez, *Our Sacred Maiz*, 9-10; 39-43, for discussions on the "de-Indianization," and "de-Indigenization" of peoples of Mexican descent.
[99] See Rodríguez, *Our Sacred Maiz*, 46; Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, translated by Myra Bergman Ramos (New York and London: Continuum, 2005) qtd in Rodríguez; also see Linda Tuhiwai Smith *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New York and London: Zed Books 2004), for discussions about "decolonization," reframing narratives and retelling narratives, identity, and re-humanization, which are a part of the decolonial process.
[100] Vanessa, Interview, *Esplanada*, New Mexico, December 11, 2017.
[101] See Gloria Anzaldúa, and ed. Ana Louise Keating, *Light in the Dark Luz en lo Oscuro Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015, 76-7).
[102] Vanessa, Interview, Esplanada, New Mexico, December 11, 2017.

[103] See Gloria Anzaldúa *Borderlands/ La Frontera, The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999, 102), for her theorization of a "mestiza consciousness, which she maintains is an identity consciousness, of accepting and living in the "borderlands" of mixed heritage cultural identity, which for peoples of Mexican descent includes Indian, European and black descent. Moreover, identity is "transcend[ental]," always in a state of transformation, of becoming, much like decoloniality.
[104] See Anzaldúa, and ed. Ana Louise Keating, *Light in the Dark*, 2015, 69.
[105] See Patrisia Gonzales, *The Mud People: Chronicles, Testimonios & Remembrance* (San José: Chusma House, 2003), *Red Medicine*, 2014; also see Aurelio Ramírez Cazarez et al. "It's not Traditional without the elders: Epistemological authority in Macehual knowledge system" in *Indigenous Places and Colonial Spaces* eds. Nicole Gombay and Marcela Palomino-Schalscha (London and New York: Routledge, 2018, 34-49), for discussions on the importance of respecting, revering and continuing our elder's knowledge regarding culture, ceremony and healing ways into futurity.
[106] Paul, Interview, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, November 19, 2017.
[107] Sophia, Personal conversation, South *Angelitas*, July 24, 2017; and Sophia, Interview, December 19, 2017.
[108] Sophia, Personal conversation, South *Angelitas*, July 24, 2017.
[109] Sophia, Interview, December 19, 2017.
[110] Sophia, Interview, December 19, 2017.
[111] See Lawrence and Dua, "Decolonizing Antiracism," 2005; and Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," 2012.
[112] Sophia and the *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca concilio* (council) conceived of "love donations" as a form of ritual gift exchange.
[113] Sophia and the *Kalpulli Tezcatlipoca concilio* (council) conceived of "love donations" as a form of ritual gift exchange.
[114] Lawrence and Dua, "Decolonizing Antiracism," 2005.
[115] See Ward Churchill, *Struggle for the Land: Indigenous Resistance to Genocide, Ecocide, and Expropriation in Contemporary North America* (Toronto: Between the Lines Press 1992): see esp. 19-20; 411; and Churchill qtd. in Lawrence and Dua, "Decolonizing Antiracism," 2005, 124.
[116] Lawrence and Dua, 127, 132.
[117] Lawrence and Dua, 123.
[118] Lawrence and Dua, 123.
[119] Lawrence and Dua, 123.
[120] Lawrence and Dua, 123.
[121] Lawrence and Dua, 129.
[122] Lawrence and Dua, 129.
[123] See James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997): see esp. 252; and see Clifford qtd. in Lawrence and Dua 2005, 129-30.
[124] Lawrence and Dua, 130.
[125] Lawrence and Dua, 123.
[126] Jennifer Nez Denetdale, class lecture, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, February 3, 2014; and Jacqueline, Interview, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, February 3, 2018.
[127] Lawrence and Dua, 2005; and Tuck and Yang, 2012.
[128] Lawrence and Dua, 126.
[129] Lawrence and Dua, 126.
[130] Lawrence and Dua, 126.
[131] Lawrence and Dua, 126.
[132] Lawrence and Dua, 126.
[133] Lawrence and Dua, 126.
[134] Lawrence and Dua, 126.
[135] The term *indígena* means Indigenous, as in Indigenous to a country.
[136] The expressions, *"Siembra un circulo"* or *"Siembra la semillas,"* is an expressions that is said by elder ceremonial participants of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo*. And, I have heard Sophia and Sarah say these expressions regarding the importance of the recovery and, or beginning of a ceremonial tradition, and regarding its continuance into futurity.
[137] Sophia, Personal conversation, South *Angelitas*, New Mexico, February 19, 2017.
[138] See María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo (2003); and Nicole Guidotti-Hernández (2011).
[139] See María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo (2003); and Nicole Guidotti-Hernández (2011).

