

AMOXTLI YAOXOCHIMEH

by

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## APPROVAL BY THESIS DIRECTOR

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my children (born and unborn), their descendants, and the future generations that will inherit the world we create for them. Never forget your roots. Los Venceremos.

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## **ABSTRACT**

How has for over 500 years the Calpolli system of social organization and governance survived? Why is it important for Mexica communities to organize themselves into Calpoltin? These are the central research questions that underpin my work. In the process of answering these questions I have developed a liberating (decolonizing) research framework rooted in the Tlamanalcayotl. Through this framework an analysis of Nican Tlakah resistance movements for liberation and autonomy is undertaken in order to understand that we've been fighting for our traditional social systems of organization and governance. These Nican Tlakah ways of being are rooted in principles of self-sufficiency and sustainability that engender human societies that take care of their ecology. The Calpolli families having formed a union (establishing relationships of responsibility with one another) create a living community that is continually developing a way of being that is functional, practical, self-sufficient, and sustainable.

## HUEHUETLAHTOLLI

### Introduction

Groups of tight knit families have carried on the Calpolli system of governance through the generations across Mexico and the United States.<sup>1</sup> A Calpolli is the basic social unit of Mexica society and is generally thought of as an autonomous union of families (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). *Calpolli* (singular) and *Calpoltin* (plural) are Nahuatl words that are etymologically rooted in the concepts of *Calli* (house) and *Polli* (a grouping or union of families) (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). Calpoltin hold onto the memory of our ancestors, the ceremonies that make up Anahuacayotl Epistemology, in order to once again blossom as a people. Anahuacayotl Epistemology is the study of our sciences that have been preserved through our sweat lodges, ceremonial runs, medicinal practices, vigils, traditional dances, storytelling, medicine songs, as well as symbolic/metaphoric representations of Nican Tlach concepts found in codices and sculptures (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). Nican Tlach communities have held onto our scientific methodologies. One cannot learn how to run a sweat lodge, an all night vigil, or the melodies of our medicinal songs from reading books. The very fact that these methodologies still exist is proof that Nican Tlach communities have resisted the European invasion and have made serious sacrifices to preserve the Anahuacayotl. Anahuacayotl is also used to refer to the Toltecayotl, Mexicayotl, Tlamanalcayotl, and other Nican Tlach ways of



being that exist in Anahuac (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). It is the essence of who we are as people of Anahuac.

*Nican Tlachah* is a Nahuatl word that refers to all “Indigenous Peoples” of Aba Yala, it means “we people here” and is used in replacement of the labels “Latino, Hispanic and Indigenous” (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010).

These identities are tools used by the colonial apparatus to erase our Nican Tlachah cultural patrimony as original Peoples of Aba Yala. *Abya Yala* is a term that comes from the Kuna language who are Nican Tlachah from Panama and Colombia. This term has been translated as “continent of life,” or “land in full maturity,” and has been used by Nican Tlachah throughout the continent to refer to the landmass that is known as the “Americas” (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010).<sup>2</sup> It is dangerous for us to begin to see ourselves for who we really are as Nican Tlachah. To do so would mean that we are shedding the vestiges of white supremacy that we have inherited from the long history of colonialism in our lands.

Our Nican Tlachah ancestors worked the land, their blood, sweat, tears, and bodies have filtered into this continent's soil over millenniums. Nican Tlachah have created the soil, here, in Abya Yala (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). It is made of us and we have an intimate connection to these lands through this history. Nican Tlachah as a term signifies that the community is of Abya Yala, we are made of it, meaning there exists a relationship between the people and the land our ancestors inhabited (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). The Nican Tlachah intellectual traditions are

still very much alive and practiced throughout Abya Yala. As a member of Calpolli Teoxicalli this is evident within my own community of Tlamanalco.

### **Terminology**

In order to communicate effectively I must define more terms that will be used throughout my work. I have deliberately made use of the Nahuatl language in order to liberate (decolonize) the underlying framework of my research. These terms are heard and used within many Nahua communities that have held onto their language and cultural heritage.

I will use the term *Mexica* when referring to peoples of “Mexican” descent that identify as being Nican Tlach, have held onto our ceremonies, or are working towards the liberation (decolonization) of our people. *Mexica* is a term that is composed of three major Nahuatl root words. The first is *Mecatl* and refers to a traditional rope made out of maguey fibers (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). *Xictli* is the human navel and *Co* signifies “the place of” (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). When put together the resulting concept is “the place and center where things are tied together” (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). I use this term in replacement of Mexican or Xicana/o because it predates them and more accurately illustrates our roots as Nican Tlach. The terms Mexican and Xicana/o are both etymologically rooted in the word *Mexica* and constitute a direct link to this Nahua community. I believe that the term *Nahua* more

accurately describes peoples that identify as Xicana/o, Mexican, or Mexica.

The term Mexican is tied to a nation state that is very culturally heterogeneous; many Nican Tlach communities reside within its borders. Mayan communities are an example of a Nican Tlach community that is also Mexican but not Xicana/o, Mexica, or Nahuatl. Mayan people are not rooted to the Calpolli system of organization historically since they have their own traditional structures of governance and social organization. Thus, the term Mexica (as I use it) is specifically referring to communities of Nahuatl lineage that are historically rooted to the Calpolli system of governance and social organization. Additionally, I use the term Mexica because the community itself, the people who are liberating (decolonizing) themselves, use this term to self-identify as Nican Tlach of Aba Yala. I am directly speaking to this sector of my community and its important to use terms that they can identify with. Therefore, the term *Nahuatl* will also be used in order to clearly show the Nican Tlach cultural lineage of what has been traditionally called “Mexican” culture.

Tlamanalcah will be used when referring to the peoples of Tlamanalco, which include the constellation of families that make up Calpolli Teoxicalli. *Tlamanalco* is a Nahuatl word that comes from the term *Tlamanalli*, which means “offering” (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). It refers to the ceremonial offerings that are given to the Earth and the Universe in

the practice of Tlamanalcaloyotl Epistemology (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). *Tlamanalcah* (plural, singular is *Tlamanalcatl*) is how we as a Nahua community from Tlamanalco, Anahuac self-identify in relation to the land we inhabit (Capolli Teoxicalli, 2010). The Nahuatl concept of Teoxicalli can be thought of as “the habitat for life energy on Earth; under the Sun” (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). In addition to these terms, I will use Toltecayotl<sup>3</sup> when referring to the heritage left us by the Tolteca culture, Mexicayotl<sup>4</sup> when referring to the heritage left to us by the Mexica culture, Tlamanalcaloyotl<sup>5</sup> when referring to the cultural heritage of the Tlamanalcah, and Anahuacayotl when referring to the essence of who we are as Nican Tlakah of Aba Yala.

Throughout this thesis I will use “we,” “us,” and “our” when referring to Nican Tlakah of Aba Yala. Specific distinctions will be made when referring to my community of Tlamanalco in regards to certain uses of “we,” “us,” and “our” in order to clarify whom I am speaking to. It is crucial to note that this document was written for the benefit of my community. As such, they are the audience/reader to whom I direct my thoughts and pen to.

### **Research Methods**

I will cite Calpolli Teoxicalli throughout my work, referencing the Huehuetlahtolli that we have as Tlamanalcah. *Huehuetlahtolli* is a Nahua methodology that is used to transmit knowledge from one generation to the next (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). As a ceremonial union

of families we have been entrusted with several teachings through the use of Huehuetlahtolli methodologies (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010).<sup>6</sup> Some of these teachings come from the relationship we have to our ceremonial staffs, altars, and other instruments (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). They are our elders in the sense that the knowledge needed to use them appropriately and respectfully has been transmitted from generation to generation (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). I help carry this precious bundle, the Tlamanalcayotl, with my Calpolli. I have been entrusted with the responsibility to present our perspective as a community, as Tlamanalcah, within academia by my Calpolli through Tlahtocan.<sup>7</sup>

This thesis is an investigation of how the Calpolli system of organization, as a pre-Cuauhtemoctzin<sup>8</sup> cultural institution, has survived and thrived thus far. It will demonstrate how these unions of families are preserving and reconnecting to our Nahua traditions. Tuhiwai Smith's call for conducting research projects with Nican Tlach communities such as claiming, celebrating survival, remembering, revitalizing, writing, representing, envisioning, naming, and creating have been utilized in my research on Calpoltin (2005).<sup>9</sup> Before I began this work, I asked for a Tlahtocan with the Coayotl,<sup>10</sup> which I am a member, of my Calpolli and asked what was needed for our community. How could my work at the University of Arizona help my community? How could my research be of some real tangible benefit to this union of families that I am a part of? The result of this Tlahtocan was an

agreement that the focus of my thesis would be to illustrate a) how Calpoltin have survived the European genocide and b) why it's important for Mexica communities to organize into Calpoltin. As stated earlier, because I am writing under the directive of my Calpolli for my Calpolli, it is to their knowledge base and understanding I am appealing to as readers first and foremost. Secondly, I also consider the academic readers that, quite obviously, need more definitions and elaborations.

In my research on how the Calpolli system of governance has survived, I have made extensive use of academic literary works spanning various fields, but my main knowledge base comes from being an integral member of Calpolli Teoxicalli. The works of scholars within the academic realm that underpin my thesis are those of Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, Ward Churchill, Vine Deloria Jr., Jack Forbes, Jesús Inclán, Miguel León-Portilla, Enrique Maestas, Steve Pavlik, George Tinker, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Daniel Wildcat, Shawn Wilson, Waziyatawin Wilson, Michael Yellow Bird, and Ignacio Yturbide. With this said, I am primarily writing from a Tlamanalcah perspective. This means that I make use of the centuries of scientific research conducted by my ancestors in their quest for an understanding of life and nature. Our wisdom is precious knowledge that should not be ignored. It constitutes a piece of humanity that has been under siege since the European invasion of Abya Yala. As Tlamanalcah, we have an inherent right to preserve and reconnect with our ancestral ways of life. We are original inhabitants of this continent.

As Nican Tlachah of Aba Yala we have our own traditions and culture that predate the European invasion. The traditions and culture are still very much intact today. I have a responsibility, as an inheritor of our ancestor's wisdom, to help others reconnect to it and preserve it for future generations.

As Tlamanalcah, our knowledge base is our ceremonial culture and the various strands of consciousness that have been left to us through our rich Nican Tlachah traditions (languages, songs, dances, stories, poetry, narratives, etc...). As a member of Calpolli Teoxicalli, I am actively reconnecting to the Anahuacayotl through the evolution of our Tlamanalcayotl and represent the precious Huehuetlahtolli for my Calpolli within academia. With this in mind the questions that I will answer in the proceeding chapters are: How have Mexica people held onto their autonomous structure of governance, the Calpolli? Why should Mexica communities organize themselves into Calpoltin?

To truly implement Tuiwai Smith's "*decolonial methodologies*" means that a researcher must create a Nican Tlachah research framework that works to liberate not subjugate our communities and the knowledge base that it is rooted in (2005). Decolonization is defined as:

The intelligent, calculated, and active resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetuate the subjugation and/or exploitation of our minds, bodies, and lands, and it is engaged for the ultimate purpose of overturning the colonial structure and realizing [Nican Tlachah] liberation (Wilson & Yellow Bird, pg 5, 2005).

For these reasons, I have created a liberating (decolonizing) framework for the Ontology, Axiology, Methodology, and Epistemology of my work that is rooted in Tlamanalcah thought and philosophy.

Ontology can be thought of as “what is real” (Wilson, pg 33, 2008)? Earth wisdom, the teachings we have learned from nature that are embedded in our ceremonies is real knowledge that is based in scientific principles of Quetzalcoatl methodology. The metaphor embodied in the conceptual framework of Quetzalcoatl is of a serpent covered in precious feathers (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). The serpent lives within the Earth, uses its sense of smell to see, is always touching the Earth with its belly, and can sense minute vibrations through the land (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). It is in its nature to be in tune with its surroundings. The feathers that cover Quetzalcoatl represent the experiences necessary to acquire such knowledge as human beings (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). Feathers are earned not given.

Axiology can be thought of through these questions “is it ethical to do what needs to be done to obtain this knowledge and what purpose will this knowledge serve” (Wilson, pg 34, 2008)? As a researcher, I have made an earnest attempt to be very transparent in the collection and sharing of this knowledge. Through the working system of the Tlahtocan, the Coayotl gathered periodically throughout my research and writing. We would discuss research methods, concepts, trajectory, and purpose. In general, it was agreed very early on that while ceremony, as



an experiential manifestation of our Nican Tlach sciences, informed my knowledge base, I was not to disclose specifics about said ceremonies. (My knowledge base for: my understanding of Quetzalcoatl, In Tlilli In Tlapalli, and the Huehuetlahtolli passed through specific ceremonial activities that integrate agriculture, dancing, running, sweating, singing, writing, painting, and storytelling). It is *not* the purpose of this thesis to document ceremony, nor the participating individuals and elders. It is *not* the purpose of this thesis to discuss the structures, roles, and systems that make up a Calpolli. The *purpose* of the knowledge gathered from my research will be to help my community understand how the Calpolli system has survived and the importance and benefit of organizing ourselves into Calpoltin. In understanding our historical survival, we pull together the parts of ourselves that were scattered through the trauma of invasion, genocide, and colonization. In this way we can heal ourselves and begin to live a liberated (decolonized) life.

