

Deep Culture:  
With Wings On The Roots

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis chronicles the experiences of six young adults living in the Central San Joaquin Valley of California, including those of the main author, who have origins to Oaxaca, Mexico, who use writing, performance and visual arts as a means of building community cohesion; and also to speak back to the social inequalities faced by Mexican indigenous communities across the U.S.-Mexican borderlands. Through personal narratives, poetry and visual arts this research (re)examines the historical, political, economic and social fabric that connects the lives of these young adults and speaks to their experiences and vision for the future generations of U.S.-Mexican indigenous migrants. The author looks beyond the narrative of historical discrimination to that of a community undergoing a profound transformation.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“We’re here. [...] We are Mexican but we’re different. Like you feel different. We’re a different community [...] (Juanita, Personal Communication, August 2013).

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I was able to see my breath. It was the winter and it was freezing cold in the outskirts of Madera, California. The drizzle from the fog seeped into my cotton glove, making them wet. Heavy fog has settled in the valley floor, unable to see more than ten feet ahead in these desolate acres of grape vineyards. Numb fingers, bend down the cane against the metal wire, in a few months the buds will sprout. Again and again we bend the cane, and bind them with a twist tie. Many fields of grape vineyards awaited my family for the day. This was the season known as el amarre, when jobs in the valley fields are scarce and wages drop low<sup>1</sup>. The occasional chatter or crop duster would lend itself to the sound of these fields.

The Central San Joaquin Valley the Corazoncito (heart) of California is indigenous land<sup>2</sup>. It is place that generations of indigenous people have called home. Its once swampy lands where flocks of geese nested, herds of wild pigs roamed and flowery meadows adored the land, has been severely reduced and transformed into fields of harvest<sup>3</sup>. The socioeconomic structure of the Central Valley is based on agriculture that has always depended on the labor of immigrants groups<sup>4</sup> (Martínez Nateras & Stanley: 2011: 2). Mexican immigrants, especially have devoted

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<sup>1</sup> The winter for farmworkers and their families is economically challenging. The lack of jobs during the winter seasons, would often lead my parents to drive around from farm to farm looking for any sort of farm working job. It was also a time when my parents had no choice but to seek government assistance from food stamps to unemployment benefits to provide food in our tables. As other farmworkers, my parents struggled with unemployment during the winter. According to Martin (2012) in California farming counties suffer from high unemployment rates that have topped 17 percent during the winter months. Typically, most farmworkers, food processing, packing workers are laid off in October, and most worker are “idle” during the Nov/Dec with some harvesting taking place in Southern California and Arizona (Martin & Edward, 2000: 20-25). During the winter months (Jan/Feb) in the Central California, employment in California fields is only half of its September peak levels (Martin & Edward, 2000: 20-25).

<sup>2</sup> It is estimated that before the gold rush, 80,000 indigenous people lived in the San Joaquin Valley (Mayfield, 1993:11).

<sup>3</sup> The Central Valley has a history of more than 100 years of agriculture (Martínez Nateras, et al., 2011: 2)

<sup>4</sup> As Martínez Nateras et al., (2011) note the history of labor in the Central San Joaquin Valley is also encompassing of immigrant groups including the Chinese, Armenians and Filipinos (7).

their labor to these lands. The hands of working women, men and children have tended the fields and orchards that provide the fruit, vegetables, and nuts, which appear on the dinner tables of most homes in the United States and the world.

The Central Valley's rural landscape has also fostered a new home for many immigrant communities from across the globe. Most recently it has become the home for Mexican indigenous people, particularly Oaxaqueños<sup>5</sup>, who live alongside their paisanos<sup>6</sup> from México and Latino America. Fresno County, and the City of Madera are an emblem of the shifting dynamics of the Valley, together they have a population of 858,948 people, 47 percent Latino, of which 93 percent is of Mexican origin (Martínez Nateras et al., 2011: 2). Madera in particular, has become the “mecca” of Mexican-indigenous people in California (Leigh Brown, 2011) it is estimated that 10,000 to 15,000 Mexican indigenous people reside in Madera mostly from the state of Oaxaca.

Unified by a profoundly distinct way of understanding the world, indigenous communities from Oaxaca have come to develop their own cultural, economic and political practices that marks their own autonomía (Escobar, 2012: xxix). A battle of resistance to maintain their way of life marks the experiences of indigenous people from Oaxaca. But this battle has not been easy, and has left many wounds. These wounds manifest themselves in the emotional, physical and spiritual lives de mi gente, la gente indígena<sup>7</sup> on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican borderlands/la frontera. Pejorative terms such as Oaxaquita and Indito cut through and delve deep paralyzing, erasing and denying the existence of la persona indígena that lives in all of our bloods. There is no denying that the illness of racism has manifested itself in the political, economic and social forms of repression that has resulted in indigenous people being at the

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<sup>5</sup> Oaxaqueños (Spanish), people with origins to the state of Oaxaca in the Mexican Republic

<sup>6</sup> Paisanos, is a term that implies a special camaraderie that at times emerges from a connection to a certain place, struggle or history.

<sup>7</sup> Indigenous people

fringes of the dominant society. And so under constant tyranny, hundreds and thousands of Mexican indigenous people from Oaxaca have left their native lands, expanding the boundaries of their pueblos<sup>8</sup> as they migrate throughout Mexico and the U.S.

In the Central Valley of California the presence of Oaxaqueños goes beyond the agriculture fields as farmworkers but as members of dynamic communities (re)creating their ways of life and understanding as early as the 1970's<sup>9</sup>. The first generation of Oaxaqueños came to construct social organizations that came to "recreate patterns of community life" (Velasco Ortiz, 2005:100). Today a young generation continues to (re)create these patterns of community that reveals a world of itself. This is a world with wounds from the past and present. And yet these wounds are being confronted and most importantly transformed. It is a transformation without borders that bridges across generations of Oaxaqueñas/os.

In this thesis I write about this transformation via the voices of a young generation of Oaxaqueñas/os living in the Central San Joaquin Valley of California. This vast land, never ours and deeply engraved in us, foregrounds the hopes, aspirations and narratives of Elvira, Grisanti, Juanita, Miguel, Rey and my own<sup>10</sup>. This is illustrated in our personal narratives, poetry, visual arts and lyrics that throughout the chapters unveils a footprint that is distinctively different.

## **METHODOLOGY: COMPAÑERISMO**

"I can see my reflection in you, and you can see yours in me. This has to be everybody's story, not one's individual story." – Mare<sup>11</sup> (Lirika, 2013)

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<sup>8</sup>According to Fox (2013) "pueblo" in Spanish has a dual meaning-it encompasses both "people" in the broad sense of a whole society as well as a more localized sense of "community of origin" (18). In this context here and throughout the thesis "pueblo(s)" will be a reference to a more localized sense of community origin this is because for Mexican indigenous immigrants, their primary loyalty is to their hometowns of origin, which are typically small towns. A history of discrimination from "mass society" has resulted in indigenous communities to not trust outsiders (Mines, Nichols, Runsten, 2010: 21). In addition, factors including distinct language variants and political indigenous organizations for each pueblo also result in members being interdependent of members of their own hometown pueblos.

<sup>9</sup> According to Velasco Ortiz (2005) since the 1970's there has been a significant population of Oaxaqueños in the northwestern frontier of Mexico (39). This concurs with Mines et al., (2010) who also found that the migration of indigenous Mexican to California re-emerged in the 1970's and they were typically men. The first migration of Mexican indigenous migrants began during the Bracero Program from 1942-1965 (100).

<sup>10</sup> I use the real names of Elvira, Grisanti, Juanita, Miguel and Rey. This was their preference.

<sup>11</sup> Mare is a hip-hop singer and Zapotec woman from Oaxaca.

Elvira, Grisanti, Juanita, Miguel and Rey are my compañeras/os. I choose to employ the term, compañeras/os because I see our narratives being intertwined. We are the daughters and sons of the first generation of immigrants from Oaxaca, and whose relationships, initiated from a reciprocal relation “wherein one enables the other” (hooks, 1991). Compañerismo is inspired by the pedagogy of acompañamiento introduced by Sepúlveda III (2011), a process of engaging immigrant youth that fosters a space for deeper bonding and critical dialogues (558).

In my experience this included critical dialogues with my compañeras/os regarding my position as a graduate student researcher and a member of the community. Often times I evoked these conversations, as a means to make sense of my position. I received reassurance from my compañeras/os that they “trust[ed]” me and that they felt “good” about my work<sup>12</sup>. These words of encouragement were reaffirming and yet navigating this in between space was a challenge. I identified with the struggle of Villenas (1996) who wrote about her own process of navigating multidimensional identities as a self identified Chicana working in a Latino community conducting research. Villenas (1996) vividly describes her experience as “a walking contradiction with a foot in both worlds—in the dominant privileged institution and in the marginalized communities” (714). In all senses Villenas (1996) came to find our multidimensional identities are “fluid space of crossing borders”, in which we must examine our experiences of marginalization, and also join the struggle with our communities to become our own social actors in our liberation (730).