[140] Anzaldúa, et al., "Speaking Across the Divide," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 15. 3/4 (Fall 2003/Winter 2004): 7-22, see esp. 14.
[141] Anzaldúa, et al., "Speaking Across the Divide," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 15. 3/4 (Fall 2003/Winter 2004): 7-22, see esp. 14.
[142] Roberto Rodríguez 1997; 2014.
[143] Lawrence and Dua, "Decolonizing Antiracism," 2005; Byrd, *The Transit of Empire*, 2011; Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination*, 2003; and "Who's the Indian in Aztlan? Re-Writing Mestizaje, Indianism and Chicanismo from the Lacandon," *The Latin American Subaltern Reader*, ed. Ileana Rodriguez, Durham: Duke University, 2001, 416; and Guidotti-Hernandez, Unspeakable Violence, 2011.
[144] Paul, Interview, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, November 19, 2017.
[145] Paul, Personal conversation, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, January 30, 2018.
[146] Paul, Personal conversation, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, January 30, 2018.
[147] Paul, Interview, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, November 19, 2017.
[148] Paul, Interview, *Angelitas*, New Mexico, November 19, 2017.
[149] See Anzaldúa, and ed. Ana Louise Keating, *Light in the Dark*, 2015, 82.
[150] See Anzaldúa, and ed. Ana Louise Keating, *Light in the Dark*, 2015, 76-7.

Conclusion

I am a Mexican American and Hopi woman who honors Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies, participates in *Nahuatl*, Mesoamerican, and pan-Indian rituals, and lives in ceremony every day. And, I claim my indigeneity, which informs by worldview. The Mexican American practitioners of my ceremonial community claim our Indigenous heritage because our Indigenous ancestors are the original inhabitants of the Southwest and Mesoamerican, and we continue Indigenous worldviews and cultural practices through our participation in ritual performance and by living in ceremony every day.

As I conceptualized my project, I wanted it to be rigorous. To accomplish this, I included scholarship from the fields of Chicano, and Indigenous Studies regarding Chicano and Indigenous identity. I included the voices of scholars that support, and object Mexican American claims of indigeneity. As such, my dissertation includes scholars of Mexican American, and Chicano Studies who are experts in Mexican American, Mexican, and Chicano history and legacy of *mestizaje* practiced during the Spanish colonial era, which resulted in the Mexican population. I wanted to include these academicians' knowledge about the consensual intermixture that occurred between different Indigenous and interculturally mixed peoples of Mesoamerica. In addition, I wanted to create a dialogue between scholars who support Mexican American claims of indigeneity, such as Jack Forbes, Bonfil Batalla, Roberto Rodríguez, and Patrisia Gonzales, and academics who critique Mexican American claims of indigeneity and their relationship with Indigenous peoples, such as Nicole Guidotti-Hernández, and María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, who overtly reject Mexican American assertions of indigeneity; and Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang who label all PoC, including Mexican Americans, "settler colonizers."[1]

Through my focus on a specific Mesoamerican ceremonial community, I hope a deeper understanding will be conceived regarding the personal, cultural, philosophical, political and social implications that the rituals of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo* have for this ceremonial community, ethnic community, and greater community of *Angelitas*. In addition, I hope I have illuminated supportive, and oppositional stances that advocate for, and critique Mexican American and Mexican identifications and expressions of indigeneity.