Methodology can be thought of through the following question “how do I find out more about this reality” (Wilson, pg 34, 2008)? I make use of our rich written and oral histories by engaging in the ceremony of *In Tlilli In Tlapalli*. In Tlilli In Tlapalli translates into the “*the path of black and red ink*” and refers to the wisdom that our Amoxtin contain. *Amoxtli* (singular plural would be *Amoxtin*) is a Nahuatl hieroglyphic book such as the Borgia (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). For our ancestors our hieroglyphic writing system had a key oral component to it. One could not read the

images without the knowledge base necessary to speak about their multifaceted meanings that these images contain (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010).

This methodology is the coupling of the oral with the written. In this way the Huehuetlahtolli is an integral methodology used in my research and this is why the Nahuatl language will be used (without translations in the poetry).<sup>11</sup> Our Nahuatl language is a critical aspect that must be learned, reconnected to, preserved, and used in order for us to completely liberate (decolonize) ourselves. Daniel Wildcat in *Red Alert* writes about how critical our Nican Tlach languages are in the process of liberation (decolonization):

The language of the Earth, her mother tongue, is one best understood through the many dialects known by [Nican Tlach] around the world. Because [Nican Tlach] have paid attention to our Mother Earth, it is important to listen to what we can share with humankind. These knowledge's are bound in unique lifeways—customs, habits, behaviors, material and symbolic features of culture emergent from the land and sea—and therefore have practical implications for those of humankind wanting to cooperatively and sustainably live with a place as opposed to at an address (pg 17, 2009).

Nican Tlach languages are part of the way we are able to communicate to nature and the surrounding environment. Through this dialogue we have been able to develop a way of being that is intimately tied to the land. Mexica and Nahua communities are rooted through our culture, the very essence of who we are as a people, to the Calpolli system of social organization and governance. The concepts embedded in Nican Tlach languages are seeds, waiting for us to germinate them by

speaking, writing, or singing in our original languages. By utilizing my Nahuatl language, I will understand and describe the world from my own Tlamanalcah framework.

I say that I engage in the ceremony of In Tlilli In Tlapalli because it is a transformative process whether I'm painting hieroglyphic images, writing poetry, or writing my thesis. I am making heart, making face, which is the concept of In Yollotl In Ixtli (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). It is the product of this ceremony and it is tangible. You can read it and I can teach you what I know. This thesis has taken several years to put together and has gone through many revisions. This process of introspection and reflection has been done in a ceremonial manner. Whether it be through tobacco offerings at the break of dawn, reflecting on how certain historical movements are tied together while working with a ceremonial fire, constructing flowery words (poetry) in order to better express feelings I have experienced throughout the writing process, asking for a Tlahtocan in order to establish my research questions, or singing to creation to clear my thoughts, writing this thesis has been a ceremony for me. In this sense I understand this ceremony as that of In Tlilli In Tlapalli and the result of it being this thesis. This wisdom/knowledge that I have been able to acquire and provide to my community was done in the manner of the Tlamanalcah (in a ceremonial way).

Huehuetlahtolli  
palabras antiguas

de nuestras nanas y tatas  
 método de aprendizaje  
 para el pueblo  
 Tlazocamati Huehuetecuhtzin  
 Macehualiztli Mitotiliztli In Huehuetlapalohtli

el sonido del Huehuetl  
 mueve nos mueve  
 nuestra medicina  
 Mitotiliztli Macehualiztli  
 polinizándose  
 con cada pasito precioso  
 con nuestros cantares preciosos  
 en cuevas, montes, selvas y barrios  
 armonizando nos  
 generación por generación  
 la palabra anciana  
 la palabra de sabiduría  
 Pahchimalli Tohuehuetlahtolli  
 Chicahua Nochantzin Tlamanalcah  
 Chicahua Nican Tlacah

The Huehuetlahtolli is a method used to transmit the knowledge of our ancestors from generation to generation. Elders play an integral and important role within Nican Tlacah society. Elders guide the community at large through various methods of learning that create rich intergenerational relationships. The Huehuetlahtolli is one of these methods and is still practiced within many Nahua communities.

Nican Tlacah ancestral sciences survived the European genocide by preserving our knowledge through the human body (Mulford, 1995). The tendency in academia is to call this physical embodiment of knowledge “oral history.” It is important to understand that for Nican Tlacah our “oral history” is not purely oral. For example, communication is not done through the spoken word in our traditional Nahua Macehualiztli

Mitotiliztli ceremonies, but rather through the physical movement of the body to rhythmic beats and dances.<sup>12</sup> When we engage in Nahua Macehualiztli Mitotiliztli ceremonies we are communicating with our bodies to the Earth, sky, cosmos, and each other. By retracing steps that are thousands of years old, a historical tie is created between our ancestors and us. We physically hold on, preserve, and pass on their steps each time we dance. We continue to hold onto the Anahuacayotl physically within our own bodies and through the movements of our bodies.<sup>13</sup>

This is why I will make use of our oral traditions in conjunction with our written histories.<sup>14</sup> History and storytelling are integral components of the Huehuetlahtolli. They are tied together as I must be able to tell our story of survival from a narrative that has been kept alive through Calpoltin. In order to tell our story I have made use of narratives, stories, and histories that have been written in European languages (Spanish and English). I compliment this academic history with the oral traditions that we carry as Tlamanalcah. I interpret the academic written history from a Tlamanalcah perspective.

Epistemology can be thought of as “how do I know what is real” (Wilson, pg 33, 2008)? The Tlamanalcayotl is how my community of Tlamanalco, Anahuac<sup>15</sup> is preserving and reconnecting to the Anahuacayotl.<sup>16</sup> By planting our traditional foods in our homes, dancing, sweating, singing, running, writing, painting, and storytelling

we come to realize what is real. As Nican Tlachah, we have always identified ourselves in relation to the particular ecosystems that we inhabit. By naming the land, we in turn name ourselves. Although I am of Nahua lineages, the most accurate term to identify myself is as a Tlamanalcatl because I am an inhabitant of a particular ecosystem that we as a Calpolli have named Tlamanalco (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010).<sup>17</sup> We are practitioners of Anahuacayotl Epistemology but the way it manifests itself in our community is as the Tlamanalcayotl. It is our particular way of being that is evolving through the continual and consistent practice of Tlamanalcayotl Epistemology.<sup>18</sup> The methodologies of Tlamanalcayotl Epistemology require the practitioner to fully participate in ceremony in order to gain an understanding of oneself in relation to all other forms of life (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). All of this taken together makes up my research paradigm and overall framework for my thesis.

clear thoughts  
 clear head  
 for war is at hand  
 has been for over 500 years  
 the enemy has outlawed our precious dances, drumbeats, and songs  
 yet we continue to dance  
 we continue to sing rhythmically in unison  
 we continue to run and offer our sacrifice  
 of pain, sweat, tears, and blood to Tonanztin

even though the enemy murdered us for playing our ancient drums  
 we resisted by constructing stringed instruments made from armadillo  
 shells  
 clandestine ceremonies conducted by our nanas y tatas  
 in the very heart of dark cavernous mountains our venerable fires were  
 kept alive  
 passing down our scientific methods from one generation to the next  
 step by step

song by song  
ceremony by ceremony  
down to us their grandchildren

we will reconnect with our precious way of life  
nana y tata  
los venceremos  
no los pudieron matar  
no los pudieron ganar  
Tlazocamati to all our fallen ancestors who gave their life  
so I may sweat, dance, run, and offer sacrifice  
in the manner of our ancient ones  
to you we sing  
for strength  
for guidance  
as your granddaughter's call upon you by name  
in order to activate their precious Chantico fire  
utilizing the wisdom of our ancient ones with each graceful movement of  
their heart  
guiding human hands who have been bequeathed cherished flowery  
bundles  
so we may live as true human beings  
as planetary citizens

## IN CUAUHTEMUCTZIN IN NAHUATILAMA

*nosotros somos Tlamanalcah  
 los guardianes de la historia  
 Tezcatlipoca obsidiana guardia  
 todos los colores, rutas, palabras y silencios  
 la memoria genética vive y viviendo no muere  
 Tezcatlipoca Mitotiliztli activa estrellas serpentinadas en cuerpos ser humanos  
 danzando con el tiempo de los antiguos  
 pasito por pasito  
 deshacemos el silencio  
 de nuestro genocidio  
 pasito por pasito  
 deshacemos el silencio  
 de nuestro susto  
 con palabras obsidianas que miran hacia ambos lados  
 caminamos el sendero y somos el sendero mismo*

### **Historical Trauma**

It is imperative that we as Nican Tlachah rebuild our humanity by turning to what our ancestors have held on to and conserved for the future generations in order to heal from the historical trauma that we carry within our community. “Historical trauma refers to cumulative wounding across generations as well as during one’s current life span. For [Nican Tlachah], the legacy of genocide includes distortions of [Nican Tlachah] identity, self-concept, and values (Weaver, Hartz, & Brave Heart, pg 22, 1999).” The colonization of our culture by European invaders has sought to erase our Nican Tlachah identities through the implementation of a racial caste system. “Colonization refers to both the formal and informal methods (behaviors, ideologies, institutions, policies, and economies) that maintain the subjugation or exploitation of [Nican Tlachah], lands, and resources (Wilson & Yellow Bird, pg 2, 2005).” The



social construct of race has been used to dehumanize dark skinned peoples throughout our continent and the world. This colonial legacy has forced us to survive under a racial caste system that affects our values and self-concept. It is important to underline the concept that historical trauma transfers from generation to generation. In discussing internalized racism, bell hooks (*Killing Rage, Ending Racism*) states: “The reenactment of unresolved trauma happens again and again if it is not addressed. Psychological woundedness prevents [us] from engaging in movements for liberation and self-determination (pg 144, 1995).” She asserts that in order to actively liberate (decolonize), the colonized must find “ways to heal and recover that can be sustained, that can endure from generation to generation (pg145, 1995).” Intergenerational healing is imperative so that the cycle of trauma in our communities can be broken. Decolonizing and reconnecting with the humanity that our ancestors preserved for us, and in turn passing that on to the next generation, is healing.

Many sectors of our community deny their Nican Tlach roots and instead identify with the colonizer. I have seen and experienced this phenomenon within my own family. Even though I have a direct familial link to my family’s Indigeniety, they deny that we are Nican Tlach. They feel it has been bred out of us over the generations. This way of thinking and mindset is very typical of many de-Tribalized Nahua families. Like my family, people will emphasize their European ancestry (which is in

fact very minimal) instead of coming to terms with the truth that our Nican Tlachah blood will always run in our veins (Forbes, 1973). My ancestors were never bred out of me. I carry their lineage. As a community we need to come to terms with who we are.

As people of Mexica and Nahua lineages we share a common cultural heritage that expresses itself every time we use the terms *tata*, *nana*, *tutu*, *huarache*, and countless other Nahuatl rooted words that we never stopped using. Our diet still consists of traditional Nican Tlachah foods like corn, beans, squash, chile, nopal, avocado, tomatoes, and many other staples of “Mexican” cuisine. The time has come to break free from this unhealthy relationship we have with colonial society. We must be the generation that is willing to set an example for those that will come after us.

Reconnecting to our own autonomous structures of governance is necessary for balance and harmony to be restored in our community. The main structure and social unit of organization within Mexica society is the *Calpolli* (Moreno, 1931; Yturbide, 1959; Yturbide, 2000). How we remember the process by which we have preserved our way of life is an integral mechanism that has allowed us to continue organizing ourselves into Calpolli structures. Millions of our ancestors died of disease, starvation, and murder at the hands of European invaders (Churchill, 1997). In *A Little Matter of Genocide* Ward Churchill describes what the genocide that took place in Aba Yala looked like:

The people had died in their millions of being hacked apart with axes and swords, burned alive and trampled under horses, hunted as game and fed to dogs, shot, beaten, stabbed, scalped for bounty, hanged on meathooks and thrown over the sides of ships at sea, worked to death as slave laborers, intentionally starved and frozen to death during a multitude of forced marches and internments, and in an unknown number of instances, deliberately infected with epidemic diseases (pg 1, 1997).

Western history has down played the genocide, even theorizing it into non-existence, yet we carry these scars as a people (Churchill, 1997).<sup>19</sup>

Nican Tlachah know what European invaders did to our grandmothers and grandfathers; it is scorched in our memories and runs through our veins.

### **Survival of Traditional Governance Structures**

In the face of brutal European invasion our Mexica ancestors, in Mexico Tenochtitlan, came together in a Tlahtocanechicolli (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010; Yturbide, 2000). The Tlahtocanechicolli was the governing council of the Mexica Confederacy that Cuauhtemotzin was the spokesperson for as the Hueyi Tlahtoani of this assembly (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). In the Tlahtocanechicolli, a message was constructed and delivered to the people by Hueyi Tlahtoani Cuauhtemotzin in 1521 (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). It has come to be known as the Cuauhtemotzin In Nahuatilama<sup>20</sup>, the new strategy of resistance against the European invasion (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). This new strategy called for the preservation of our precious traditions and culture through our families and homes (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010).<sup>21</sup> Since the 16<sup>th</sup>

century, Calpoltin throughout history have been fulfilling the Cuauhtemoctzin In Nahuatilama. This strategy of resistance protected our way of life up to the present day.