Coming to understand my writing as part of a collective struggle I also recognized that it was also part of my own voice. This is a voice that seeks liberation from its own marginalization. A voice with hunger and a vision of liberation that was fostered as a consequence of the

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<sup>12</sup> My compañeras/os throughout my fieldwork regularly encouraged the research that I was conducting sometimes during informal conversations as well as during the process of interviews. Juanita as one example remarked her approval of the research I was conducting stating without any prompts: “I think it’s really good that your’re doing this research. And that’s its coming from a voice within the community. I think that it is really important.” (Juanita, Personal Communication, Aug 17, 2013).



relationships I developed with my compañeras/os within a period of three years, through the different community convenings regarding the Oaxaqueña/o community<sup>13</sup>. The Winter of 2010 is when I first met some of my compañeras/os at a meeting that embarked the creation of the group called Autónomos, where I initially came to meet young people who self identified as having origins to Oaxaca. I feel grateful and privileged to have witnessed the formation of the Autónomos, committed to preserving the culture and native language of indigenous communities<sup>14</sup>.

The space created by Autónomos provided me with a sense of belonging and connection to a larger community. Critical pillars to this sense of belonging constituted in the pedagogy described by Sepúlveda III (2001), in which spaces constitutes both personal and intellectual growth by re-centering voices, building community and validating identities based on the realities and knowledge of individuals (552). However, because of the physical distance while attending graduate school, I felt unable to contribute as a full-time member, but I came to develop close relationships with certain individuals from Autónomos as well as other Oaxaqueñas/os whom I met throughout California<sup>15</sup>. Some of the narratives of these individuals are to follow.

From both personal and group dialogues, my compañeras/os and I came to engage in critical discussions on, but not limited to, cultural and shifting norms of gender, tradition, music and also the discrimination we experience. Our conversations encompassed critical thinking, reflection and analysis regarding our “lived experience” and thus we engaged in what hooks

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<sup>13</sup> Many of the of the convening’s where I came to meet other young adult Oaxaqueños took place in the city of Fresno, Los Angeles, Madera, Oxnard, and Santa Maria largely because these are cities with a significant presence of Oaxaqueñas/os. See Mines, Nichols Runsten, David (2010) for concentrations of Mexican indigenous people in rural California (16-17). See Lopez & Runsten (2005) for Zapotec migration to urban areas.

<sup>14</sup> Autónomos mission is a “group of young people preserving the culture, native language with equality, pride, and respect in our communities”. Their mission is written in Spanish, this is my personal translation. (Personal Communities)

<sup>15</sup> I witnessed and was inspired by the ongoing efforts by young Oaxaqueños throughout the state of California, many of whom I have met personally throughout my fieldwork. Many of these groups are sharing their own stories and taking direct actions as they believe is best for their respective communities. This includes group such as but not limited to Autonomos in Fresno, *Tequio* in Oxnard and Tonaltecos Unidos in Santa Rosa, For more about Oaxaqueño youth led organizing in California, see Oaxacalifornian Reporting Team (2013)

(1994) refers to the liberatory practice of theory (61). Having engaged in such practices allowed me to feel a sense of personal and “collective liberation” (hooks, 1994: 61). These dialogues culminated in an understanding that my life journey, is not solely my own.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK-IN DIÁLOGO**

In writing about the Oaxaqueña/o community living in the Central San Joaquin Valley I searched for writings that spoke to the felt experience of navigating various cultures at once and yet embarking on a transformative state that “embraces the complexity of culture (s)” (Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo: 2001: 240). I looked to the writings of the late Gloria Anzaldúa (2009 & 2007) a Chicana, a lesbian, an activist and writer whom theorize from her own experiences as a “border woman”. Anzaldúa’s (2007) writing style of personal narrative to the incorporation of prose and poetry as a way to theorize about the borderlands, as a space of in “between cultures” pushed me to re-examine my familys’ and my own journey border-crossing.

In dialogue with Anzaldúa (2009) and other border-crossing theorists (Villenas 1996, Sepúlveda 2011), I came to understand that in order to stand in solidarity with my compañeras/os I also needed to write of my own source of pain. By writing from this place of vulnerability, I became conscious that writing is a transformative act — or “shamanistic” (Anzaldúa, 2007); and one that must be connected with action. This has been a message echoed by other various feminist theorists (hooks 1991, Lorde 2007, Watson-Gegeo, et al., 2005) whose writing profoundly shaped my writing approach. This approach constitutes of an analytical dialogue supported by plenty of footnotes to keep the dialogue going.

Reflecting on my own experience, as well as dialogues with my own compañeras and the writing of the feminist theory I recognize the need to write about our experiences, as a self identified Oaxaqueña woman. Several theories manifested themselves in our lived

experiences that constituted in recognizing the “body-mind” (Watson-Gegeo, 2005: 405) as a source of knowledge that is “culturally situated” and connected to the environment (Potter, 2008: 449).

The scholarly work of Watson-Gegeo et al., (2001) also pushed me to reconfigure the notions of culture(s) as ever-complex, encompassing different forms of knowing within individuals and communities and conceptualize by her concept of deep culture (240). With this in mind, as well conversations with my compañeras/os regarding the challenges of preserving the cultural knowledge of our communities I sought to have a deeper understanding of the role of language<sup>16</sup> as a powerful mode that reflects the world that emerges from speaking various languages which coincides with the work of scholars (N. González 2001, Watson-Gegeo 2005, Zentella 2004) who also recognize that language(s) reveals multiple ways of knowing and that needs be fostered within our society. In addition to language being a cultural emblem I came to understand that our knowledge of the world is profoundly linked to the senses, this including but not limited to feeling, sight, touch and sound which has been established by the work of cultural anthropologists (Classen 1991a, 1991b, 1997).

Finally, in an attempt to bridge the historical legacy of our pre-colonial ancestors with that protégé trajectory of present day indigenous I provide a historical and analytical analysis of the work by Jansen & Jiménez Perez (2007, 2009, 2011).

## **UN GUIDE FOR THIS CAMINATA**

In some matter, this thesis itself is a caminata, a path that sways back and forth. It is a slither in between borders. I am referring to the borders between Mexico and the U.S.A. As well

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<sup>16</sup> My concern regarding the language stemmed from listening to the concerns expressed by my compañeras/os regarding the future of the Mixteco language. From their perspective fewer young people were learning the language. This was vivid during Miguel’s interview during when we discuss the role of language and the challenges of preserving it. Miguel stated, “I don’t know what it’s going to be in the future. We’re just going to be another culture that has been erased. It’s bad enough that you have Chicanos who don’t speak Nahuatl anymore. Now we’re going to have Oaxaqueños who don’t speak Mixteco and Zapoteco anymore” (Miguel, Personal Communication, August 2013).

as the existing racial borders between la gente indígena and paisanos Mexicanos/Chicanos. And the gender and spiritual border that continues to exist in all societies. It calls for crossing over, and as Anzaldúa (2009) put it “becoming the subjects in our own discourse” (125). In fact, I myself become a subject, a testament and entrance to these borders that I navigate alongside with my five compañeras/os.

This caminata, interjects a voice, a message about our experiences, which at times might lead to some ambiguity. As a reader, one is introduced to an ongoing collective dialogue, via excerpts of personal narratives, prose & poetry, visual arts and lyrics. Since my attempt is to stage my writing in a way that guides the reader to the distinct voices it, will not always be definitive who is the individual speaker. At times our voices will become an infusion, echoing a similar struggle or undergoing a collective transformation.

But this caminata also splits in an attempt contribute to the distinct experiences of a young generation of Mexican indigenous in California that has been only begun to be addressed in the literature (Barrillas-Chón 2010, Cruz Manjarrez 2012, Oaxacalifornian Reporting Team 2013, Hernández Morales 2012, Kovats 2010). It will discuss what is an often times not discussed, and that is the self-identified Oaxaqueña mujer (woman) experience who writes from an embodied, a place of knowledge. Unveiling many wounds and yet enacting transformative change from this place.

And so I go beyond what N. González calls (2001) “surface markers” that have come to erode the various layers of complexities within the Mexican and Latino groups (169). Along with N. González (2001) I move away from “uniform categorizations” that assume that all members of cultural groups are the same. Rather, as she (N. González, 1995) proposes I take a process that

understands the personal experiences of my compañeras/os and my own as “dynamic, emergent, interactional” (as cited in N. González, 2001: 170).