Exit Point

This dissertation utilized the dual lens of performance and decolonial theory to examine a specific group of Mexican Americans' participation in the ritual performances of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo*, located in *Angelitas* and Tanoan, New México, and to a lesser degree, México City. The research sample of this study was not intended to represent an entire group. Specifically, this project analyzed a key case that speaks to larger issues of identity conceptualization. This ethnographic monograph demonstrated they ways in which the ceremonial practitioners conveyed social constructions and dynamics of race, class, gender and religion, and the social and political injustices and inequalities they experience and challenge every day.

The practioners rely upon *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican thought, philosophy and deities that inform and guide our relationships with ourselves and our environment, and necessitates being responsible to ourselves and our community, helping one another with the innate gifts we have, and maintaining harmonious unity and a sense of wellbeing within our community. This responsibility involves growth through self-healing and helping one another heal through mental, spiritual and physical (dis)eases, learning to overcome adversity, and helping others overcome adversity, and by continuing to learn from our personal life experiences and one another. *Nahuatl*

and Mesoamerican ethics and practices inform and guide the practioners ritual performances and everyday lives.

One of my motivations for this research, was to speak to other culturally mixed Mexicans, like me, so that we could share *testimonios* and knowledge about our experiences as culturally mixed peoples, namely how we challenge objections toward our claims of indigeneity and how we think and live as Indigenous people. I wanted to learn about the various ways in which our family members and ancestors (re)membered our Indigenous relatives and ancestry. Through this research, I have offered a different understanding of Indigeneity that accounts for Indigenous cultural expressions, worldviews, and community—all of which are a part of identity formation, regardless of biological heredity.

Through this work, I became acutely aware of the possible reasons why Indigenous peoples may be threatened by Mexican Americans' recognition of indigeneity. But, there is no fear to be had, because Mexican Americans, like myself, and the practitioners of my ceremonial community who acknowledge our indigeneity, do not desire federal recognition or Native American resources of any kind. All we want is for others to understand and respect our indigeneity. Importantly, we do not rely on others acceptance of our Indigenous identity. We rely on our family's and community's knowledge and understanding of our indigeneity. And, we respect other Indigenous peoples in our conjoined efforts to ignite a greater understanding of Mexican American indigeneity.

I wish to reemphasize one of my key arguments, which is a personal and collective assertion of mine and my ceremonial community. The practitioners are Indigenous, because we have Indigenous ancestry. However, this ancestry is not the only marker that justifies our indigeneity. We acknowledge our Indigenous heritage and ancestors of the Southwest and

México. Moreover, our ritual performances and Indigenous identifications are founded upon *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican philosophies of the face and heart, the five ethics, and *Tu eres mi otro yo*, which inform and guide us on how to better our world. And, we practice Mesoamerican ritual performances of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo* today, as a living cultural expression in the present, not the past. As Sophia's *maestro* Andres Segura use to tell her, "We can never go back to the way things were five hundred years ago, that would go against the laws of the universe."[2] Life is like the *Nahui Ollin* in a state of constant movement and transformation. As a result of the transformative processes of life we must continue our cultural traditions to the best of our knowledge with a good heart and strong mind.

These recognitions acknowledge our legacy to this land and connections with Native Americans of the Southwest and Indigenous peoples of México in ethical, respectful and dignifying ways. Importantly, the practitioners' claims of indigeneity are enactments of decolonization, because this assertion (re)imagines our community. In so doing, we disavow limiting hegemonic narrations of our identity that do not recognize our intercultural Mexican and Indigenous heritage. My ceremonial community's recognition of our mixed heritage and privileging of our Indigenous identity through *ceremonia* and everyday lives demonstrated that our epistemologies and ontologies are informed and guided by an Indigenous worldview that has been passed down intergenerationally through our families and communities. As such, the practitioners of my ceremonial community ethically acknowledge our indigeneity. We are not "settler colonizers," "arrivants," or merely, "descendants of Indigenous peoples." Yes, as Mexican Americans, some of our ancestors were forced to re-settle Indigenous lands. However, we do not have a settler colonizer's mentality that aims to structurally and systemically eliminate native peoples. On the contrary, the practitioners understand and support Native peoples and

their sovereignty and self-determination by participating in ceremony with Native Americans and working with them politically and socially for the rights of our communities.