This chapter will focus on how we, as Nahua people, have preserved our traditional forms of governance by struggling and resisting to keep organizing ourselves into Calpoltin as well as other traditional modes of governance. There are two major strands of Nahua resistance that clearly show a continuation of Calpoltin from post-invasion times up to the present. The first is the Nican Tlach based movement initiated by the Cuauhtemoctzin In Nahuatilama that eventually led to the overthrow of Spanish rule. Emiliano Zapata's movement is the second major resistance that was a Calpoltin based struggle. Taken together they will give us an understanding of how and why Calpoltin have survived in Nahua communities.

gente del color de la tierra  
 clandestinamente resistiendo y preservando nuestra forma de ser  
 hablando nuestros idiomas Nican Tlach  
 sembrando nuestras comidas medicinales  
 el fuego antiguo preservado entre nuestras familias  
 no los deja olvidar el camino florido  
 la manera serpentina de la naturaleza  
 se contiene en las llamas del fuego  
 que ilumina nuestras ceremonias  
 la luminosa luz del Chantico  
 no la pudieron conquistar

las llamas de la resistencia clandestina  
 chispeando en Mexico Tenochtitlan  
 las llamas de la resistencia clandestina  
 chispan en Eloxochitlan  
 las llamas de la resistencia clandestina  
 que chispa en Anenecuilco

las llamas de la resistencia clandestina  
chispeando en Atoyac

resistencia del pueblo que engendre mujeres y hombres insurgentes  
muriendo para poder vivir  
luchando para nuestra dignidad y autonomía

The Tlahtocanechicolli of Mexico Tenochtitlan realized that the resistance to the European invasion was transforming from a short-term to a long-term struggle. The war being waged could not be won on the battlefield due to the devastation that our communities experienced from European diseases and policies of genocide (Churchill, 1997). The Cuauhtemoctzin In Nahuatilama tells the people that their Sun has come to pass, calls for the preservation of the Mexicayotl within our homes and families, and when our Sun once again rises the people will initiate a process of reconnecting with their Mexicayotl (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010).

In this phase of resistance, communities of Anahuac went underground and dedicated families preserved the Mexicayotl by any means necessary. “[Our ceremonies] were performed in hidden locations, often in abbreviated form, and often transformed in other ways to make concealment and continuation possible (Tinker, pg 56, 2004).” Colonizing missionary projects forced our people to incorporate Catholic rituals, rites, and theology in order to preserve the core of the Mexicayotl (Burkhart, 1989; Forbes, 1973). These European elements were “Indigenized” by transforming them into tools that cloaked our ways of being and social systems of organization (Broyles-González, 2002).

One particular strand of Mexica resistance, the Macehualiztli Mitotiliztli Conchero lineage, preserved the infrastructure of the Calpolli through the incorporation of Catholicism as a survival strategy (Maestas, 1999). This was done at a time when our hands would be cut off for playing the Huehuetl, our traditional Mitotiliztli drum. The armadillo shell was used to construct stringed instruments as a substitute for our traditional drums (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). In this way the ancient Mexica rhythms, songs, dances, culture, and traditions were preserved for future generations (Maestas, 1999). What is known today as “Aztec dance” was preserved by Conchero families who continued conducting traditional Mitotiliztli ceremonies. They were forced to adopt Catholicism in order to preserve our ancient traditional dances.

Concheros figured out ways to fulfill obligations of renewal Mexica communities used to maintain established relationships with the land. Ceremonies originally conducted for the 20-day periods of the Xiupohualli, 13-day periods of the Tonalpohualli, and rites of passage were hidden under the guise of Catholic conversion.<sup>22</sup> The missionaries never eradicated our relationships to the land and our core systems of social organization. What they were able to accomplish was the alteration of our traditional ceremonies through the forced adoption of Christianity. Even though this was done at a surface level it still changed how things were done. In many communities the Christianity

that manifests itself within traditional culture was originally used as a cover for Nican Tlachah rooted ways of thinking and being.

Complete conversion of Nahua communities into the Catholic religion was extremely hindered by the fact that missionaries were forced to speak to us in our mother tongue of Nahuatl. This transformed their European ideologies into our cultural framework and worldview (Burkhart, 1989). In effect, we used Catholicism as a tool to hide our precious culture and traditions from European projects of genocide. “[Our] outlawed ceremonies quite often continued in one fashion or another in spite of attempts to end their observance (Tinker, pg 56, 2004).” Although a *pueblo* would adopt a Catholic patron saint, the infrastructure from which the community functioned, and the framework used to make sense of the world was at its core rooted in Nican Tlachah civilization.

The Virgen de Guadalupe is a perfect example of this, although on a national level. Nican Tlachah throughout Mexico have historically made pilgrimages to Tepeyacac (in Nahuatl, commonly known as Tepeyác the northern most delegación of Mexico City) where a Teocalli dedicated to Tonantzin Coatlicue was situated. Teocalli is the true Nahuatl term for what has become known as our “pyramids” or “temples” (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). The Spanish destroyed the Teocalli, but maintained a hermitage (religious retreat) as Nican Tlachah continued to make

pilgrimages to the site. The Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe now occupies that space.

Ceremonies conducted during the winter solstice in honor of Tonantzin Coatlicue created relationships of responsibility to the land and creation that infused the participant with a deeper understanding of the cycles of life and death. Coatlicue is a Nahua metaphor that sees Mother Earth wearing a serpent skirt (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). The deeper meaning of this natural phenomenon is related to the cycles of life and death that the Earth goes through with the changing seasons (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). It also refers to the human cycle of birth and death (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). Thus, it is a symbol or a metaphoric representation of the earth's fertility as well. Tonantzin is another manifestation of the feminine aspects of the earth, and is related to the concept of Coatlicue, that literally means "our venerable Mother Earth" when translated from Nahuatl (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). We continued to conduct our winter solstice ceremonies and offerings to Tonanztin and Coatlicue through the strategic adoption of a feminine Christian image. Thus, the Virgen de Guadalupe originally served as a guise for the continuation of traditional Nican Tlachah ceremonies dedicated to Tonanztin and Coatlicue. To this day Nahua Mitotiliztli (dancers) and other Nican Tlachah traditional societies make pilgrimages to Tepeyacac and offer dances to Tonanztin and Coatlicue every December 12<sup>th</sup> (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010).



Nahua scholars and the oral tradition have documented that the Virgen de Guadalupe is an image of European origin that was carried on banners by Hernán Cortés troops in their colonizing campaigns (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010; Tlapoyawa, 2000; Yturbide 1964). The term “Guadalupe” is of Latin and Arabic origin contradictory to popular myth that says it is a Nahuatl rooted term (Tlapoyawa, 2000). The term *gudale* means river in Arabic and *lupo* means wolf in Latin (Tlapoyawa, 2000). The original image of the Virgen de Guadalupe was found on the bank of the Guadalupe River in Extremadura, Spain (Tlapoyawa, 2000). A small wooden statue of the dark skinned virgin was buried in the year 714 A.D. by Christians who were escaping from the Moors and was later found by Gil Cordero in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Tlapoyawa, 2000).<sup>23</sup> In the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century the Virgen de Guadalupe gained many devotees in Spain and many of these followers were the European invaders that came to Mexico (Tlapoyawa, 2000). Yturbide in his third volume of *Moctecuhzoma Xocoyotzin ó Moctezuma el Magnifico y la invasion de Anahuac* states that Cortés ordered his men to place the image of La Virgen de Guadalupe in the Teocalli of Yopico (1964).

We strategically adopted the image of La Virgen de Guadalupe in order to maintain our obligations of renewal to Tonanztin and Coatlicue. The winter solstice ceremonies that are conducted for Tonanztin and Coatlicue are very old (pre-invasion) and many Nican Tlach communities travel far distances to Tepeyacac to participate in them

(Tlapoyawa, 2000). The Christian establishment was fooled into thinking we had converted or that they were winning us over. We were in fact using Catholicism as a way to preserve our precious ways of being. It was a guise used to make the European invaders believe we were being converted to Christianity when in fact we were maintaining our Nican Tlakah traditional culture.

nuestras nanas no entienden los idiomas europeos  
 erigiendo fronteras y barreras  
 cuando entregamos nuestras canciones en lenguas conquistadoras  
 pero son las  
 antiguas flores entonadas con sonidos de naturaleza  
 pero son las  
 antiguas flores pintadas con los colores del arco iris  
 reclamando las en Nahuatl

con jícara y plumaje en mano  
 dando forma a milpas llena de flores antiguas  
 mis nanas son jardineras de nuestra Mexicayotl  
 sembrando una cosecha de resistencia  
 para las Calpoltlalli y Atepetlalli de nuestras uniones de familias  
 tierra robada por los invasores europeos  
 tierras comunales en el tiempo de nuestros antepasados  
 serán defendidas por sus nietos y nietas  
 en el esfuerzo Nahua por independencia de 1810  
 300 años de opresión europea fue destrozada  
 a ritmos de machetes y el sonido del fusil  
 en el esfuerzo Nahua por independencia de 1910  
 400 años de opresión europea fue destrozada  
 a ritmos de machetes y el sonido del fusil  
 Tlaczin Cuauhtemoctzin In Nahuatilama  
 estrategia Nican Tlakah  
 para poder preservar nuestras uniones de familias  
 cargos, obligaciones, usos y costumbres

**Tierra y Libertad: Emiliano Zapata**

The struggle for our ancestral lands culminated into a broad Nican Tlachah based movement, seeking independence from Spain in 1810 and the restoration of our traditional forms of governance (Inclán, 1970; Mendoza, 1999). The Nican Tlachah strand of resistance was one of three, the others being the conservative and liberal independence movements. Both the liberal and conservative movements had the goal of “modernizing” Mexico through the institutionalization of Western civilization (Bonfil Batalla, 1996). “The struggles between the liberals and the conservatives reflect different conceptions of how to achieve that goal, but those struggles never question [the Westernization of the country] (Bonfil Batalla, pg 63, 1996).” Both of these movements were largely based out of the ruling classes of colonial society. They were the minority of the populous but controlled the existing infrastructure of society (Bonfil Batalla, 1996; Inclán, 1970).

Operating under Western notions of what it means to be a Nation, projects were undertaken to create a common identity, culture, and language. “Consolidating the nation meant, then, proposing the elimination of the real culture of almost everyone in order to impose a culture held by only a few (Bonfil Batalla, pg 63, 1996).” As a newly formed state, European social and political models of organization were adopted, instead of building on the millennial Nican Tlachah infrastructure that permeated society (Bonfil Batalla, 1996). Throughout

Mexico Nican Tlach communities maintained their social systems of organization and continued the struggle for the land.

Unfortunately, when independence from Spanish colonial rule was realized in 1821, Nican Tlach ancestral lands were not protected by the new social order. Grievances communities had over lost lands were not addressed. Furthermore, there was no official recognition of traditional forms of governance by the new independent state of Mexico. “The free [Nican Tlach] of independent Mexico were not recognized as independent nations. Such recognition was out of the question, since it implied renouncing control over the enormous extensions of land [we] occupied (Bonfil Batalla, pg 98, 1996).” Land in our communities is communally owned which hindered efforts to institutionalize private property as a societal norm. Traditional agriculture also hindered the private ownership of land since communities farmed subsistence food crops communally.

Western policies such as the Laws of Cádiz and the Laws of Reform allowed the ruling classes to acquire high concentrations of land in the form of *latifundios* and *haciendas* through privatization (Bonfil Batalla, 1996). These laws were not completely successful in their attempts to wrestle our lands away from us. For example, in 1824 the Nican Tlach communities of San Juan and Santiago in Mexico City were dissolved into private allotments by the Laws of Cádiz even though they survived the Spanish colonial period as communally owned landholdings (Bonfil

Batalla, 1996). Nican Tlachah resistance was too great to fully implement such policies. At best, the movement for the privatization of San Juan and Santiago resulted in villages and barrios, not individuals, receiving re-allotments of ancestral lands (Bonfil Batalla, 1996). We maintained our land communally and in turn our communal ways of being. This was possible because we kept producing food using traditional agricultural practices that were communal in nature. <sup>24</sup>

How did our Nican Tlachah social systems of organization survive? We must look into the life of Emiliano Zapata, his Calpolli based liberation movement, and what they were really fighting for in order to answer this question. “When the Revolution broke out in 1910, more than 40 percent of villages had conserved their communal lands, in violation of the law (Bonfil Batalla, pg 100, 1996).” The central issue for us as Nican Tlachah communities has, and will be, issues surrounding land ownership. Our social systems of organization are intimately tied to the physical geography that surrounds the community. We organize ourselves in ways of being that are self-sufficient and sustainable (Wildcat, 2009).

preciosa sabiduría de nuestros antepasados  
aprendida utilizando la capacidad  
de canciones floridas y danzas astronómicas  
para establecer una relación de obligación a la naturaleza  
relaciones de responsabilidad  
a el aire, fuego, agua y nuestra madre tierra  
han sido pisoteadas a las manos del proyecto occidental  
que ha criminalizado nuestras formas de ser  
nuestros usos y costumbres

para poder robarnos la tierra

no lo logaran  
los venceremos

Hueyi Calpixque organizando nuestra defensa de tierras ancestrales  
allí están sepultados nuestros antepasados guerrilleros y guerrilleras  
que murieron defendiendo nuestras Calpoltlalli  
allí se encuentra nuestras raíces y razones  
por tierra y libertad

Emiliano Zapata is part of a rich history of Hueyi Calpixque<sup>25</sup> in Anenecuilco, defenders of the Calpoltlalli, and the movement he led for liberation is the only vision that offered a true alternative to the projects of Westernization (Bonfil Batalla, 1996; Gonzales, 2003; Inclán, 1970; León-Portilla, 1978; Yturbide, 2000). In Zapata's community a lineage of resistance exists where individuals have assumed the responsibilities of a Hueyi Calpixque up into contemporary times (Gonzales, 2003; Inclán, 1970). The term that is used within Anenecuilco to refer to Zapata's leadership role is *Calpolleque* (Gonzales, 2003; Inclán, 1970). The term Calpolleque in Nahuatl simply signifies that an individual is a member of a Calpolli (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). If we analyze the functions that Zapata carried out and the responsibilities that were entrusted to him by Anenecuilco's council of elders it is clear that he in fact is fulfilling the traditional Calpolli role of a Hueyi Calpixque (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010; Inclán, 1970; Yturbide, 2000).