The writing of the thesis is a reflection of this. From my own writing, to the poetry excerpts of my compañeras/os we sway back and forth from lenguas: English, Spanish, and Mixteco. La lengua is a symbol for speech as a means to talk about the in-between (Anzaldúa, 2009: 211). As anthropologist Kanaaneh (1997) suggests about language “It is the embodiment of the very axioms of existence” (pp.9-10 as cited in Watson-Gegeo et al., 2001: 240). Language is central to our narratives, and profound to understanding what Watson-Gegeo (2001) refers to as *deep culture*, which is at the “heart of cultural identity” (241). And as Zentella (2004) found language is a revelation of “community life” (15) and it has the “power to create a world” (N. González, 2001: 174).

This is a world that also links our narratives with those of our parents, ancestors, and our communities. And so the landscape throughout the thesis will often shift according to the binding relationships that we foster, maintain and (re)establish. This includes physical landscapes from the mountainous lands of Oaxaca to the agricultural lands of the Valley. These lands are source of a deep knowledge, which speak to this stage of “in-betweenness” (Anzaldúa, 2009: 209)

This “in-betweenness” means replacing the temporal divide between past and present. And so I reweave our relationships with the traditions and practices of Pre-Columbian ancestors by (re) analyzing the Mixtec codices<sup>17</sup>. By doing so, I unveil the spiritual bond rooted in a different way of making sense of the world. This means acquiring the ability to shift and to transform.

## **ROADMAP TO CHAPTERS**

*At a Crossroads*, Chapter 2, introduces the reader to the U.S.-Mexican borderlands/ La

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<sup>17</sup> The Mixtec codices are Pre Columbian texts

frontera as a place of sacrifice and possible transformation through personal accounts and topography of Mexican indigenous migration. I align the historical perseverance of indigenous people in La Mixteca region in Oaxaca with the current quest of hundreds and thousands, Mexican indigenous people who have come to migrate, as a means to defend their way of life/understanding. Recognizing and exposing the challenges of surviving this sacrificial route I move into the ways a young generation has also come to (re) construct these borders.

Moving onward, chapter three *Young Mujer Oaxaqueña-A Self Reclamation* unravels the experience of young mujeres Oaxaqueñas living in the Central San Joaquin Valley of California. Our embodied experiences as Mujeres Oaxaqueñas delves into the embodied wounds of a colonial caste system that has been creating divisions within the Oaxaqueña/os- Mexicano/a-Chicano/a community. In dialogue with the work of feminist theorists (Anzaldúa 2011 & 2007, hooks 1991, Lorde 2007, Watson-Gegeo 2005), I examine how writing has become a “shamanistic” (Anzaldúa, 2009: 121); a transformative healing act for us young mujeres Oaxaqueñas and our communities.

Healing is a process that foregrounds the last chapter of the thesis *Weaving our Relations*. In this chapter I intentionally blur the spatial, temporal and cultural boundaries by doing so, I unravel how a young generation of Oaxaqueñas/os has come to (re)establish and restore a symbiotic relationship with their communities.

## CHAPTER 2: AT A CROSSROADS

I. Soy Mixteco  
no soy Mestizo  
no soy Azteca  
Soy Mixteco  
Soy de Oaxaca  
My roots come from THOSE indigenous people whose brilliance invented MAIZ!

— Juanita

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Juanita's poem Soy Mixteco, elucidates a transformation, in the narratives of many young people with roots in Oaxaca, Mexico. Born and raised in Fresno County, Juanita is the fifth child of six. Her parents are native to San Miguel Cuevas, Oaxaca, Mexico, and migrated with her elder brother in the 1980's to Fresno County, where they worked in the farm fields of the Central San Joaquin Valley of California. Juanita's reclamation is intimately wrapped within an understanding that Mexican indigenous people, are at a crossroads<sup>18</sup> moving beyond centuries of coercion.

And yet being at the crossroads is a treacherous and difficult act. It as an act of creation, of a (re)evolution (Anzaldúa, 2007: 103) which began and continues to manifest itself in the borderlands/la frontera. Therefore in this chapter I will discuss the U.S.-Mexican frontera, whose "borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them" (Anzaldúa, 2007: 25). La frontera is a place of division, (re)experienced in the lives of people everyday. Through a personal narrative of my parents' migration I examine the historical and political reasons that led them to migrate. I refer to this migration, as a sacrificial route made by many migrant people to the U.S., in an attempt to (re)create and (re)constitute ways of life and understanding.

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<sup>18</sup>In part I am adopting the concept of "crossroads" from Gloria Anzaldúa (2007); the section titled *La encrucijada/The Crossroads* (102).

For la gente indígena these ways of life and understanding are wrapped up in a historical legacy of self-determination, as depicted in historical texts such as the Mixtec codices, which are examined in the first part of the chapter. These pre-Columbian texts illustrate a distinct way of understanding life that is embedded in present day indigenous communities. This self-determination has resulted in hundreds of thousands of Mexican indigenous people rejecting a life under a tyranny, and so they make the sacrifice to leave their native lands. I focus on the migration of indigenous people from La Mixteca, a region in Oaxaca characterized by its perseverance in spite of centuries of being under attack. This attack is complex, so here I attempt to delve into the political, economic and social conditions that have resulted in this great migration. And despite being uprooted from our pueblos and divided by physical borders, the personal reencounters and narratives of my compañeras/os elucidate a convergence of the borderlands.

## **PEOPLE OF THE RAIN**

Depicted in the Mixtec Codice of Yuta Tnoho (Vindobonensis)<sup>19</sup> are the first Ñuu<sup>20</sup> Dzau<sup>21</sup>, “People of the Rain”<sup>22</sup> who were born from the Tree of Origin considered to be the first ladies and lords (Jansen & Pérez Jiménez 2007 and 2009). According to Joyce (2010) the Tree of Origin was once located in the Valley of Apoala, Yuta Tnoho which translates into “rivers where the lords came up” (Joyce, 2010: 59). They divided themselves in four groups and went in four directions that had distinct landscapes, leading them to establish sovereign nations considered to be sacred (Jansen & Jimenez Perez, 2011: 308). In the Mesoamerican languages including Dzaha

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<sup>19</sup> Also known as Codice Vindobonensis (Jansen & Pérez Jiménez 2009: 37)

<sup>20</sup> The concept of Ñuu refers to both land and people who are tied to a history of autonomous communities, often constructed around networks and lineages (Jansen M. & Pérez Jiménez, 2011:8).

<sup>21</sup> Distinct translation exists regarding the meaning of Dzau<sup>21</sup> but it can mean “rain”, “god” or “god of the rain” (Jansen & Pérez Jiménez, 2009:7).

<sup>22</sup> Ñuu Dzau<sup>21</sup> can also translate into “People of the Rain”, “Land of the Rain” and “People and Land of the Rain God” (Jansen & Pérez Jiménez, 2007: 7).



Dzau<sup>23</sup>, the Mixtec language, Nahuatl, and Mayan these sovereign communities or nations, were designated as “mat and throne” (Jansen & Jimenez Perez, 2007: 9). In the case of the Ñuu Dzau, the mountain ranges and abrupt landscapes led to the creation of small, independent communities best characterized as “village states” with a chiefdom structure consisting of a hereditary ruler who organized the structure of communal labor (Jansen & Jimenez Perez, 2007: 9).

Hundreds of thousands of people who are descendants of the Ñuu Dzau continue to live in the ancestral lands that from 1000 A.D. to 1500 A.D. were one of the most densely populated areas in Mesoamerica with an unprecedented levels of artistic expression, demographic growth, and political expansion<sup>24</sup> (Children of the Plumed Serpent, 2012). In 1440 the Ñuu Dzau became the subjects of the Mexica (“Aztec”), however they maintained their own cultural and political forms of organizations, which distinguish them from other Mesoamerican ethnic groups (Terraciano, 2001:399). In addition, the “language of the rain” Tu’un Savi or Dzaha Dzau, the Mixtec language, is a tonal language<sup>25</sup> with an analytical structure, which demonstrates the autonomous nature of the people (Jansen & Pérez Jiménez, 2009: 7)

The Ñuu Dzau people are commonly known as “Mixtec” or Mixtecâ, a name given by Nahuatl speaking people which means “inhabitants of the place of the clouds” (Jansen & Pérez

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<sup>23</sup> In Spanish *Dzaha Dzau* means “Lengua De La Lluvia” (Jansen & Pérez Jiménez, 2011: 7) which I translate into “Language of the Rain”. According to Joyce (2010) *Dzaha Dzau* is the spoken language in La Mixteca Alta (43). However, in this thesis I will refer to the language of “Mixteco” as *Tu’un Savi*, which also means the “language of the rain” a term employed and defined by Miguel Villegas (2013). Miguel is one of the interviewees a native speaker and instructor of Mixteco and native to San Miguel Cuevas located in La Mixteca Baja. In a local Fresno newspaper, article written by Miguel Villegas (2013, Sep. 1.) he elucidates that each community has its own way of pronunciation according to its dialectal variant. Linares Navarrete (2008) also makes note of the great divergence in the variants and dialects of the “Mixteco” language, which is recognized as one of the 62 indigenous languages in Mexico (24). There are debates that exist amongst linguistic as to whether Mixteco, as well as Zapoteco should be recognized as one or divided into distinct ones (Linares Navarrete, 2008: 24).