The *danzantes* and *promotoras* of my ceremonial community, such as Paul and Sophia demonstrated their knowledge of, and identification with their Indigenous heritage. As Mesoamerican knowledge keepers, they continue their Indigenous ancestor's ceremonial traditions and live their daily lives based upon Indigenous worldviews. The practitioners of my ceremonial community know themselves as Indigenous through not only Indigenous epistemology and ontology, but also through kinship and community. And, the practioners disavow hegemonic paradigms of blood quantum and federal recognition in their conceptualization of indigeneity.

Importantly, through our ritual performances and everyday lives, we do not replicate colonialism, appropriate indigeneity or play Indian.[3] Nor are we "settler colonizers," or "arrivants," which scholars Nicole Guidotti-Hernández, María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, Romario Bautista, Jessica Hernandez, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua, and Jodi Byrd fail to recognize. The *danzantes* and *promotoras* reject narrow colonial frameworks of identification and belonging, as we self-define our identity for ourselves in ways that honor our Indigenous relatives of the past and present.

Paul's *consejos* resolved any self-doubt I had about my and other Mexicans Americans' claims indigeneity. When the practitioners learn our *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican culture and traditions, and recognize those who taught us this knowledge, we avoid appropriating indigeneity. And, we realize that our indigeneity is alive, in the present. Our indigeneity affects our consciousness and relationship to this land. And, the practitioners stand firm in our conviction that we ethically claim our Indigenous identity.

Our ritual performances and daily lives are also informed and guided by the *Nahuatl* and Mesoamerican principles of "human value," and "ritual gifting."[4] Our ritual performances convey our ceremonial, ethnic communities, and greater community of *Angelitas'* need for "healing justice" and social justice.

This work is important to the interdisciplinary field of American Studies, because it intersects and builds upon the fields of Chicano, Southwest, and Critical Indigenous Studies, in addition to, Performance, and Cultural Studies, and Decolonial theory. This study is the first ethnographic project of its kind, which examined the ritual performances of an interconnected ceremonial community of *danzantes* and *promotoras* in New Mexico. This work is a critical examination of Chicano claims of indigeneity that intervenes into difficult dialogues within Chicano, Latino, Ethnic, and Indigenous Studies scholarship that support, and oppose Chicano and Mexican American claims of indigeneity and critiques our relationship with Native Americans and other Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas. Finally, this work affirms the connection of the Mexican American and Mexican immigrant community to place, and *danza Azteca and curanderismo* as embodiments of social justice, self-governance, and self-determination.

Suggestions for Further Research

Scholarly research on Mexican American practioners that recognize their intercultural heritage is sparse. This regional study illuminated the performative dynamics existent within a specific ceremonial community. Further research needs to be conducted with a larger comparison of *danza Azteca* and *curanderismo* communities located in differing regions of the Southwest, the United States, and México. Such a study would provide a breadth of research findings and material with which to theorize. In particular, such a study would further illuminate Mexican

Americans' and Mexican immigrants' negotiations of identity, if and how these expressive cultural forms are organic decolonial community work that disavow and challenge hegemony, if these ritual performances replicate colonialism and, if, or how these ritual performances potentially enact cultural appropriation or "playing Indian," among other innovate findings that would build upon the interdisciplinary field of American Studies.

Notes

[1] See Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1.1 (2012): 1-40; and Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua, "Decolonizing Antiracism," *Social Justice* 32.4 (2005):120-43, for their use of the term settler colonizer, which they perceive as colonizers who have settled and remain in their colonial nation state.

[2] Sophia, personal conversation. In our conversation Sophia quoted *consejos* that Andres Segura use to give her, July 21, 2020, *Angelitas*, New Mexico.

[3] See Philip Deloria, Playing Indian (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), for his notion of "playing Indian," to refer to Anglo early colonizers appropriations of indigeneity.

[4] See Richard Flores, *Los Pastores: History and Performance in the Mexican Shepherds' Play of South Texas* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995): see esp. 149-53, for his use of the terms "human value" and "ritual gifting."

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