There is speculation that Don José Zapata, a revolutionary of the 1810 Mexican War of Independence who defended the ancestral lands to his fullest capacity as the Hueyi Calpixque of Anenecuilco, is actually

Emiliano Zapata's great grandfather (Inclán, 1970). Although it cannot be conclusively proven that Don Jose Zapata was Emiliano's great-grandfather, what can be asserted is that in Anenecuilco, the Calpolli function of a Hueyi Calpixque has survived all projects of Westernization (Inclán, 1970). Even if Emiliano is not Don Jose's grandson he definitely was an inheritor of the Hueyi Calpixque lineage of Anenecuilco. As a community they fought to preserve communal ownership of the land by utilizing their ancestral Calpolli infrastructure and traditional forms of leadership to organize the liberation of stolen lands (Gonzales, 2003; Inclán, 1970).

Emiliano Zapata as a Hueyi Calpixque re-established the autonomy of various Calpoltin in Morelos (Gonzales, 2003; Inclán, 1970). For a time, we truly organized ourselves around the land in a self-sufficient and sustainable way. Lost ancestral lands were liberated and redistributed communally (Inclán, 1970). Zapata never lost sight of issues related to the land and self-governance (Inclán, 1970). He was not for sale.

Emiliano Zapata was too much of a threat to the foundation of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Mexican nation-state (Bonfil Batalla, 1996). A vision of Mexico as a Nican Tlakah rooted country in terms of social organization, use of land, and culture was not acceptable to imperial powers (Bonfil Batalla, 1996). Imperial beneficiaries within Mexico defended their corrupt system from the serious threats liberation movements like Zapata's posed to their hold on power.

The death of Zapata ensured that land and liberty would not become a reality in Mexico (Inclán, 1970). However, the Nican Tlach liberation movements for autonomy and ancestral lands embodied in the message of the Cuauhtemotzin In Nahuatilama survived (Forbes, 1973). Many Nican Tlach structures have been preserved in communities who have struggled to maintain our autonomous systems of governance.



## YAOTLACAH

my people once were warriors  
 before alcohol destroyed the social fabric  
 that our nanas weaved their precious bundles with  
 utilizing their hand made looms  
 for labors of love appreciated by children, wombyn & men

Mayahuel fibers intertwined into yarn  
 made to resemble the colors of the rainbow  
 flowery Huipil & Mitotiliztli Maxtla  
 for warrior peoples with warrior dances  
 preserving our Mexicayotl y Toltecayotl in the mountains  
 laying down threads of resistance for warriors to weave the fabric  
 of liberation

my people once were warriors  
 before invading europeans deceived themselves  
 into truly believing they could steal our land  
 through murder  
 yet the land has always remained ours  
 through venerable relationships  
 we still maintain in our homes  
 on our lands

my people are still warriors  
 in the present  
 in the future  
 in Tlamanalco Anahuac  
 Azteca  
 Mexica  
 Nahua  
 Tlamanalcah  
 Nican Tlakah  
 Yaotlakah

Highlighting some of Mexico's popular uprising will serve the purpose of demonstrating how these movements for autonomy and liberation, like the Calpolli system of governance, are rooted in Nican Tlakah resistance. In effect, these movements serve as historical evidence that, to varying degrees, Nican Tlakah have held onto their

autonomous structures of governance. Their organized resistance alone speaks toward a vision of the future based on Nican Tlach principles and ideologies.

Having looked at how Calpoltin structures have survived up to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, an analysis is in order, of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, guerrilla movements of Mexico in the 1960s through the 1980s, and the Mayan based Zapatista liberation movement in Chiapas. This historical review will illustrate how Nican Tlach structures of governance have not only survived, but also how our communities are reconnecting with them. An understanding of Magonismo in its relation to Zapatismo within the Mexican Revolution of 1910 show that Nican Tlach struggles for liberation greatly influenced the visions of these two revolutionary ideologies. These strands of resistance directly impacted many of the underlying ideologies of the guerrilla movements that sprung up throughout the rural mountainsides of Mexico in the 1960s-80s. The legacy of this intense period of guerrilla organizing in the countryside is the Mayan based Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN in its Spanish acronym- Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional) movement (Ross, 2006; Vodovnik, 2004). The creation of the EZLN is directly connected with the National Liberation Forces (FLN in its Spanish acronym- Fuerzas de Liberación Nacional) clandestine guerrilla organizing activities that took place throughout the 1960s-80s (Ross, 2006).

past  
 present & future  
 are one in the precious fire

whispering teachings of the earth  
 as wood become embers  
 glowing bright red  
 with a flicker of orange

in the heart of the fire  
 a blue flame is found  
 the pulsating core  
 initiating transformation  
 of the present into the past

so we may see a glimpse of  
 the future

### **Nican Tlachah Roots of Magonismo**

Ricardo Flores Magón was born on September 16<sup>th</sup>, 1874 into the traditional Oaxacan farming community of San Antonio Eloxochitlan (Bufe & Cowen Verter, 2005). His father Teodoro Flores was a respected elder of the community who had fought alongside Benito Juárez and Profirio Díaz against the French invasion and in the Wars of Reform (Bufe & Cowen Verter, 2005). “An idealistic, principled man, Teodoro Flores impressed upon his sons the nobility of Juárez’s mission to free the [Nican Tlachah] of Mexico from the oppression that still reigned under the Díaz dictatorship (Bufe & Cowen Verter, pg 31, 2005).” Ricardo Flores Magón’s mother, Margarita Magón, also strongly believed in Juárez’s legacy and was the primary reason the family moved to Mexico City (Bufe & Cowen Verter, 2005). Margarita Magón wanted her sons to receive a good education like Benito Juárez and enrolled them into the

best schools in the country (Bufe & Cowen Verter, 2005). They both emphasized the importance of their Nican Tlachah community's form of social organization upon their sons. Where "each person produced what she or he could and each took what she or he needed for survival. The villagers did not need judges, jails, or policemen to govern them (Bufe & Cowen Verter, pg 31, 2005)." This upbringing instilled strong moral values that would later inform the revolutionary work of Ricardo Flores Magón in the development and implementation of Magonismo.

Magonismo is often thought of as framework underpinned by anarchist ideology, but I argue that it is instead deeply rooted in Nican Tlachah thought and philosophy. There are correlations to anarchist ideals such as the practice of autonomy at the local level where communities govern themselves and working for the equality of women within the community. However, we must remember that Flores Magón was from Oaxaca. Home to Zapotec communities that to this day have held on to their matrilineal structures of social organization where women play very important and key roles within community life (Gosling, 2000). Zapotec communities of Oaxaca are also one of the few places in Mexico where the queer community is fully accepted and respected (Gosling, 2000).<sup>26</sup> We must also keep in mind that *Usos y Costumbres* is still the major way that Oaxacan communities govern themselves (Gosling, 2000). *Usos* is a Nican Tlachah based mode of governance that relies heavily on consensus decision-making through community-

organized assemblies (Gosling, 2000). *Costumbres* refers to the traditions and ceremonies that are the center of a community's cultural life (Bonfil Batalla, 1996). Ricardo Flores Magón was surrounded by all of this as he grew up within a traditional farming community that effectively governed themselves. This no doubt greatly influenced his ideology for a more just society based on Nican Tlacah principles of social organization that he experienced first hand. Magonismo is therefore directly inspired from the direct life experiences of autonomous communities of Oaxaca.

### **An Analysis of Magonismo in Relation to Zapatismo**

Magonismo and Zapatismo are two frameworks of social organization, both rooted in Nican Tlacah thought and philosophy. Magonismo coined the slogan of the Zapatista liberation movement: *Tierra y Libertad* (Land and Liberty). It clearly shows that the struggle for restitution of stolen Nican Tlacah lands is a unifying link between both movements. The ideal of liberty also implies the revitalization of Nican Tlacah forms of autonomous governance and social modes of organization. The major difference between both of these liberation movements of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Mexican Revolution is in the ways they decided to organize the struggle for tierra y libertad.

Magonistas, unlike Zapatistas, were a centralized and hierarchical social movement. The *Junta Organizadora del Partido Liberal Mexicano* (Organizing Junta of the Mexican Liberal Party), the central governing body of the Magonistas, coordinated all major activities amongst their

extensive network of armed revolutionary collectives within the United States and Mexico (Bufe & Cowen Verter, 2005). Magonistas established it in exile on September 28<sup>th</sup>, 1905 in St. Louis, Missouri (Bufe & Cowen Verter, 2005). This Junta would receive “political notices, revolutionary plans, funds, and membership lists” and distribute *Regeneración* (its propaganda and main organizing tool) amongst its network of secret revolutionary collectives (Bufe & Cowen Verter, pg 39, 2005). Key Magonistas such as “Práxedes Guerrero, Antonio de P. Araujo, and the Mayo [Nican Tlachah] Fernando Palomarez, functioned as Special Delegates, coordinating the activities of various branches of the party (Bufe & Cowen Verter, pg 41, 2005).” Magonistas had to rely on special delegates who would organize communication and coordination of their revolutionary collectives because of government infiltration of their movement in the United States and Mexico (Bufe & Cowen Verter, 2005). These special delegates of the Junta in their movements from the United States to Mexico would smuggle arms and pay careful attention to military buildups (Bufe & Cowen Verter, 2005). Many of these collectives consisted of Nican Tlachah communities who had decided to begin organizing themselves secretly for an eventual uprising with the aim of recovering their stolen lands (Bufe & Cowen Verter, 2005).

The Magonistas were able to organize over forty revolutionary collectives in every state of Mexico and in the southwestern United States (Bufe & Cowen Verter, 2005).<sup>27</sup> The collective in Douglas, Arizona

actively recruited Yaqui people who were escaping the genocidal policies aimed against them by the Díaz dictatorship in Mexico (Bufe & Cowen Verter, 2005). The Yaquis and other Nican Tlach communities were promised the return of stolen lands in return for joining the Magonista revolution (Bufe & Cowen Verter, 2005).<sup>28</sup>

In 1906, the Magonista revolutionary collectives went on the offensive by initiating an organized uprising near the border towns of the United States (always careful to wage their attacks on the Mexican side of the border) and across Mexico (Bufe & Cowen Verter, 2005). The Mexican government of Díaz in coordination with the U.S. government effectively put down most of the Magonista collectives. One of the major structural weaknesses of the Magonistas was their heavy reliance on foreign revolutionaries within their armed collectives. This created a situation on the ground where many (typically those in northern Mexico) of the collectives were not from the communities they were attempting to liberate. Their collectives were unable to organize a large base of support for their revolutionary activities amongst the local population. This led to the eventual defeat of the Magonistas (as an armed struggle) in their uprisings. These uprisings however sparked the Mexican Revolution and greatly influenced its ideological trajectory as can be seen in the Zapatista movement.

Through the publication and distribution of *Regeneración*, the Magonistas radicalized many sectors of society in the United States and

Mexico. The ideology of the Magonistas struck a cord with many Nican Tlakah communities who were becoming disillusioned with the effectiveness of liberating their stolen lands in a non-armed struggle. For example, Anenecuilco had for decades attempted to protect their ancestral lands through official government channels to no avail (Inclán, 1970). After many betrayals by the political class, Anenecuilco joined the ranks of the Magonistas as armed revolutionaries with the goal of recovering their stolen lands (Inclán, 1970). Through the armed struggle they quickly realized that they could more effectively and immediately regain their lands.

The Zapatistas, unlike Magonistas, primarily used Nican Tlakah forms of social organization to carry out the liberation of stolen lands and the restitution of their autonomy. Zapata was accountable to Anenecuilco's council of elders and led by obeying (Gonzales, 2003; Inclán, 1970). By utilizing the main social modes of organization that existed within their community (Calpolli structures) Zapatistas were able to effectively organize a large and powerful liberation army.

The Zapatistas took many of the ideals of Magonismo and transformed them into their own unique philosophy for tierra y libertad. Instead of looking to European and U.S. anarchists for inspiration and direction they looked to themselves. This is the key difference between the Magonistas and Zapatistas of the Mexican Revolution. Although Magonismo is definitely underpinned by Nican Tlakah thought and



philosophy their forms of social organization were more in line with the anarchist social movements of their time.

### **Guerrilla Movements**

The phenomenon of Nican Tlachah liberation movements looking elsewhere for inspiration and guidance to organize their resistance would once again repeat itself amongst the *focalist* based guerrilla insurgencies of the 1960s-80s in Mexico (Muñoz Ramírez, 2008; Rosales, 1974; Ross, 2006; Tort, 2005; Vodovnik, 2004). Magonismo and Zapatismo heavily influenced all of the guerrilla liberation movements of this period and were considerably impacted by Che Guevara's guerrilla ideology as well. This is understandable since Guevara was a historical contemporary and because the Cuban Revolution succeeded in overthrowing Fulgencio Batista. The Marxist-Leninist ideology of Guevara took precedence over Magonismo and Zapatismo in regards to how to organize liberation. However, the guerrilla insurgents adopted many of the Nican Tlachah ideological underpinnings of Magonismo and Zapatismo.

mental assault  
has become an art of clandestine sabotage  
herramienta en contra de nuestro pueblo

it ain't about no peace  
estamos en guerra  
until po-lice put down  
their piece

it ain't about no peace  
estamos en guerra  
until we get a piece

so where is your piece, my people?