<sup>24</sup> During the mid-thirteenth century independent royal houses in Mesoamerica were producing extraordinary, finely crafted jewelry, polychrome ceramics, textiles, and feather works. Luxury goods were exchanged as gifts to strengthen strategic alliances. Trade networks, fostered the exchange of both goods and ideas across vast distances in the kingdoms of Southern Mexico. Much of the physical evidence of this epic era was destroyed during the conquest, and by the nature of time but some remain such as the Mixtec Codices (illustrated screen fold manuscripts) once used by poets to recite genealogies and heroic histories (Children of the Plumed Serpent, 2012). Glimpses of this epic era survived, many of which are in European museums including the Codice Zouche Nutall making them less accessible to the communities that they derive from.

<sup>25</sup> According to Jansen & Pérez Jiménez (2007) tonal language, means that words may have very different meanings when pronounced with different tones (7)

Jiménez, 2011: 7). When the Spanish arrived they appropriated the term ‘Mixteca’<sup>26</sup> as they encountered hundreds of autonomous states united by a shared culture and common language (Terraciano, 2001:1). The region known as “La Mixteca” comes from the word Mixteca, which today is an important cultural region in the southern part of the Mexican Republic, primarily in the state of Oaxaca but inclusive of Puebla and Guerrero (Jansen & Pérez Jiménez, 2007: 7).

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“Working in your own pueblo wasn’t enough. Why? Because the value of what you sold in the market wasn’t enough.” – (Miguel, Personal Communication, August 2014)

Today, La Mixteca is a symbol of centuries of direct coercion towards indigenous people in Mexico. It is one of the poorest regions in Mexico, with serious ecological and economic problems (Jansen & Pérez Jiménez, 2007: 8). In La Mixteca Alta I witness the wounds<sup>27</sup> that the land bears; “Scrubby hillsides stretch for miles and miles in every direction, scarred with huge swaths of eroded red clay and white limestone earth” (Clark, 2008). More than 500 years of coercion has cycled from “the conquistadores to the colonizer and then...the Mexican State” (Kearney, 2004: 280). The prejudice is disguised in the public discourse of nuestro pueblo Mexicano. Our own patria (homeland) has casted us out from our own lands: the rivers-our montes-our cuevas. We, Mixtecas/os have been forced to migrate to the urban centers of Mexico City<sup>28</sup> and Tijuana, and to the farmworker camps of San Quintin in Baja California (Mines, Nichols & Runsten 2010 and Velasco Ortiz 2005). And now we are in the land of the coyote that discreetly appears on foggy winters in the Central San Joaquin Valley of California. The soil

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<sup>26</sup> Kevin Terraciano (2001) notes the term “Mixtec” as “never” being used, as a way for people to self reference themselves during the colonial periods in Oaxaca between 1550-1779 (2).

<sup>27</sup> I use “wounds” as a metaphor to describe the conditions of the land of the Mixteca Alta often described as an “ecological disaster” (Clark, 2008) a consequence of damaging practices introduced by the Spanish from domesticated grazing animals and the plow. Perhaps one of the most devastating impacts includes allowing goats to graze the slopes, which has resulted in damaging trees, bushes and grass. As a result, much of the land in the Mixteca suffers from high levels of erosion while uplands suffer from unending depredation (Clark, 2008). Prior to the introduction of these methods “Mixtecs” had neither domesticated animals or plow instead they used the *coa* “digging stick” and terrace (Wright, 2005: 129-130). The *coa* might be similar to the tool used in the North Sierra of Oaxaca referred to as *sembrador* (Sp.) which is still used by campesinos to plant milpa described by Gonzales (2001: 141-142).

<sup>28</sup> As cited in Wright (2005) according to a study by the Center for Research on Integral Rural Development, it is estimated that in Mexico City there are more Mixtecs than there are in their own land (132).

bears the footprints<sup>29</sup> of the coyote and now it bears ours. We are a growing population, cautious of our surroundings just like the coyote, but we are here.

We work in the arduous fields of the Central Valley. We carry the soil of the land in between our nails from the fields of harvest. It is estimated that in rural California, the indigenous Mexican people population is 165,000<sup>30</sup> (Mines, et al., 2010: 8). We are the people whose bodies sweat, breathe the dust, and whose bodies are repeatedly bent over<sup>31</sup>.

En los campos somos los campionas/os! Como aguilas, somos hábiles y rapidos dejando a las otras cuadrillas atras. Les ensañamos que aunque no altos somos gigantes. El trabajo honesto no nos asusta. Pero sabemos que somos dignos de mas. In nuestra propia patria o sea en territorio desconocido, sufrimos por ser gente indígena. Abusan porque somos gente buena. Haciendo los trabajos mas feos y nos pagan mal. Es una injusticia.

[In the fields we are the champions! Like eagles, we are skilled and fast leaving the other work crews behind. The fruits of our labor show that despite not being tall we are giants. Honest work does not scare us. But we know that we are worthy of more<sup>32</sup>. In our homeland or in territorio desconocido (foreign territory) we suffer for being indigenous people<sup>33 34</sup>. They abuse

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<sup>29</sup> I am adopting the metaphor of “footprint” from Juanita, one of my *compañeras*. During a interviewee we discussed the symbolic meaning up of setting up an altar for the Day of the Dead with members from Autónomos in Fresno. Juanita and I along with members from Autónomos put up an altar in a popular coffee shop. As she reflected on this experience she stated, “Were a different community and by having this here (referring to altar) we put our footprint” (Personal Communication, Perez, October 2012).

<sup>30</sup> This figure derives from the California Indigenous Farmworker Study (2010). The figure of 165,000 is inclusive of children, whose population has increased along with that of women, from 17 and 22 percent (101). However, it is likely that the population is higher considering that major urban centers were excluded from this figure (Mines, et al., 2010: 9).

<sup>31</sup> According to Kermit & Kotowski (2007) migrant farmworkers have cited over-exertion or strenuous movement as a cause for injuries. However, according to Earle-Richardson et al, (2003) they may be “more susceptible to musculoskeletal injuries due to short due to the relatively short period of long, intense workdays with limited acclimatization to the physical demands” (as cited in Kermit & Kotowski, 2007: 504). But because of possible fears of the repercussions of reporting these injuries they might be a tendency to not report them (as cited in Kermit & Kotowski, 2007: 504).

<sup>32</sup> According to Kearney (1996) when Mixtecs enter into exchange relations with non-Mixtecs, they tend to give more value than they receive. Such exploitation, which occurs at hundreds of thousands of sites and transaction each year, is the bottom-line political issue. (177).

<sup>33</sup> Holmes (2007) working alongside indigenous Triqui farmworker in Washington State describes the hidden structure of farm labor that results in the segregation of work, resulting in indigenous farmworkers being at the bottom end of the agriculture labor market. The agriculture labor hierarchy according to Holmes (2007) is as follows: White and Asian-American U.S. Citizen, Latino U.S. citizen or resident, undocumented mestizo Mexican, undocumented Indigenous Mexican (13).

<sup>34</sup> According to Mines et al., (2010) research study 80% of farmworkers are from Oaxaca with Mixtec speakers being the largest group of Mexican indigenous migrant workers (9). And therefore it safe to assume that indigenous farmworkers fall under or similar structural conditions of Mixteco workers on both sides of the USA and Mexico border with Kearney (1996) writing “Although the lines the demarcate them are diffuse and complex, the positions Mixtecos occupy... are positions within a class system that spans the U.S. Mexican border (177).

us because we are good people<sup>35</sup>. We have the worst jobs<sup>36</sup> and receive unfair wages<sup>37</sup>. It is an injustice.]

I see no love in Fresno City,  
I see no light in Fresno City,  
I am so blind in Fresno City,  
[...]  
They say I'm a criminal, when, I feel like a victim,  
and just for crossing the border they can convictim.  
Just another pay roll for the system

— Rey

## **ECONOMIC GROWTH Y¿EL PUEBLO DE QUIEN ES?**

As in many indigenous communities, a history of dispossessions has followed suit in La Mixteca from the period of colonialism to the formation of the Mexican Republic. During the eighteenth and mid-nineteenth century La Mixteca suffered from the process of territorial privatization and fragmentation (Velasco Ortiz, 2005: 35). Under the presidency of Benito Juárez the first indigenous president, La Reforma Constitución meant to shrink the political power of the Catholic Church by dispossessing it of some land holdings, but also came to eliminate the ability of politically weak indigenous communities from landholding (Wright, 2005: 131). The land came to be sold to private ranchers, farmers and land speculators; rarely were individual indigenous people able to afford the cost of the land (Wright, 2005: 131).