### **Nahua Guerrilla Movement of Guerrero**

Lucio Cabañas was born in the state of Guerrero, Mexico and is the grandson of Pablo Cabañas, a veteran guerrilla insurgent of the Mexican Revolution of 1910 who took up arms after the murder of Emiliano Zapata (Rosales, 1974; Tort, 2005). This familial history and lineage to the liberation movement that took place in Guerrero during the Mexican Revolution greatly affected the trajectory of Lucio Cabañas as a revolutionary in his own right (Tort, 2005). Cabañas was an educator in a *Escuela Normal Rural*, schools that trained teachers for rural communities (Rosales, 1974; Tort, 2005; Mayo, 1980). These schools were a known source for community activism and Cabañas learned a lot from participating in radical reformist movements based out of the rural schools (Mayo, 1980; Rosales, 1974; Tort, 2005;). In his role as an educator, Cabañas deconstructed the social inequalities in ways that the rural communities could understand (Tort, 2005). He spoke the language of the people and by doing so was able to empower his pupils to organize solutions to their problems. This was done during the 1960s before he undertook clandestine guerrilla activities.

Like many adherents of the 1960s-80s guerrilla movements Lucio Cabañas became disillusioned with the effectiveness and progress of the social movements he was a part of (Tort, 2005). In 1962, Cabañas was elected to fulfill the responsibilities of General Secretary of the Federation of Socialistic Peasant Students of Mexico (Secretario General de la

Federación de Estudiantes Campesinos Socialistas de México) (Tort, 2005; Mayo, 1980). This experience put him in a central organizing role at a national level and further developed his revolutionary character (Tort, 2005). Cabañas was also a key member of the Escuelas Normal Rural teachers union, Civil Association of Guerrero (Asociación Cívica Guerrerense), the Revolutionary Movement of the Magistrate (el Movimiento Revolucionario del Magisterio), the Movement for National Liberation (el Movimiento de Liberación Nacional), and led opposition movements to oust the corrupt Guerrero governors Caballero Aburto and Abarca Calderón (Mayo, 1980; Rosales, 1974; Tort, 2005;). Cabañas became even more radicalized in his revolutionary ideology after experiencing the severe State repressions that were typical of social movements in this historical period first hand (Tort, 2005). It seemed futile to struggle non-violently when the Mexican State was implementing terrorist tactics of social control to quell the upsurge of radical reformist activity it was faced with (Tort, 2005). It must be kept in mind that Cabañas saw his colleagues in the struggle murdered and “*disappeared*” at the hands of the State. His father turned up dead after being mysteriously kidnapped; they suspected local police forces were responsible for his death (Tort, 2005).

The breaking point for Cabañas occurred on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May in 1967 when in his hometown of Atoyac the government massacred community members that were supporting Cabañas in an internal power struggle in

the Escuela Rural Normal de Juan Álvarez (Tort, 2005). Together they had formed the Defense Front for the Interests of the Juan Álvarez School (Frente de Defensa de los Intereses de la Escuela Juan Álvarez) in order to keep non-communal interests out of the school (Rosales, 1974; Tort, 2005). By this point, the government, fed up with Cabañas, actively began cracking down on him. The government armed forces organized an action with the intent of murdering Cabañas, but he was able to escape into the surrounding mountainsides (Tort, 2005). This left Cabañas with no choice but to create a guerrilla insurgent movement (Tort, 2005).

Cabañas as a guerrilla insurgent is important because he was decidedly non-Marxist even though he had socialist affinities with Leninist-Marxist-Socialist-Anarchist movements (Tort, 2005). He believed that he had developed his own framework of resistance based on the example of Emiliano Zapata and termed it “*Poorism* (Tort, 2005).” The theoretical analysis of Poorism was simple in the respect that it was about showing the poor how they were being “screwed” (he used the term “*fregado*”) and by whom (Tort, 2005). The only Marxist paradigm that was used in his construction of Poorism was the idea of class struggle, but he kept it simple (Tort, 2005). The poor had to revolt against the rich in order to not be poor anymore (Tort, 2005). In many ways Poorism was more about learning by doing, walking asking questions, and leading by obeying.

Traditional agricultural practices also played a key role in organizing the resistance in the Guerrero communities that constituted Cabañas' base of support. Coffee bean growers organized into cooperatives that were aimed at ending exploitative practices of these Nahua communities (Rosales, 1974; Tort, 2005). Issues dealing with land ownership and its use were central to Cabañas' success in gaining bases of support for his guerrilla movement among these Nahua communities (Rosales, 1974; Tort, 2005).<sup>29</sup> He was fighting for the needs that the people wanted and many of the key issues that affected the rural communities dealt with exploitative agricultural practices. Whether it was not being paid a fair price for their crops or the ruling class stealing the community's rich agricultural lands, Cabañas was able to give his community hope that things could change with direct action (Tort, 2005). This allowed him to organize an armed resistance successfully for many years in the Nahua mountainsides of Guerrero.

insurgentes reclamando nuestra historia y tierras  
con comunidades enteras  
otra vez operando y funcionando en maneras serpentina  
consejo del pueblo organizando  
resistencia a la privatización de nuestras tierras comunales

nuestros ancestros fueron insurgentes sembrando semillas de libertad  
con la implementación de nuestra autonomía  
desde a bajo y a la izquierda  
comunidad a comunidad  
luchando por nuestros usos y costumbres  
nuestros estandartes que forma nuestra esencia  
Yaotlachah

The breaking point for many radical reformists of the prevalent social movements within the country was the massacre of non-violent student protestors at Tlateloco (October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1968), which further radicalized them (Hernández, 2009; Topete, 2009; Mayo, 1980). It was the final straw for many of the soon to be guerrillas. Many of the leaders of the 1960s social movements went underground and initiated an intense period of guerrilla warfare that drew heavily from Che Guevara's *focalism* model of insurgent warfare (Hernández, 2009; Topete, 2009; Mayo, 1980). The basic idea was to replicate the model used in Cuba to overthrow the Batista regime. This model of guerrilla warfare relied heavily on small bands of guerrillas that are thought of as a focal point for organizing resistance who established bases in remote geographic locations and strategically attacked State armed forces (Guevara, 1998). In theory, the surrounding communities would support the guerrilla cause in order to liberate themselves from their oppression (Guevara, 1998). The Che Guevara school of thought also posited that focalism could initiate a national liberation movement through its guerrilla actions (Guevara, 1998).

Many of the new guerrilla leaders who went underground had previously worked together or knew of each other in their previous non-clandestine work for social change (Hernández, 2009; Mayo, 1980; Topete, 2009; Tort, 2005;). This created an atmosphere where focalist groups that were independent of one another communicated with each

other (Tort, 2005). Serious attempts to organize a united front were made between Lucio Cabañas' el Partido de los Pobres (PDLP), the guerrilla focalist bands led by Genaro Vazquez (who also established themselves in the Guerrero mountainside), the various focalist groups organized by La Liga de Septiembre 23 (La Liga) throughout Mexico, and finally with the Fuerzas de Liberación Nacional (FLN) led by Comandante German (Magil Yañez) (Hernández, 2009; Tort, 2005). They were hindered in their attempts to unify due to their ideological differences and the end result was a fractionalization of the various guerrilla movements of the period (Tort, 2005).

Marxism via the Cuban Revolution heavily influenced most of these guerrilla insurgencies that became well established in the 1970s throughout Mexico. Lucio Cabañas' PDLP and Comandante German's FLN are unique in the fact that they had a longer life span due to their reliance on Nican Tlach structures of social organization that pre-existed the establishment of their guerrilla focalist groups. In this respect the FLN did a better job of truly organizing a guerrilla force that was part and parcel of the community it chose to establish itself in (a FLN group would later become known as the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional). The PDLP organized assemblies in Guerrero based on the Nahua model of governing through consensus (Tort, 2005). These communal assemblies were strategically disassembled by the State in its efforts to route Lucio Cabañas' focalist groups from the Guerrero

mountains (Tort, 2005; Turbiville, 2007). Lucio Cabañas was unable to organize a base of support strong enough to withstand the terrorism of the counter-insurgent Dirty War waged in Guerrero (Tort, 2005; Turbiville, 2007).

### **Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional**

The strength of the FLN was its belief of slowly accumulating the guerrilla force in silence versus the strategic execution of sensational actions of the other focalist groups who put them on the government radar screen prematurely (Ross, 2006). Highly publicized bank heists along with kidnappings of government officials and civilians (usually of the ruling class) to fund guerrilla focalism initiated a highly organized program of government counter-insurgency against them (Hernández, 2009; Topete, 2009; Tort, 2005; Turbiville, 2007).<sup>30</sup>

It is important to note that the PDLP and FLN were much less bound to the Marxist-Leninist ideology that permeated the other guerrilla movements mentioned. They, in effect, were able to “think outside the box” in their clandestine activities and the FLN had a much broader vision than the other guerrilla movements (Ross, 2006). The vision of the FLN was to slowly establish focalist groups throughout the north and south of Mexico (Ross, 2006). They were using the Villista and Zapatista forces of national liberation as an organizing model (Ross, 2006).<sup>31</sup> The idea was to build the capacity of these guerrilla focalist groups throughout the north and south of the country so that they could one



day be activated when the “*pueblo*” most needed them (Ross, 2006). The resurrection of the liberating forces of the north and south was the ultimate goal.<sup>32</sup>

guerrilla de nuestra Yaotlachah  
 generación de la dignidad  
 hombres y mujeres guerrilleros y guerrilleras  
 de las décadas 60's, 70's y 80's  
 sembrando semillas de insurgencia en las montañas  
 heredando nos aprendices aplicados  
 de su historia personal y colectiva

guerrilla de nuestra Yaotlachah  
 generación de la dignidad  
 que dejaron todo para tener nada  
 forjando el ético de hacer y hacerse  
 la luz luminosa  
 su resplandor  
 se encuentra en todos los rumbos de nuestras tierras Nican Tlachah

generación de la dignidad  
 que nos asombran con la esencia de nuestra  
 Yaotlachah

By the mid 1980s the FLN had been setting up focalist groups in the mountains of Chiapas for several years and the surrounding Nican Tlachah communities knew they were there, although it was not really clear why they were there (Ross, 2006). On November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1983 the FLN established a group (who called themselves the EZLN) deep in the jungle near lake Miramar who quickly began contacting the surrounding Mayan communities (Muñoz Ramírez, 2008; Ross, 2006). Subcomandante Marcos and Comandante Elisa experienced a major communication breakdown between their FLN focalist guerrilla band and the surrounding communities (Ross, 2006). The inability to

communicate effectively with the Mayan communities persisted until they established a relationship with Old Antonio (as he is known in EZLN literature) who is a key figure as a storyteller within many Zapatista *comuniqués* (Ross, 2006). “But the old Mayan farmer was a real person, the first to invite the Zapatistas to his community—on the condition they would just listen, not try to convert the villages (Ross, pp 8-9, 2006).” This was the first encounter the EZLN had with a Mayan community assembly that governed through consensus (Ross, 2006). By listening the guerrillas learned how to adapt the structural organization of their focalist group to better fit the Mayan community structures of social organization (Muñoz Ramírez, 2008; Ross, 2006).

As an armed movement the EZLN grew because it was willing to make changes that were necessary for it to function effectively and efficiently in Mayan communities (Muñoz Ramírez, 2008). These organizational changes consisted of adopting Nican Tlach structures of social organization and governance.<sup>33</sup> The eventual outcome of this restructuring and organizing phase was “that the villages were now maintaining their army (Muñoz Ramírez, pg 75, 2008).” By 1992 the EZLN was a very large regional clandestine organization (with thousands of adherents) that consisted of entire Mayan communities who were able to sustain their own brigades in silence (Muñoz Ramírez, 2008). In this year it was decided through consensus that they were ready and it was almost time to rise up in arms (Muñoz Ramírez, 2008). The Mayan

rooted EZLN was at this point just waiting for the right moment to initiate an armed uprising for liberation and autonomy.

The right conditions for an armed uprising began to arise when Carlos Salinas de Gortari stole the presidential election from Cuauhtémoc Cárdena's in 1988 (Ross, 2006). Salinas de Gortari as president began dismantling Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution and completely nullified it by 1992 (Ross, 2006). This can be seen as a moment of crisis as is explained in *¡Zapatistas! Making Another World Possible Chronicles of Resistance 2000-2006*:

Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution set the guidelines for land ownership, and its inclusion in the post-revolution magna carta passed in 1917 was really the accomplishment of the agrarian martyr Emiliano Zapata, the incorruptible Nahuatl [Nican Tlacah] leader of the armed campesinos he had organized into the Liberating Army of the South in Morelos state (Ross, pg 10, 2006).

Article 27 institutionalized or legalized communal land holdings known as *ejidos* where land could be passed down intergenerationally but it could never be sold privately (Bonfil Batalla, 1996; Ross, 2006). The *ejido* was an institutionalization of traditional Nahuatl norms of land use and ownership (Bonfil Batalla, 1996). Through it, traditional Nahuatl agricultural communities acquired legal status for the lands they farmed communally (Bonfil Batalla, 1996). The *ejido* system also helped preserve traditional social systems of organization and governance since communities were able to function autonomously in accordance to their ways of being.

The land within the ejido system is communally owned and Salinas de Gortari attacked this basic pillar of Article 27. This, in concrete terms, meant that parcels of communal land could be sold privately. National and transnational agricultural private interests pressured Salinas de Gortari to amend the constitution in order to pass the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which was being negotiated at the time with George H. Bush (Ross, 2006).

In 1993 the EZLN's Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee (CCRI in its Spanish acronym) decided to declare war on the Mexican government by consensus of the various Mayan communities that make up their base (Muñoz Ramírez, 2008; Ross, 2006). NAFTA went into effect in Mexico in 1994 and with its implementation many Nican Tlach communities holding land communally, like the EZLN communities, would be directly impacted by capital interests intent upon seizing their land for economic exploitation.<sup>34</sup> The EZLN declaration of war was a silent one until January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1994 when the communities took the world by surprise by launching their armed uprising in Chiapas that took control of seven cities (Muñoz Ramírez, 2008; Ross, 2006).

The EZLN had organized clandestinely for ten years for an armed uprising in Chiapas and believed that civil society would follow their example, taking up arms in order liberate their country from the *mal gobierno* (Muñoz Ramírez, 2008). Instead, what they found, was civil society's support for their cause but not for an armed conflict with the

government (Muñoz Ramírez, 2008). The EZLN dedicated itself to the use of the word as its principle weapon for liberation and “to listen, to ask, and to try to understand the demands of this civil society that supported it, but that did not follow with a rifle on its shoulder (Muñoz Ramírez, pg 112, 2008).” The willingness to listen and to learn from civil society is a markedly Nican Tlachah trait of social organization. The EZLN leadership at all levels leads by obeying and listening (Muñoz Ramírez, 2008).<sup>35</sup> These Nican Tlachah modes of social organization and governance made it particularly easy for the EZLN to adapt their struggle for liberation to one that does not employ arms.

The Nican Tlachah struggle for autonomy can be waged and won at the grassroots level as the EZLN clearly demonstrate by their example of direct action. In many ways, they are simply doing what our communities have been doing for centuries: continuing to organize ourselves into our traditional forms of social organization and governance. We do not need to ask nation state governments for permission to be who we are. We do not need to take power from the top when we already have the power of below. The EZLN began the long process of asserting their autonomy by implementing it through community assemblies and the revitalization of their Nican Tlachah modes of governance.

Xochiquetzalli In Nananztin  
Huitzilin  
revoloteando entre flores  
comiendo su néctar precioso para poder sobrevivir

Huitzilin  
 se encuentra a la izquierda del pecho ser humano  
 palpitando sangre con cada latidito  
 iniciando el Nahui Ollin  
 en los caminos de arterias que forman el red de nuestras raíces  
 como las venas de una planta asegurando que sus flores  
 est:n alimentadas  
 humanidad floreciendo con la ayuda de nuestro

Huitzilin  
 representante de Tonatiuh  
 en su danza planetaria  
 en su Mitotiliztli cósmica  
 ciclos escritos en piedra para todos los/las nietas y nietos  
 que siguen nuestro camino florido

Huitzilin  
 fuerza natural de nuestra resistencia  
 Mexica  
 Nahua  
 Tlamanalcah  
 Yaotlacah  
 Nican Tlacah

### **Summary**

I have given clear examples of Nican Tlacah struggles for liberation such as Magonismo, Zapatismo, the guerrilla era from the 1960s-80s, and the EZLN to illustrate how, as a whole, Nican Tlacah have been continuously fighting to govern ourselves by revitalizing our own social systems of organization. Magonismo and Zapatismo were both organizing resistance for autonomy and liberation. Emiliano Zapata was successful because he fully accepted his Nahua heritage and was deeply rooted in his culture. He was able to use the strongest weapon Anenecuilco had, which was its Nican Tlacah forms of social organization and governance (Calpolli based) to wage resistance and obtain autonomy.

Lucio Cabañas was Nican Tlachah and offered his guerrilla contemporaries his lived experience of organizing an armed insurgency amongst his own community in Guerrero. Through speaking the language of the people he helped them organize themselves into community assemblies that operated through consensus, which greatly impacted many of the resulting guerrilla collectives that came after the PLDP.

The EZLN, like Lucio Cabañas guerrilla insurgency, connected with the communities they operated in by listening to them. They were willing to learn and not place so much importance on Leninist-Marxist theoretical frameworks. This is why the only guerrilla focalist group that was able to survive the Dirty War is the EZLN. They put into practice Emiliano Zapata's and Lucio Cabañas's models of liberation. The EZLN became a Nican Tlachah based movement for liberation by using social structures of leadership, governance, and organization that are rooted in Mayan culture. They shed their Leninist-Marxist guerrilla theories of liberation and instead listened to the community and adopted their Nican Tlachah structures of social organization. Magonistas, Zapatistas, Lucio Cabañas, and the EZLN have been able to develop a Nican Tlachah rooted framework for deconstructing and understanding the world around them.

These movements for autonomy and liberation are related to the Calpolli because they are all branches on the same tree of Nican Tlachah

resistance. The Calpolli is just one manifestation of Nican Tlach communities organizing themselves for autonomy through traditional structures of governance and social organization. We, like the EZLN, have organized ourselves under the radar not being noticed by the mainstream. Just because we are not seen does not mean we do not exist. Nican Tlach traditional structures have survived and we continue to practice them.



## CONCLUSION

*european invaders weave mythical narratives  
 to divest the original peoples from their land  
 language and culture  
 they have tried to take away our visions  
 remove our concepts of humanity  
 self worth  
 life and family  
 roots, roots, roots  
 they could not kill our roots  
 we have survived the genocide  
 listen to the voices of your nanas y tatas  
 as they lay down flowers for the babies  
 healing songs are sung to put the children to sleep  
 weaving dreams with our ancestors seams  
 stories with no borders  
 but with many hummingbirds and flowers  
 creating relationships that seek life  
 between each other  
 in order to survive*

### **Nican Tlach Tiahui**

Imperialism and colonialism have for over 500 years continuously attempted the destruction of our languages, sciences, culture, and institutions (Churchill, 1997). European invaders from the beginning forced their culture and way of life on our communities by engaging in a program to systematically purge the continent of all elements Nican Tlach: the people, our land, languages, medicines, ceremonies, food, homes, stories, songs, and knowledge (Churchill, 1997). Yet the colonizers have not prevailed in their goal of ridding our continent of the very essence of who we are as Nican Tlach. They have only created an illusion of the “West”, an imaginary that is at its core becoming undone by that which preceded it (Bonfil Batalla, 1996). In spite of their

ravenous colonial agenda we have preserved our Nican Tlachah traditional knowledge through our stories, languages, ceremonies, and culture (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). The liberation movements of Emiliano Zapata, Lucio Cabañas, the EZLN, and Calpoltin are all aspects of this struggle to preserve and reconnect to our ancestral ways of being.

We must re-establish our relationships to the land and the elements of nature that make our lives possible (Wildcat, 2009). Projects of colonization actively de-humanized us to justify their atrocities (Churchill, 1997). Christian based ideologies (the Catholic Church) played a key role in establishing the in roads necessary for their take over (Tinker, 2004). Nican Tlachah, through this colonizing paradigm, were soulless heathens and savages who needed the guiding 'Father' for salvation and civilizing (Tinker, 2004). Re-humanizing, then, is our way of taking back our humanity in the way *we* understand our relationship with creation (Wilson & Yellow Bird, 2005).

Thus far, I have focused on the following two central questions as they relate to cultural patrimony and social resistance. 1) Why should Mexica communities organize themselves into Calpoltin? and 2) Why should Nican Tlachah communities the continent over organize themselves into their traditional structures of social organization and governance? It is important to also root these questions in the land as we are intricately tied to the ecosystems we live in. Therefore, these questions

must be framed with the following concept: to truly liberate ourselves we must also begin restoring balance to our ecosystems.

It is important for Mexica communities to organize ourselves into Calpoltin because it offers us a way of life that is healthy, in balance with nature, and re-humanizes us. Before the European invasion of Anahuac, our ancestors lived in self-sustaining communities that had very little negative impact on the ecologies we inhabited (Bonfil Batalla, 1996; Wildcat, 2009). “The value of reciprocity, which is a hallmark of [Nican Tlakah] ceremonies, goes to the heart of issues of sustainability—that is, maintaining a balance and tempering the negative effects of basic human survival techniques (Tinker, pg 20, 2004).” It must also be kept in mind that Mexico-Tenochtitlan had millions of inhabitants who practiced a way of life based on a culture-nature nexus that did not exploit natural resources (Bonfil Batalla, 1996; Wildcat, 2009). Mexica culture was constructed through relationships with natural elements that make life possible: air, water, fire, and the land. Vine Deloria Jr. offers us an example of how Nican Tlakah relationships of responsibilities work in the following passage of *Spirit & Reason*:

The Old people, surveying a landscape, had such a familiarity with the world that they could immediately see what was not in its place, and if they discerned anything that seemed to be out of its natural order, a nocturnal animal in the daytime, unusual clouds or weather conditions, or a change in the plants, they went to work immediately to discover what this change meant...Presented with the natural ordering of cosmic energies, when the people saw an imbalance they knew that their responsibility

was to initiate ceremonies that would help bring about balance once again (pg 134, 1999).

Vine Deloria Jr. provides insight into a scientific tradition that we as Nican Tlachah of Aba Yala utilize to maintain balance in our ecologies (1999). Ceremony is a science that continuously reminds humans of our role within an ecosystem and teaches us how to use relationships that are established within our surrounding ecology to maintain a balance in them (Deloria, 1999). By engaging in relationships of responsibility with the natural elements of life we developed a way of life known as the Mexicayotl (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). This culture was rooted in the Toltecayotl that was constructed over generations of experience and the establishment of relationships to the lands we lived in (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). The Toltecayotl and Mexicayotl still exist and are continually changing.<sup>36</sup> I know it as the Tlamanalcayotl (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010).<sup>37</sup>

We as Nican Tlachah were excellent stewards of our surrounding ecology (Wildcat, 2009). We developed sustainable ways of being that had a minimal impact on the ecosystems we inhabited (Wildcat, 2009). “Inherent in the [Nican Tlachah] worldview of harmony and balance is a deep understanding of the need for human limits in order to maintain the harmony and balance of all creation (Tinker, pg 20, 2004).” If a human society cannot respect the water, air, or other forms of life in their ecology then they will not be able to develop social systems of organization that are non-oppressive (Wildcat, 2009).

The survival of our species on this planet depends on our ability to organize human societies that establish relationships of responsibility to the surrounding ecosystems we are a part of (Wildcat, 2009). “For [Nican Tlachah], *not* all things are possible for humans, because some human actions (for example, mining uranium or cutting down rain forests) would destroy the balance of the world (Tinker, pg 20, 2004).” We, just like any other living creature, have responsibilities to maintain balance that are particular to our species in the ongoing process of creation (Tinker, 2004; Wildcat, 2009).

Nican Tlachah of Aba Yala have the ability to establish autonomous self-sustaining communities by simply reconnecting to what the European invasion tried so hard to eradicate: our ways of being. There exists an entire sector of our community that is actively engaged in a struggle for liberation often relying on European theories and models of social organization for inspiration (i.e. Marxism, Socialism, Anarchism, etc...). Instead of ignoring Nican Tlachah infrastructure and modes of social organization that have been able to survive all imperialistic and colonial projects of genocide we should adopt these life ways that are our very own.

lluvia  
descendiendo del cielo a la tierra  
el cordial umbilical haciendo la vida entre la matriz posible

Impalnemohuani Atzin penetrando Tonanztin  
dando de comer a las raíces  
de nuestro maiz, frijoles, calabazas, amaranto, chiles, nopales y agaves  
Chicome guerrilleros y guerrilleras Nahuatlacah

comidas medicinales, comidas ancestrales

yervas medicinales que nos dieron nuestras nanas y tatas  
 crecen en los jardines urbanos y rurales  
 en ventanillas, en milpas, en corrales  
 en los lados del Chante  
 pero crecen y nos curan

sana  
 sana  
 colita de rana  
 si no creces hoy crecerás mañana

### **Self-Sufficient and Sustainable Human Communities**

In order to have autonomy and freedom we must be able to feed ourselves. It is futile to rely on the very system we are trying to liberate ourselves from for something as basic as the food we need to survive on a daily basis. Emiliano Zapata and the EZLN understood/understand this and their movements for autonomy and liberation reflect this ideal since they both produced/produce their own food. Modern agricultural and meat industries are responsible for pollution of our groundwater, erosion of our topsoil, and the degradation of our ecology in general (Wildcat, 2009). The use of pesticides, herbicides, chemical fertilizers, genetically modified seeds, antibiotics, and unsustainable practices of manure-waste management in factory farms is not healthy for nature or us (Bonfil Batalla, 1996; Wildcat, 2009). The nutritional value of our food declines simultaneously with the pollution of our ecosystem (Wildcat, 2009). We must gain independence from the current food system by restoring our relationship to the food we eat.

One of the first cultural elements attacked by the invading Europeans was Nican Tlach traditional food and medicines (food is medicine) (Wilson & Yellow Bird, 2005). Nahua communities possess a well-balanced nutritional system based off of seven core crops: nopal, chile, amaranth, squash, beans, corn, & the maguey. In addition to these staples chia, spirulina, tomato, sunflower, potato, avocado, quinoa, cacao, mesquite flour, and cacti fruit are incorporated into our traditional nutrition (depending on our ecologies). Many of these staples are now considered “super foods” for their high nutritional value and overall health benefits. Yet, many Nican Tlach communities no longer produce the food that they consume due to loss of traditional agricultural lands.