Generally Mexico's economic growth has come at the expense of peasant agriculture, this is illustrated in the early effects of capitalism during Porfirio Díaz's nearly forty year reign from 1876-1911 that resulted in great wealth for foreign investors at the expense of the

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<sup>35</sup>Most indigenous farmworkers are unaware of their legal rights this might be a consequence of their limited access to legal services and puts them at risk for exploitation from their employers (Mines et al., 2010: 63). The California Rural Legal Assistance, who receives funds from the federal agency Legal Services Corporation under strict rules, excludes undocumented workers from legal protection (Mines et al., 2010: 63).

<sup>36</sup> Lopez & Runsten (2005) speculate that the mobility of Mixtec farmworkers in California is limited by a level of racism towards indigenous people in Mexico that has led to Mestizos giving them the worst shortterm jobs with few prospects of mobility.

<sup>37</sup> Mexican Indigenous farmworkers wages fare worst than Mexican Mestizos. Their median family income is of \$13,750 compared with their Mexican mestizos who makes \$22,500 (Mines et al., 2010: 63).

exploitation of rural people (Wright, 2005: 151). In 1910, only 4 percent of Mexico's rural families owned land, and it is estimated that 92 percent of the total population was landless (Barry 1995: 15-16 as cited in R. González, 2001: 124). Even after the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), the political landscape and land reform that el pueblo mexicano fought for went unrealized for much of Mexico's rural campesinos including in La Mixteca (Wright, 2005: 132). Meager efforts to reverse this fragmentation such as the land grants in Oaxaca from 1962-1985 resulted in La Mixteca only receiving 8.7 percent of the total land redistribution in the state (Velasco Ortiz, 2005: 35).

## **LA MILPA UNDER ATTACK**

La milpa (maize field) in Mexico is one of its most important crops as a major food source. La milpa is a way of life. It is an emblem of a certain understanding and practice of *mantenimiento*, of finding a balance between sufficient food from the earth and preserving the land for future generations (R. González, 2001: 14, 174). But this balance has been disturbed in many parts of La Mixteca. The introduction of Spanish practices from domesticated grazing animals and the plow *le han echo daño a la tierra Mixteca* (have harmed the land). The soil bears the wounds unable to maintain *el maíz*. *El sobrevivir*, (survival) became part of life, my mother tells me.

"We had corn, beans and squash that we planted, but sometimes the corn would just not give at all. We survived because your father would bring money from the other side [referring to the U.S.] and with that we would buy what was necessary. He worked from eight months to a year on the other side and with the money he would send, we would pay for the land to be cultivated. We helped one another [referring to the pueblo], with what little we had but the families started living to the United States, little by little beginning in 1977 and 1978. Is that, there was no way. There was no money and no jobs (Isabelia, Personal Communication, June 2012).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> This conversation took place in Spanish and the translation is mine.

Unjustified suffering, hunger, slavery and premature deaths pushed people to the limits<sup>39</sup> in La Mixteca. By the 1960's, 115,000 left permanently and by the 1970's 240,000 had emigrated from La Mixteca<sup>40</sup>. Writing about the 1980's, era Velasco Ortiz (2005) wrote, "Migration had become a path to survival for the inhabitants of the Mixteca" (38)<sup>41</sup>. It was calculated that Silacayoápam and two other major regions in La Mixteca, were faced with one out of two people emigrating from the region permanently (Wright, 2005:132).

Migration is part of larger story. In Mexico's economic model there was little place for indigenous people "other than their joining the urban and agroexport workforce" (Fox & Salgado-Rivera, 2004: 3). From the 1940's till the 1980's the Mexican federal government strongly supported capitalist agriculture during the period known as the "Green Revolution" and invested in technological research to promote large-scale commercial agriculture (Kearney, 1984: 179). The livelihood of *la gente* (the people) was not eased by *las mentiras* (the lies) of welfare policies that occurred during the green revolution, meant to "Feed the masses" (Kearney, 2004, 179)<sup>42</sup>. The dream to make a livelihood (economic) from family farming especially for indigenous communities eroded as the Mexican government abandoned its commitment<sup>43</sup>. The introduction of chemical-dependent technology was an attack on traditional agricultural technology that did not favor the livelihoods and interests of peasant communities (Wright, 2005:

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<sup>39</sup> Juanita informed me that her father had a older brothers and sisters whom died as adults. Juanita attributed their deaths to the level of poverty remarking "they were so poor" which prevented them from having access to medicine and medical services (Juanita, Personal Communication, August 2013)

<sup>40</sup> This is the official estimate of Centro de Investigaciones para el Desarrollo Rural Integral (Center for Research on Integral Rural Development) as cited in Wright (2005:132).

<sup>41</sup> During the 1980's Mexico was undergoing an economic crisis after the devaluation of the Mexico peso (Velasco Ortiz, 2005: 90). The state of Oaxaca was severely impacted and in La Mixteca migration was rampant. As revealed by Velasco (2005), "In the mid 1980's the product of migration was equivalent to value of livestock and agricultural production (205). Most of the people migrating were from La Mixteca region were from the Mixteca Baja (Mixteca lowlands). Migration from La Mixteca Alta might have been delayed due to the poor roads, as was the case of Chalcatongo in the District of Tlaxiaco, Oaxaca; people from this area have only come to settle in California in the first decade of the 2000's (Mines, et al., 2010: 24).

<sup>42</sup> Intensive cultivation, was the method proposed to, "feed the masses" however the grain that in public discourse was suggested to be for the Mexican people was exported (Kearney, 2004: 179)

<sup>43</sup> The majority of Mexico's indigenous people livelihood depended on agricultures, and the abandonment of the Mexican government support characterized as "on-again/off-again" illustrates the economic exclusion that severely impacted their livelihood (Fox & Salgado-Rivera, 2004: 3).

153). On the bridge of survival after centuries of coercion on the land and livelihood, se fueron (they left) to work in the factory farms and urban centers as was predicted.

It was an attack on la milpa  
Nuestra vida  
(Our livelihood)

### **A SACRIFICIAL ROUTE WITH WINGS ON THE ROOTS Y GARRAS DE DIGNIDAD**

“Yet the fact is that poverty does not only affect indigenous people. It affects black people, mestizos, and all the worlds dispossessed. Suffering has no frontiers.”

-Rigoberta Menchú (2005:127)

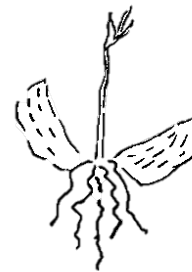
Forced to take a sacrificial route in la frontera.

Les llaman inmigrantes

Nosotros los conocemos como los guerreros@s

Con alas en las raíces

Y con Garras de Dignidad



They call them immigrants

We know them as the warriors

With wings embedded in their roots

And with Claws of Dignity

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For my parents and thousands of migrant people, La Colonia Libertad was more than just a neighborhood that divided Tijuana and the USA. It was described as a “staging ground,” (McDonnell, 1986) a place of connection for thousands of people before their route to “tierra desconocida”, a foreign territory. It was ground to the initiation of a sacrificial route, in which

life and death were center stage. For the children, men and women who cross the border it is an act of piety, calling for a (re) evolution. Libertad! It is a painful journey for the body, mind and soul. In the Mexican-USA frontera, in the hood of a trunk gasping for air, under a tunnel for hours, walking con el coyote<sup>44</sup> in the dessert or with the passport of la prima/o, this is a place of sacrifice.

The weapons of choice for people making this sacrificial route are their own garras de dignidad (fierce claws of dignity). These garras are sharpened by an ability to dream and create another possibility. And like thousands of other people my mother and father took this sacrificial route. Con sus garras de dignidad they came face-to-face con la muerte (death). They attempted to cross this “unnatural boundary” of the borderland, “prohibited and forbidden” (Anzaldúa, 2007: 25).

The helicopter hovered over the sky. My parents and other paisanos had been ambushed, surrounded by border police and their horses. Almost trampled by one of border police horses my mother six months pregnant managed to survive. I was in her womb-it was my mother’s pain and my father’s dream for their sixth child to be birthed en territorio desconocido. From the grapevines this territorio was said to be a promise land for their child to have una vida de porvenir<sup>45</sup>. This vida of porvenir, meant transcending the ills of the colonial minds and practices –el racismo, la pobreza y la violencia- which had brought us to this sacrificial path.