The Calpolli in pre-Cuauhtemotzin times had integral agricultural components that practiced sustainable organic farming throughout Anahuac. The *milpa* system of agriculture<sup>38</sup> is an example of these practices that is still utilized throughout Nahua agricultural communities (Bonfil Batalla, 1996). Nican Tlach communities all across Aba Yala prior to the European invasion produced all of their own food. Today there exist very few communities that produce the majority of their food due to the devastating impact of colonialism on our traditional systems of food production and our ecologies (Wilson & Yellow Bird, 2005). We can turn the tide by reconnecting to our traditional agricultural practices in our urban and rural communities. We must keep in mind that we had

urban centers in pre-Cuauhtemoczin times that practiced bio-intensive agriculture that sustained millions of people (Bonfil Batalla, 1996; Yturbide, 1959; Yturbide, 1963). The basic infrastructure that made this possible still exists within our traditional agricultural practices, systems of organization, and governance (Bonfil Batalla, 1996; Yturbide, 1959; Yturbide, 1963; Yturbide, 2000).

freedom is  
 feeding our families with these seeds of resistance  
 Native seeds sown in Native soil  
 in the ground  
 in mothers womb  
 is where our  
 freedom fighters  
 can be found

### **Tribal Councils in The United States**

Our survival as Nican Tlachah rests on our ability to reconnect to our ways of being (Wilson & Yellow Bird, 2005). “The Europeans knew that destroying [Nican Tlachah] governments was the key to controlling Indigenous Peoples (Wilson & Yellow Bird, pg 88, 2005).” There is no other choice but to liberate (decolonize) ourselves from the effects of over 500 years of imperialism and colonialism in our communities. In order to do this we must turn to our strength, our traditional forms of social organization and governance that have survived the genocide of our people and ecologies.

It is important to understand how the Calpolli system of social organization and governance is related to the liberation (decolonization) of Nican Tlachah communities in the United States. The reconnection to



ancestral Nican Tlachah ways of being is a unifying link between communities. The struggle for autonomy is local at the same time that it is continental. Communities that are liberating (decolonizing) themselves are offering an example for others to follow and a living history of what is possible. Calpoltin throughout Anahuac are related to all other Nican Tlachah communities of Aba Yala that are struggling for their own autonomy. This movement for freedom and liberation (decolonization) unifies us continent wide.

Every Nican Tlachah community has its unique forms of social organization that have been developed over many generations. Many of our communities have continued functioning in accordance to our traditional structures of social organization and governance. For Nican Tlachah within the United States this has often occurred alongside the existence of a colonially imposed governance structure such as a Tribal council. Instead of developing the millennial infrastructure that our communities possess, Tribal councils turn to Western models of development that further exploit our local ecologies and peoples (Bonfil Batalla, 1996; Tinker, 2004).

For Nican Tlachah communities of the United States, it is imperative to move away from the federally imposed Tribal council model of governance by asserting true sovereignty through our ancestral forms of social organization and governance. Sovereignty is defined as:

The power of a people to control their own destiny. A nation's sovereignty is dependent upon three things: (1) the

degree to which the people believe in the right to define their own future; (2) the degree to which the people have the ability to carry out those beliefs; and (3) the degree to which sovereign acts are recognized both within the nation and by the outside world (Wilson and Yellow Bird, pg 208, 2005).

We must also ask ourselves “at what point and by what process did a people who never ceded their sovereignty to an immigrant colonial state lose their sovereign status to these modern state entities (Tinker, pg 8, 2004)?” We have the ability to establish autonomous self-sustaining communities rooted in our ancestral social systems of organization whether colonial governments recognize us or not (Vodovnik, 2004). We will recognize each other and in the process help liberate (decolonize) one another from colonial governments that deny our existence.

Tribal councils are not traditional forms of governance and offer no real avenue for the liberation (decolonization) of our Nican Tlachah communities since they are imperially imposed structures of governance (Wilson & Yellow Bird, 2005). Through the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) the United States government has absolute power over Nican Tlachah communities within its “borders” (Wilson & Yellow Bird, 2005). The BIA has been responsible for the overthrow of traditional governments, recruiting Nican Tlachah government officials in order to establish puppet governments, and narrowly defining who is Nican Tlachah for tribal membership rolls (Wilson & Yellow Bird, 2005). “This system has led to political divisiveness, governmental impotency, and social and cultural strife in several [Nican Tlachah] communities (Pavlik & Wildcat, pg 48,

2006).” They often times serve as a vehicle for the continuation of imperialistic and colonial projects on Nican Tlachah lands (Tinker, 2004). By their very nature they divide our communities since they ignore and even work against the underlying infrastructures that have kept our communities intact.

Nican Tlachah communities of the United States that reconnect to their ancestral modes of social organization and governance are re-humanizing themselves. A community’s ancestral language, agricultural practices, ceremonies, and rich culture are integral elements in the process of liberation (decolonization). These are our strengths in conjunction with our ancestral leadership and governance structures. This is what connects us as Nican Tlachah of Aba Yala. By turning to our strengths that have made our survival possible we can together work towards a continental liberation of all Nican Tlachah.

### **Final Thoughts**

We are in a struggle for survival and we must not lose sight of this. We must be realistic in the work we undertake for own liberation. The EZLN are realistic in their attempts to obtain autonomy just like Emiliano Zapata was before them. Both of these liberation movements made use of our Nican Tlachah ancestral leadership and governance structures. Our traditional forms of social organization and governance have survived this far for a reason. Without money and despite all odds they still exist. By understanding our strengths as Nican Tlachah of Aba

Yala we can liberate ourselves by re-humanizing ourselves through our ancestral structures of social organization and governance.

In my community I have seen how Calpoltin are asked to support the grassroots movements of the people. As a living community we create a space where others can come and liberate themselves. Often times we are asked to conduct openings, Mitotiliztli ceremonies, runs, sweats, workshops, or all night vigils in support of the struggles that our people are fighting for. We are asked because our community recognizes us as part of their struggle. We are related to one another through our mutual efforts to liberate each other. By engaging in a ceremonial run, opening, sweat, or all night vigil that has been asked of us we are helping our community liberate themselves (decolonize) through our ancestral ways of being. These are acts of healing.

Mexica and Nahua communities that organize themselves into Calpoltin are initiating a process of liberation (decolonization) from the oppressive structures that the European invasion introduced into Anahuac by force. Sexism, classism, racism, ageism, xenophobia, and homophobia have no place in our traditional social systems of organization (Gunn Allen, 1986). They have been infused into our communities for more than 500 years through imperialism and colonialism (Gunn Allen, 1986). Lucio Cabañas' PDLP, the EZLN, and contemporary Calpoltin confront sexism, classism, racism, ageism, xenophobia, and homophobia (Muñoz Ramírez, 2008; Rosales, 1974;

Vodovnik, 2004). It is part of the liberation (decolonization) of our communities and ourselves. It is a necessary task in order to function properly and have healthy communities.

By asserting our right to develop our own path to liberation means we must confront the historical trauma that exists within our Nican Tlach communities. Part of this is dealing with non-ancestral rooted ways of being that are sexist, racist, classist, homophobic, and xenophobic. The experiences of colonization our communities have gone through have developed many dysfunctional ways of being that need to be re-thought. Working towards the autonomy of our communities also implies that we need to learn how to relate to each other in healthy ways. The process of liberation (decolonization) is one that requires communities to deal with the sexist, racist, classist, homophobic, and xenophobic strands of consciousness that exist in our community.<sup>39</sup>

We must follow in the steps of the EZLN and Calpoltin of Anahuac in our struggles for autonomy and liberation. By reconnecting to our traditional leadership structures we will become stronger and healthier. The way this will manifest itself will change depending on which Nican Tlach community of Aba Yala we are a part of. We have very rich and diverse cultures that have engendered their own ways of being. I am in no way arguing for everyone to adopt the Calpolli system of social organization and governance as their own. It will only really work for Nahua and Mexica communities that are rooted to it through our

Tezcatlipoca (genetic memory). The EZLN are a good example of a community that has established their autonomy through the revitalization of Nican Tlachah leadership roles and modes of governance that are their very own (Vodovnik, 2004).

For the non-Nican Tlachah that live on our lands we can find common ground in what is known as the Permaculture movement. Permaculture is defined as “consciously designed landscapes which mimic the patterns and relationships found in nature, while yielding an abundance of food, fiber and energy for provision of local needs (Holmgren, 2004).”

Permaculture is a holistic way of being that organizes human societies so they produce no waste, turn problems into solutions, replicate nature’s patterns and cycles, and is geared towards sustainability and self-sufficiency (Holmgren, 2004). “People, their buildings and the ways in which they organize themselves are central to Permaculture. Thus the Permaculture vision of permanent or sustainable agriculture has evolved to one of permanent or sustainable culture (Holmgren, 2004).” There is no need for Euro-Americans to attempt to replicate our social systems of organization and governance. A more worthwhile and meaningful undertaking would be the establishment of completely sustainable and self-sufficient communities. We can more easily find common ground when we both have our own established relationships of responsibility with nature.

For non-Nican Tlachah who truly want to be in solidarity with us it is imperative that they initiate a reformulation of a culture-nature nexus that is based on self-sufficiency and sustainability. Otherwise our relationships (between Nican Tlachah and non-Nican Tlachah) will be marked by systems of oppression that are deeply rooted in a culture-nature nexus that is presently threatening our species ability to survive on Earth (Wildcat, 2009). We can no longer keep functioning on a culture-nature nexus that is based on the hyper consumption of material objects that poison our ecosystems (Wildcat, 2009). When life can be materialized and objectified then it no longer is precious (Wildcat, 2009). It becomes a resource to be used or a barrier to the use of resources (Wildcat, 2009).

There is no need to learn our ceremonies but there is a dire need for non-Nican Tlachah to develop ways of being that are not destructive to our ecology. This can be done through the serious and organized implementation of Permaculture life ways throughout non-Nican Tlachah society. Imagine a world where everyone produces a portion of his or her own food through sustainable agriculture. Imagine a world where everyone composts green (i.e. food scraps, manure, etc...) and brown (i.e. shredded paper, leaves, etc...) organic matter reducing our use of landfills (replenishing our currently depleted topsoil). Imagine a world where we harness the power of the wind and sun to power our homes and heat our water. This, in many ways, is the world we used to live in.

red & brown youth  
 dividing into red & blue crews  
 specializing in deathly arts  
 deleting one another for cold dirty cash  
 that slips right through red & brown finger tips  
 hollow tips tearing the flesh & bone  
 that a mother nurtured for an entire Tonalpohualli within her  
 womb

stop shooting each other the enemy is not you or me

my people, don't you see?

my people, don't you see?

red & brown bodies  
 locked up like farm animals  
 in industrial slaughterhouses  
 to rot away  
 to lose our connection to our Tonalli & mind  
 to break us  
 to maintain  
 the illegal squatting  
 on our Nican Tlachah lands

my people, don't you see?

my people, don't you see?

red & brown peoples  
 kidnapped  
 corralled into detention centers  
 prison camps  
 death camps  
 across the continent

where are your papers pilgrims?

our nanas y tatas smudged you  
 like we smudged ourselves  
 purifying our existence on the land  
 that we are a part of  
 that we are caretakers of

our land titles are written  
 with copal, cedar, & sage smoke



as we offer songs to creation  
as we offer dances to creation  
as we offer our sweat to creation  
as we run from community to community  
creating relations

land titles written in star dust  
shining & shimmering  
star nations serve as witness  
to the responsibility we have inherited  
from our nanas y tatas  
to establish harmony within our ecosystem  
so the seven generations may have life

what *is* your relationship to *my* land pilgrim?

what *is* your relationship to *my* land pilgrim?

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Governance is defined as “the rules and procedures developed and used by a people to allow them to take collective action as a society (Wilson & Yellow Bird, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Using *Aba Yala*, instead of a Nahuatl term for the continent, is an act of solidarity with Nican Tlachah resistance movements that utilize this term in documents addressing the world community. By using this term I am allying our community to our collective Nican Tlachah struggles for liberation.

<sup>3</sup> *Toltecayotl* is a Nahuatl word describing the very essence, or roots, of the Tolteca culture (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> *Mexicayotl* is a Nahuatl word, where *Mexica* means *the people*, and *yotl* roughly translates into essence (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). When put together, *Mexicayotl*, is describing the very essence, or roots, of the Mexica culture (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> *Tlamanalcayotl* is a way of being; it is a place-based epistemology that re-humanizes us by establishing relationships of responsibility to the natural elements of life within the ecosystems we inhabit (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). The *Tlamanalcayotl* is the very essence of who we are as a Nahua community (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). It refers to our social and cultural institutions that make us who we are (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> One aspect of the Huehuetlahtolli in practice is that it bonds two generations together through the teaching and learning of ceremonies. The younger generation will then in turn teach those that come after them creating a link across space and time.

<sup>7</sup> *Tlahtocan* is a Nahuatl concept that roughly translated into a space where people come to listen and speak (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). It is also a space where people come into agreement through the establishment of consensus (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> The term pre-Cuauhtemotzin will be used instead of pre-Columbian in order to frame my work in a Nican Tlachah historical context. Cuauhtemoc is the last Hueyi Tlahtoani (spokesperson) of the Tlahtocanechicolli (governing council of the Mexica Confederacy) of Mexico-Tenochtitlan (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010; Yturbide, 2000). Cuauhtemoc marks the turning point in our struggle to defend our land and culture. He delivered a message on behalf of the Tlahtocanechicolli intended for all peoples of Anahuac that calls for a strategic long-term shift in our resistance movements (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). The message of our last functioning Tlahtocanechicolli marks a turning point in our history and the beginning of a long-term movement focused on the preservation of our social and cultural institutions (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> For a more in depth explanation of each one of these projects refer to *Chapter 8 of Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*.