They envisioned a child with book in hand on a path to school-this vision summoned them to take this sacrificial route two more times after their initial attempt. On their second attempt, this time accompanied by people from the pueblo they were mugged by “cholos”. At gunpoint they were instructed to lie face down on the ground and frisked for whatever little

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<sup>44</sup> Coyote: a border guide

<sup>45</sup> *Una vida de porvenir* is a concept that my father used to describe the conditions in the USA for a citizen which he understood was different for people whom like himself at the time did not possess citizenship or even have the legal means to become a resident.



money they might carry. Unable to face down, my mother laid down-belly up and was not frisked, she clung on to the little money they had, but once again they were shortly detained by la migra. On their third attempt muriendose de sed (dying from thirst) and yet running across the 805 Interstate lanes, my mother with her full belly fell on her knees. By the act of some miracle there were no cars, and this time they succeeded y *si se cruzaron al otro lado*.

But the border never went away. For my parents, as for millions of paisanos the border was and is constantly relieved and experienced. In this territorio desconocido in Madera, California my parents found themselves once again running, this time from the Madera County Social Services building. Una mujer de piel morena, Mexicana, social worker cara-a-cara con mis padres with deep dark brown skin and faciones indígenas told them that she would have call la migra when they informed her that they did not have a social security card.

Their sacrificial route made by parents and millions of guerrer@s like them, was not a matter of their choice. The systematic racist tyranny they lived under was not of their making. An economic and social structure was oppressive but it did not take their garras de dignidad. They used their garras to strip a layer of mascara. As their daughter and apprentice I am (re) mastering this artistic craft.

Here, I am taking another layer off.

### **LA SEMILLA DEL PUEBLO**

I think the future looks good, but we must remember that the fruit only comes when we have had time to sow the seeds and bring in the harvest...Maybe a lot of what is being done now is simply reclaiming the living seeds. It is these living seeds that will germinate and flower again.

(Rigoberta Menchú, 2005: 135)

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We unshackled the locks to our home in the pueblo, which my parents and siblings were forced to leave in 1985<sup>46</sup>. It was surrounded by overgrown grass, big chunks of paint chipped away, revealing the adobe. It was our home. In our visit to our pueblo my mother, brother and I walked the paths that my siblings, family and ancestors once walked. We bathed in the river and walked the monte, and as we did, we experienced a distant past; a reminder that “landscape are not just not just “views” but intimate encounters” (Bender, 2002: 136 as cited in Howes, 2006: 161).

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The spring water bubbled, emerging from the earth. The water was abundant and my mother and I filled the cantaros made over a decade ago by the hands of my abuela (grandmother). It was midday, on a summer day in 2010 and the water spring was deserted, as was much of the pueblo. Silence filled the pueblo most of the year, the hometown festivities being the exception<sup>47</sup>. The school playground was locked, and during the school year was only utilized by ten students and one teacher. Eduardo<sup>48</sup>, a local resident, reminisced about the days when the children filled the school courtyard before families left to the United States. On both sides of the frontera we were. The U.S.-Mexican border “dividing a pueblo, a culture” (Anzaldúa, 2007: 24).

From 1981 to 2000 migration for the Mixtec people had been defined by the settlement between the U. S. A-Mexican border (Velasco Ortiz, 2005: 38). The settlement meant a new generation, would be raised or born in otras tierras<sup>49</sup>. This was the case of

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<sup>46</sup> After leaving our pueblo, my family settled in Tijuana in the Colonia Obrera. La Colonia Obrera according to Velasco Ortiz (2005) had a high concentration of Mixtec family groups living there (41).

<sup>47</sup> Juanita and Miguel, both shared their own experience of being present during festive and non-festive periods in their pueblo of San Miguel Cuevas. They both noted the silence that dominates the town during non-festive periods (Juanita & Miguel, Personal Communication, August 2013)

<sup>48</sup> The name of the interviewee was changed to protect his identity (Personal Communication, 2010)

<sup>49</sup> According to Velasco Ortiz (2005) a strong social network based on kinships and commonplace of origin (*paisanaje*) facilitated the arrival of other Mixtec migrants who formed the foundation of a new generation with origins to Oaxaca but born or raised in new places. As well the Special Agricultural Provision under the *Simpson-Rodion Act of 1986* made it possible for family reunification that led to the arrival of children and women. Leaders interviewed by Velasco Ortiz (2005) shared this time period with great enthusiasm elucidated by a male interviewee who stated “the house, at last, became a home” (163).

Miguel, who was born in San Miguel Cuevas and left at age seven to Fresno, California. When asked if he was sad to leave his pueblo, he informs me that at the time he was happy. He envisions living in a large city, with large buildings, and working, but yet remarks “I left all of my friends, my generation” (Miguel, Personal Communication, Aug 2013). Only a child, Miguel was caught *entremedio* (in between) a border, as many people pushed out of their lands are. Miguel’s story bares the skeleton<sup>50</sup> of a reality. This reality is experienced and chronicled in the narratives of Sepúlveda III’s (2011) research with a group of Mexican migrant youth whose stories bared “the paradoxical predicament of many-modern migrants divided by political borders” (551).

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But the (re) imagination invade (invades). As Gupta & Ferguson (1992) wrote, “Borderlands are just such a place of incommensurable contradictions” (18). Their statement is elucidated by an excerpt of Anzaldúa’s (2007) poem titled “To live in the Borderlands means you” (214).

To survive the Borderlands  
you must live sin fronteras  
be a crossroads.

Y sin fronteras vivimos. Bien dicho (well said) by my compañera Elvira<sup>51</sup>, born in California with origins in San Miguel Cuevas, Oaxaca.

Were very proud of our small pueblos because maybe for some of us that’s all we really knew. We don’t really associate ourselves with our municipalities. We associate with our pueblos. We are San Miguel Cuevas. We are Huicho. We are Santiago Naranja. We are [...]. That’s who we are. Its still Oaxaca but were still very much in our village and I think when we start breaking a little bit of those barriers and we start associating with just Oaxaca; I don’t know if that it will make

<sup>50</sup> The metaphor of skeleton derives from Lorde (2007) essay *Poetry is Not a Luxury* and I use it throughout the thesis (36-39).

<sup>51</sup> Elvira was born in California, but was raised in San Miguel Cuevas, Oaxaca until age four. During the years she lived in San Miguel Cuevas she became fluent in Mixteco, however gradually lost the language upon her return to Fresno but is seeking to relearn it. We formally met during a Mixteco class in the summer of 2013 in Fresno, CA. The class is called *Yó’o Tu’un Savi* (Roots of the language of the rain) meant to provide community members the skills to learn how to write Mixteco that could serve as a foundation to its oral expression. The class is part of an initiative by the Binational Center for the Development of Oaxacan Indigenous Communities. For more information about the class visit <http://centrobinacional.org/en/>

much of a difference. I think we are very much rooted in our pueblos. We are proud of our cuevas (caves), our rivers and that's where so many of our community's activities take place. (E. Perez 2013)

Elvira's perspective, bares the deep bond that my other compañera/os share with our pueblo's. And that is because the pueblo is not understood as a merely a geographical location, but a place of relationships that binds the people and nature. It is a place, deeply rooted in our essence, in nuestro ser. Perhaps, as in the past the pueblo is respectfully its own "mat and throne," (sovereign nation) not confined by the rules of a municipality but of its own. And yet, it is a place where broader alliances are forming. OAXACA!

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At the crossroads, it is the blurring of boundaries. It means breaking the barriers between a glorious past of our ancestors and the realities of the sacrificial route made in la frontera by our parents, siblings, by you and thousands to (re) create a new era. An era of transformation, that challenges centuries of coercion. This is an era of (re) imagination and (re) creation.

## CHAPTER 3: YOUNG MUJER OAXAQUEÑA-A SELF RECLAMATION

### II. LOS MIXTECOS, ZAPOTECOS, LA GENTE INDIGENA!

....

My deep dark skin is not accepted here not even en mi querido Mexico  
My native language has almost perished  
Spanish and English now breathe  
I have become my own oppressor  
I have been told repeatedly and have come to believe ...  
UNTIL NOW

....

The mind has not yet perished. La cultura is still here  
just have to water it, nurture, seek it! El sol es vida [the sun is life]  
Luz es VERDAD [light is TRUTH]  
La oscuridad ya no tiene lugar entre mi gente  
[The darkness, no longer has a place amongst my people]

—Juanita

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Poetry empowers a lot of people [...] I choose to do it, in marches— rallies.  
(Grisanti, Personal Communication, August 2013)



“Consuelo's horizontal vision Intoxicated with Color” by Barrio Art Collective in Fresno CA, July 2012 <sup>52</sup>

<sup>52</sup> This mural was created in July 2012 at the Chican@ Gallery in Fresno, California by a group of friends who firmly believe art and cultural expression is an ideal tool to fight against the many forces that systematically hurt poor communities of color. Artistic

It was a summer evening, in a Fresno parking lot. A crowd of our compañeras/os sat and ate tamales. Juanita was not physically present. Not there, and yet she was. Not there because of an agonizing pain. A back injury at age 17 working in the strawberry fields kept her home that night. That night she had to succumb to solidarity and allow her body to rest. And yet she was restless, not confined by her physical pain.

She was there because her words were there. In my hands I held her written words. I stood in front of a microphone. Stared out to the crowd. My parents sat on a petatate<sup>53</sup> watching me. And I echoed the written words of Juanita. Reading and yet not—I saw no separation, no border between Juanita and I. No border between the audience and I. Her words gave voice to the experiences of the struggle, the anger and resilience of many Oaxaqueñas/os living in Central California. Her words were familiar to me.

Not confined and not afraid, Juanita's poetry weaves her own narrative, that bears the skeleton of a reality. Nos pone cara a cara—with the wounds of Mexico's colonial caste system. This system has reconstituted itself in the lives of indigenous Mexican people. In this system, society sees no people, and subjugates dark brown bodies—indigenous bodies of children, women, and men. Whips are camouflaged as poverty, wages or no wages—as we bend over, on knees and mud. Whips are unleashed with a gaze and malicious tongue—at the sound of our languages—neither English or Spanish. Whipped, no longer able to bear the pain, we seek refuge. We strip ourselves, abandon our languages—our understandings of the world, hoping to relieve the pain. Without our world, we are left in the darkness, and the pain remains. Except, through the writings of Juanita and many like her, the narrative of la gente indigena is shifting. In writing, speaking and in actions, we are dictating our own

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<sup>53</sup> Petate is a bedroll, woven from fibers of palm. For our Mixtec ancestors the *petate* symbolize a throne/kingdom/land (Jansen & Pérez Jiménez: 301). In the Mixtec codices the petate appears in conferences, sacred ceremonies and in special ceremonies.

world—cosechando our own semillas (seeds).

As writers, in essence artists, writing nos ponemos cara a cara, confronting the past, reliving the past and sorting through the emotional memories that we want to make sense of. In the words of Anzaldúa (2009), it means making our own caras “making faces”—a metaphor for constructing one’s identity (125). To make our own caras, means walking on “tierra desconocida”, a foreign territory. It means to be in between two worlds, a space Anzaldúa (2009) refers to as *Nepantla*, a Nahuatl word meaning *tierra entre medio* (243). We dwell in *Nepantla* to such an extent that it becomes a sort of a “home” (Anzaldúa, 2009: 243) and so Juanita, Grisanti and I write from this place.

In writing from this place we give voice to profound feelings and experiences, which is difficult to do, and yet Juanita, Grisanti and myself have chosen this as a means of social action. Reconstituting and giving voice to our own narratives, young mujeres Oaxaqueñas are also using writing as a means to establish our place in history. Our writing offers to speak differently and to speak back, from an inner strength that is dignified and in a world that is threatened by our existence. As I will explain and contextualize through a cultural historical lens (Classen, 1991a) (Jansen & Pérez Jiménez, 2007 and 2009) the act of writing has a profound significance for voices that have been historically silenced.

For indigenous people, writing is an ongoing cultural identity dilemma and yet writing can become *nuestras armas* (our shields, our weapons). Writing is a “shamanistic” (Anzaldúa, 2007 and 2009) act that is transformative and healing, which has been echoed by various feminist theorists (Lorde, 2007) (hooks, 1991) whose writing I use to examine excerpts of poems and testimonies of Juanita, Grisanti and my own writing. Our writing is tightly connected to the Central San Joaquin Valley of California, a place that has become our home, a place where Oaxaca is near and yet it is at the frontlines of an undeclared war

zone<sup>54</sup>. From this place our writing emerges, capturing the multiple layers of trauma we have overcome, from internalized oppression to the practices of violence that have directly impacted our own families and communities. Most importantly, from this place we call home, our writing speaks of transformations, of self-healing and reconstituting metaphors that have the potential of a collective liberation.

## **A CULTURAL HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: ORAL VS. WRITING?**

Participating in writing for historically marginalized communities is undeniably difficult. Writing is a tug of war that has been, at times, violent. But it is not always a war, and we were not always marginalized.

Writing was an act that Ñuu Dzadui (Mixtec) people engaged in using poetry, music and prayer. For the Ñuu Dzadui people, writing and orality was meant to create a profound experience, to speak of their origins and reestablish their place in the world, and involve the audience in a ritual action. It was about establishing an equilibrium “between individuals and group, between humans and nature, or between humans and divine powers” (Jansen & Pérez Jimenéz, 2007: 38). As a consequence of the repression by the Spanish, the practice of writing for MesoAmerican civilizations, including the Ñuu Dzadui people, diminished. And yet, transcending conventional beliefs, *nuestra gente* continues using *palabras refinadas*<sup>55</sup> (refined words), also known as *sahu* (metaphorical ways of speaking), in ceremonial practices including prayers, handing over authority, or asking the hand of a

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<sup>54</sup> In part I am adopting the concept of “undeclared war zone” from Gloria Anzaldúa (2007); the section titled *El cruzar del mojado/Illegal Crossing* (33).

<sup>55</sup> My father used this expression *palabra refina* to describe the practice that aligned with the description of *sahu* described by Jansen & Pérez Jimenéz (2009). I also adopted the description of “metaphorical ways of speaking” from Terreciano (2001:78) which seem to encompass the practice of *sahu*. According to my father, not every “Mixteco” speaker has the ability to master the “refined word”. To master the *palabra refina* requires years of apprenticeship and during his childhood, parents encouraged their children to learn. Often time’s crowds of children would gather to formal occasion keeping in mind their parent’s instructions “ven para que escuches” (be present so you can listen). A certain prestige is gained by individuals within a pueblo who possess the ability to engage in the ceremonial practices (i.e. engagement rituals, etc.) that require the mastery of *sahu* (Florencio, Personal Communication, August 2013).



bride (Jansen& Pérez Jiménez, 2009: 91, 115) (Jansen& Pérez Jiménez, 2007:35)  
(Terreciano, 2001: 78).

In the realm of the spoken word, our traditions maintain alive. In the memories and hearts of the community our history would be shared. To live in a society without writing, but rather one ruled by sound was not unfamiliar to us. Parallels can be drawn to Andean culture, which was exclusively oral before their encounter with the Spanish. Their encounter with the Spanish, as cultural historian Classen (1991a) explains, had a violent impact on the oral culture of the Andeans. Along with their swords, the Spanish used writing to silence Andeans. Writing, was a source of power for the Spanish and a means to “order reality and to conserve that order” (Classen, 1991a: 410).

To reconstitute writing as our weapon is met with challenge. The dilemma faced by Andeans is also one that many indigenous communities are confronted with today.

The Andean people of today are faced with what seems an insoluble dilemma: to participate in the world of writing and lose to some extent their cultural identity, or else to not to participate and remain marginalized and at the mercy of the dominant culture. (Classen, 1991a: 420)

Here, Classen (1991a) describes the process of thinking for Andeans, central to their cultural identity. For Andeans, writing was perceived as a disembodiment and isolating experience. And yet, writing also offers the possibility to speak of our existence within our own realms opposed to the historical trajectory of being defined by others.

### **“YOU DON’T HAVE TO BE A MAN TO FIGHT FOR FREEDOM” THE BODILY CONOCIMIENTO<sup>56</sup>**

“If it’s not for us [women] there will be no next generation [...] We’re the center. No matter how much the men try to say... it’s the mother. The mother is who holds the family together, and we have a lot of power.”- (Juanita, Personal Communication, August 2013)

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<sup>56</sup> The subheading in quotations is an excerpt from Grisanti’s poem titled: *Flor De Oro* (see page 31 for excerpts of the poem)

Young Mujer Oaxaqueña. The experience of the catalyst mujer has not been told. We are the writers who write from the underground. We write from the raíces (roots). We are woman, con raíces indígenas (with indigenous roots) from Oaxaca. We are the daughters and the sisters. Not merely transmitters of culture, Oaxaqueña women are the center of a generational transformation. Some of us are not yet mothers...but we have given birth.

Our writing has birthed<sup>57</sup> a transformation. And that is because our bodies- tiene otro conocimiento (different knowing). From the body-mind, we construct knowledge about the world (Watson-Gegeo, 2005: 405). As writers we have an ability that Anzaldúa (2009) wrote about, which is being able to see “lo que daña, whatever is harmful in the cultural or individual body” (121). The relationship we have with our bodies and how we understand our bodies is culturally situated. Along with other women, we are coming to understand that we must extend the notion of the body from the merely physical to an “entire perceptual system” (Potter, 2008: 460)<sup>58</sup>; an integral system that recognizes, that how we experience and give meaning to our world varies from culture to culture—from body to body.