<sup>10</sup> *In Coayotl* is the governing council of a Calpolli (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 210; Yturbide, 2000). The Nahuatl concept of *In Coayotl* can be thought of as the “essence of the serpent” (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 210; Yturbide, 2000). It refers to the individuals that have shown through their actions an ability to govern and represent their union of families (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 210; Yturbide, 2000). The families of a Calpolli give these individuals the responsibility of administering and executing all tasks that are integral to keep the Calpolli functioning (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 210; Yturbide, 2000).

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<sup>11</sup> The Nahuatl used in the poetry will not be translated in order to create a direct dialogue with my community in a liberating (decolonizing) way. Throughout our struggle for survival we communicate with each other in ways that we can only understand. Sometimes this is done through images, inside jokes, or in my case through the use of un-translated Nahuatl throughout the poetry of my thesis. This dialogue is using the Huehuetlahtolli because communication is happening through the use of poetry's similes and metaphors unfiltered/unchanged through the use European languages. Poetry is an art form that is oral (written in order to be spoken). When we enunciate and speak the Nahuatl words in my poetry it is a liberating act. It is liberating (decolonization) our tongues, minds, and ways of thinking from that which is of European lineage. If the reader wants to completely understand what is being said in my poetry then they must liberate (decolonize) themselves.

<sup>12</sup> *Macehualiztli Mitotiliztli* is the term that Calpolli Teoxicalli uses for what is generally called "Aztec Dance" (2010). *Macehual* is a Nahuatl word that refers to the "people" or a Nahua community or "pueblo" (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). *Mitotiliztli* is a Nahua concept that is describing our traditional dance ceremonies (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Traditional dances exist and manifest themselves in many beautiful forms and are a part of our Anahuacayotl.

<sup>14</sup> Oral history also includes the bodied knowledge that we carry through traditional dances and other non-oral ways of life (such as ceremonial running).

<sup>15</sup> *Anahuac* means, "land surrounded by water" in Nahuatl (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). I use it to refer to what is now known as North America.

<sup>16</sup> Tlamanalcayotl Epistemology is the way that we, as Calpolli Teoxicalli, put into practice Anahuacayotl Epistemology (2010). We have our own ceremonial protocols, Calpolli structures, and our Tlamanalcayotl is the very essence of who we are as a Nahua community (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> Many people who consider themselves "Mexican" have become disconnected with their Nican Tlachah roots since we have a very turbulent history in regards to uprisings and projects of genocide carried out against our people. Many of us can only go as far as our immediate grandparents in our genealogy. The reason for this is the masses of families that were torn apart, children who were orphaned, and the general chaos that occurs during times of revolution or communities surviving genocidal projects. We can only go so far back into our own genealogy because we carry a violent history. Our grandfathers and grandmothers died in revolutions. Many also died in genocidal campaigns, like the wars against the Yaqui in Sonora, yet someone always manages to survive. Those of us who have become de-Tribalized due to this history have a right to organize ourselves into Tribal communities. The Calpolli system of social organization and governance offers us a way to do this.

<sup>18</sup> Nican Tlachah science is an epistemology that is experientially driven and embedded within particular ecosystems. Each Calpolli must develop their own way of being, their particular epistemology, by establishing relationships with the local ecosystem. Certain responsibilities are agreed upon and ceremonies are done in order to fulfill these relationships. Every member of the Calpolli must learn how to maintain obligations that have been established by ancestors and community. Nican Tlachah epistemological methods, such as the various ceremonies practiced by a Calpolli, are tools used to fulfill these responsibilities through the preceding generations. When Calpoltin descendants

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keep engaging in a particular ceremony that has been established, they're renewing an agreement made with the surrounding ecosystem and teaching the younger generations how to fulfill these relationships.

<sup>19</sup> The reader should refer to Ward Churchill's *A Little Matter of Genocide* (listed in Works Cited) for an in depth understanding of why the term Genocide is appropriate to use in the context of what Nican Tlach communities of Aba Yala experienced since the European invasion of our lands.

<sup>20</sup> *In Cuauhtemotzin In Nahuatilama* is a message that has been transmitted from mouth to ear for over 500 years (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). It is a strategy for the preservation of our cultural, social, and political institutions through the family unit (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). The concept of the "family unit" in Nahua culture also applies to extended family or other social mechanisms of establishing familial ties (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010).

<sup>21</sup> The Calpolli can be thought of as a family unit since it is a union made between families that have organized themselves in order to preserve our Nahua culture (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> I am referring to the two major counts of the Tonalmaxiotl (what is commonly known as the "Aztec Calendar") for the Solar Year (Xiuhpohualli) and the ceremonial count of a Human Being (Tonalpohualli). There are several Nahua ceremonies that have survived all projects of genocide that are directly tied to the 20 day "months." The fact that they still exist and are conducted by our communities attests to the strength of our social systems of organization.

<sup>23</sup> In Europe there exists hundreds of dark skinned virgins and this particular statue is one of the three "Black Madonna's." These Black Madonna statues are sculptured out of dark wood and are attributed to St. Luke, which would explain why Christians fleeing Muslim armies buried it. It is also important to note that Extremadura, Spain became a rallying point for the re-conquest of territories previously ceded to Muslim armies after the rediscovery of the Virgin. This town is the hometown of many of the soon to be Spanish invaders.

<sup>24</sup> Communal land holding (ejidos) and traditional agriculture would eventually be attacked in 1993-4 with the revision of Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution and the passing of the National Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (Muñoz Ramirez, 2008; Ross, 2006). This would eventually cause the mass economic reorganization of Mexican society and family, forcing millions of people off their land and into migration to the north (the United States of America and Canada).

<sup>25</sup> A *Hueyi Calpixque* is a caretaker of the Calpoltlalli, or the communal lands of a Calpolli, and is responsible for their defense (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010; Yturbide, 2000). They are also responsible for the work that must be done on those lands and the distribution of goods produced from the land (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010; Yturbide, 2000).

<sup>26</sup> This refers to the Juchitán community.

<sup>27</sup> It is also important to remember that women organized themselves into PLM collectives, like the Hijas de Anahuac who contributed to the development of Magonismo ideology and an armed liberation movement.

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<sup>28</sup> The Magonistas believed in local autonomous communities. This is why established Nican Tlach liberation movements like the Yaqui pueblos of Sonora and Nahua communities of Anenecuilco would ally themselves with their armed resistance. The Magonistas were not necessarily “promising” the Yaqui, Nahua, or other Nican Tlach communities their land. Rather they were recognizing the reality of our sovereignty by agreeing to co-create a new social order through an armed struggle.

<sup>29</sup> Many of these communities were ejidos that in many ways were autonomous and governed themselves.

<sup>30</sup> Genaro Vazquez’s guerrilla movement was the first casualty in this counter-insurgency war and Lucio Cabañas’ PDLP soon followed (Hernández, 2009; Tort, 2005; Mayo, 1980). By the mid 1970s the remaining guerrilla forces of La Liga and the FLN were still operating clandestinely (Hernández, 2009; Ross, 2006). La Liga would also soon fall victim to the counter-insurgency war as well. Yet, the FLN would be able to continue establishing focalist groups well up into the mid 1980s without much notice of the State (Ross, 2006).

<sup>31</sup> Villista refers to the popular uprising and organized liberation army led by Pancho Villa in Northern Mexico.

<sup>32</sup> Another important distinction of the FLN is that the urban middle class, who Comandante German was a part of, financially sustained them (Ross, 2006). They were able to subsidize their guerrilla focalism with a portion of their own personal incomes (Ross, 2006). This meant that they did not have to organize bank heists or kidnappings to fund their guerrilla movement, effectively keeping most of their clandestine activities from government detection well up into the mid 1980s (Ross, 2006).

<sup>33</sup> Mayan communities have continuously resisted and organized for liberation using their own social systems of organization and governance. The FLN did not just happen to come along and create this resistance. They hoped to establish a foco within the Lacandon Jungle precisely because of the long history of organized resistance for liberation by the Mayan peoples. In this sense the FLN added fuel to a fire that was already burning. They did not start the fire. The formation and expansion of the EZLN is an example of how a Nican Tlach community (using ancestral social structures) can help create global paths of resistance for liberation.

<sup>34</sup> The implementation of NAFTA and the dismantling of Article 27 created a situation on the ground where people were not able to feed themselves anymore. Ejidos consist of peoples who are farming subsistent food crops alongside crops for the larger marketplace. The importation of cheap foreign goods (such as corn) devastated the Mexican economy. Ejido farmers could not compete with the subsidized farmers of the United States and Canada. Ejidos communities experienced a breakup of their communal land base from land sales by struggling families. Ejido communities lost many of their youth who chose to migrate to the United States in order to survive the economic consequences of NAFTA. This contextualizes why ejido communities that are compromised of clandestinely organized Mayan peoples would see this as a war on their way of life.

<sup>35</sup> The CCRI makes all their decisions based on what the communities want (Muñoz Ramírez, 2008). The following is the seven principles that the EZLN function by: “The EZLN adheres to the following seven principles of the good government: 1) To lead by obeying (the people are the ones that decide, those that lead do not make laws or give orders. The movement is led by the people, not the spokespersons or representatives). 2)

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To represent; not replace (neither the government nor the leaders can decide for the people, the people/community retains the power to decide. The leaders can propose, but not decide or impose their ways). 3) To work from below and not seek to rise (the work of those in government is not to gain greater influence or power over other members of the community, but to work actively to maintain equality and horizontality. The leaders must engage with, and be accountable to, the community at all times). 4) To serve; not self-serve (those in government must do political work out of 'conscience' and not out of desire for personal gain. This has also been formulated as "everything for everyone, nothing for ourselves." Those in the 'Juntas of the Good Government' and the community workers/promoters do not get paid for their work). 5) To convince; not conquer (Decisions are not made through a majority vote but in an open and popular assembly. The point is to create consensus through respectful dialogue. This also means the creation of consultations and forums that make possible community participation). 6) To construct; not destroy (legitimate authority should only seek to construct/create community and community power, and not destroy it by fomenting divisions or centralizing power in his/her own hands. 7) To propose; not impose (The leaders can propose what needs to be done, but the people must decide at the end. The leaders cannot impose their decision for 'the benefit' of the community (Comandante Tacho, 2007)."

<sup>36</sup> The Toltecayotl and Mexicayotl are concepts used by Nahua and Mexica communities in different ways. Every community has their take on these concepts because they manifest particular to the community that is living it. The Toltecayotl and Mexicayotl are place-based ways of being. This is why they change and are expressed in diverse ways. My Calpolli understands the Toltecayotl and Mexicayotl as ways of being that are intimately tied to nature and its cycles (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). We engage in ceremonies that are rooted in the Toltecayotl and Mexicayotl, which is a cultural inheritance that we are also adding to (Calpolli Teoxicalli, 2010). The ceremonies are a clear continuation of a Nahua culture that is heterogeneous by nature and not static. Ceremonies are passed on person-to-person, family-to-family, community-to-community, and generation-to-generation. By engaging in ceremony we reconnect with our Toltecayotl and Mexicayotl. Simultaneously we are teaching and preserving it for future generations that will inherit it from us.

<sup>37</sup> The Tlamanalcayotl is a ceremonial way of being that is actively liberating (decolonizing) the Tlamanalcah community. By reconnecting with our Toltecayotl and Mexicayotl, through ceremony, we understand who we are as a Calpolli and community. Through this understanding we develop a lifestyle rooted in ceremony that is particular to us. It is our way of being. It is the Tlamanalcayotl.

<sup>38</sup> A *milpa* is a Nahua bio-intensive organic farming method that typically grows more than a dozen crops within the same field (Mann, 2005). This system of companion planting takes full advantage of crops that are nutritionally and environmentally complementary (Mann, 2005). This allows for the topsoil within the agricultural fields to maintain their fertility. Many traditional Nican Tlakah agricultural lands have been cultivated utilizing this bio-intensive method and are still productive (Mann, 2005). It is important to note that the milpa is the only system of bio-intensive agriculture that lends itself to this type of long-term use (Mann, 2005).

<sup>39</sup> The following is an example of the EZLN confronting sexism by developing a Women's Revolutionary Law: "First--Women, regardless of their race, creed, color or political affiliation, have the right to participate in the revolutionary struggle in any way that their desire and capacity determine. Second--Women have the right to work and receive

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a just salary. Third--Women have the right to decide the number of children they have and care for. Fourth--Women have the right to participate in the matters of the community and have charge if they are free and democratically elected. Fifth--Women and their children have the right to Primary Attention in their health and nutrition. Sixth--Women have the right to education. Seventh--Women have the right to choose their partner and are not obliged to enter into marriage. Eighth--Women have the right to be free of violence from both relatives and strangers. Rape and attempted rape will be severely punished. Ninth--Women will be able to occupy positions of leadership in the organization and hold military ranks in the revolutionary armed forces. Tenth--Women will have all the rights and obligations which the revolutionary laws and regulations give (Vodovnik, 2004).” It is important to note that the EZLN also confront homophobia, xenophobia, racism, and classism within their communities.

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