For Grisanti, Juanita and me the injustice that we experience continues to threaten our communities and therefore nos atrevemos (we dare) to write. To echo Audre Lorde (2007) our poetry has given birth to those ideas that until the poem were “nameless and formless” (36). Our writing has been an act of self-discovery—of naming what has been known and yet remained silent. It lays the foundation for a future of change, a bridge across our fears of what has never been before (Lorde, 2007: 36-38).

As we write, we shift and mold. We transform. We give meaning to the name of

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<sup>57</sup> In part I am adopting the notion of *birth* from Lorde (2007) from her essay titled *Poetry is Not a Luxury* (36).

<sup>58</sup> Potter (2008) undertaking a body-centered ethnography approach, as participant/researcher in a dance group comes to find that one must extend the notion of the body.

Oaxaca. We challenge the conceptions of what is beauty. At times we speak softly, because we search in the depths of our hearts, for the rhythmic words that capture our profound thoughts. The words come. Our fear of remaining calladita(s) (silent) mobilizes us into action. Our writing changes the discourse. It reestablishes our inner and collective relationship en lo que creemos (belief system).

We reveal an alternative understanding of our ever-changing reality. The act of writing, about emotions, injustice, the erotic<sup>59</sup>, and difference, is difficult. As other mujeres, we have been told to remain silent. We are asked: to not, to wait, to not express ourselves differently. In the community our writing and spoken words are censored. To speak of the unspoken can be met with resistance, and Grisanti attested to this when she omitted the phrase -“No soy Santa, No soy Puta, Solamente soy una Mujer” (I’m not a Saint, I’m not a Bitch, I am simply a Woman) from her poem. Grisanti stated, “People didn’t respond in a positive way” (Grisanti, Personal Communication, August 2013). So here, I try to be truthful/real without apology to our experiences, and let our bodily conocimiento of mis compañeras speak.

## **THE PLACE WE CALL HOME AN UNDECLARED WAR ZONE**

### **I. FLOR DE ORO**

Yo soy Grisanti

Flor de oro

With my beautiful brown skin

Embarrassment of my skin kept me trapped

Now! I love my brown skin!

Living on the east side of Fresno

I have hopes and aspirations

I feel trapped among poverty, drugs, and sex

—Grisanti

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<sup>59</sup> See Lorde’s (2007) essay titled *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power* (53).

From the remate<sup>60</sup> in Madera to the open fields in Fresno where La pelota Mixteca<sup>61</sup> and fiestas patronales<sup>62</sup> take place. The Central Valley has become a hub for the Oaxaqueña/o community to preserve, convene and cultivate our relationships. Las hierbas (herbs) from our pueblos have taken root in this soil, fostered by the hands of mujeres Oaxaqueñas<sup>63</sup>. These hierbas are the treasures of our community and the healing companions of our pueblos. And these hierbitas (herbs) from our cosecha (harvest) is nuestro remedio—nuestra medicina (our remedy—our medicine).

In addition to cultivating our hierbitas with care, along with our communities we work in the arduous fields of the Central Valley. As Holmes (2007) ethnographic study found, Mexican indigenous communities perform the most stigmatizing jobs in farm labor. Yes, we are amongst the people who harvest and sort the food on your dinner tables. We are people, whose bodies are repeatedly bent over, sweating, and as a consequence carry the soil of the land in between our nails. As gente indígena, our ethnicity, dark-skinned complexions and language(s) now constitute Los rostros de la verdad [the faces of truth]. Unspoken and unheard, we are at the bottom end of the pecking order in this country's unequal capitalist system, a social structure that is embedded in racialized society (Waldigner & Lichter, 2003: 8). In other words, capitalism a form of oppression accompanies racism, and in turn reaps and benefits from the colonial mindsets and practices, mimicking the colonial relationships from the past.

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<sup>60</sup> The *remate* is an open-air market/swamp meet that takes place in Madera on Wednesdays and Sunday's. Vegetables and fruits are available to community residents this includes spices and herbs from Mexico that might not be available in grocery stores.

<sup>61</sup> For more read information about *La Pelota Mixteca* read: Rodriguez Santos, B. (2013)

<sup>62</sup> I observed a fiesta organized by an Oaxaqueño community in Fresno, California, which was celebrated with food, nightly dances and *danzas* (dances). A live brass band was present but they also had bands that use electronic instruments. *Danzas*, are performed by members of the hometown community. Many of the *danzas* (i.e. Chilolos, rubios, malinches, diablos, and more) and more are specific to the region in Oaxaca and can also be specific to the hometown. When fiestas take place in the hometown a central aspect to the fiestas is the procession of the image of a "santo" (saint). In my observation I did not see a procession take place, however the image of the *santo* was highly venerated by the community, and a altar was created in which community members would pay their homage by placing flowers in the altar and by reciting prayers (Observation, March 31, 2013) (Juanita, Personal Communication, March 31, 2013). For more about *danza* and public performance as a cultural expression in the context of an Oaxaqueño Community, see Cruz Manjarrez (2013).

<sup>63</sup> Stanley (2011) interviewed a woman from Oaxaca in the Madera *remate* who stated "When I went to Oaxaca I brought with me *pericón* and *compazúchitl* seeds". She also added the "*pericón* also has medicinal uses". This interview took place in Spanish and the translation is mine.

More than often we forget our similar struggles, as paisanas/os. We fall into believing in, and recreating, an exploitative pecking order. To echo Anzaldúa (2009), some of us have become cooperators of the colonizer recreating and maintaining relations of subordination and subjugation (112)<sup>64</sup>. Today, we have a way of replicating the past, and acting out on our oppression. Somehow within our own people, we have come to continue the practices of Othering. Othering is the belief that superiority exists between human beings. It means adopting an imperialist way of conquering and dominating, under a false premise that there is a profound difference between oneself and the Other (Anzaldúa, 2009: 112).

Nuestros paisanos Mexicanos have come to exercise the practices of the colonial past. Many of us as Oaxaqueños have to internalize the belief *que somos menos* [that we are less than]. We are told that we are inadequate, from our dark-skinned complexions to being *chapparos/as* [short]. They first tell us that we speak un “*dialecto*” [dialect], not a language. And then they tell us that our “*dialecto*” *se escucha bien feo* [sounds very ugly]. We are told that our parent’s *se ven bien Indios* [look very Indian] and we remain silent. *Se burlan* [They mock us] when we say that we’re from Oaxaca and so we say that we’re from El D.F.,<sup>65</sup> or from Tijuana. They call us *Indias/os sucios* [dirty Indians].

*Paisanos se les olvida* [Paisanos, you forget] that we are in the frontlines, of a war zone. That we too suffer. Along with you, we have been denied an existence. And today you deny us of ours. Our struggles are different, and yet we are in the same battle. We are in a long battle to declare our existence within a society that strips us from our humanity.

Our humanity has been repeatedly stripped away and violated in the place we call home. The militarization of our community has kept us at the edge. Dreams come with

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<sup>64</sup> Anzaldúa writes (2009) that during the phase of colonialism, European colonizers ruthlessly exercised their control by attempting to destroy the legal and cultural systems of non-European civilizations (112).

<sup>65</sup> Mexico City or *Distrito Federal* (Federal District) of Mexico.

difficulty. There are no protectors. Our valley political leaders' primary role is to protect the profit of its largest stakeholders, not the public interest. The presence of 20,000 people in Fresno on May 1, 2006 (Martínez Nateras et al., 2011), walking and chanting "Aquí estamos, y no nos vamos!" (We are here and will not leave) is met with little acknowledgement from its so-called leaders. Despite the fury of our voices and our sweat from marching, the following year in 2007 our parents and home providers found themselves becoming the targets of federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents under the national program known as "Operation Return to Sender" <sup>66</sup>. The program made use of the media, law and intimidation tactics to conduct these attacks (Martínez Nateras et al., 2011:34). In 2007, 23,000 people were arrested as part of the nationwide program, including more than 1,800 Northern and Central California residents, according to immigration officials (Mckinley, 2007).

The written law normalizes the practices that allowed people to be "swept" from the streets and "returned" to their "sender". Handcuffed and awaiting deportation is where these parents and home providers found themselves after an ordinary day of conducting their everyday errands. In the plight and suffering of our community the ideological and conservative nature of the valley dominates. There is a lack of action by political leaders (Martínez Nateras et al., 2011: 10). We are constantly pushed into a state of fear and anxiety. We remain quiet in the Spring of May 2013 as rumors of ICE raids creep into our homes in the Central Valley ("Immigration Raid Rumors", 2013). Our fear outweighs our most basic needs during this month, and we remain in our homes; hoping and praying that they will not invade nuestras casitas (our homes).

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<sup>66</sup> *Operation Return to Sender* was a national program, considered to be part of anti immigrant attacks that made use of the media, law and intimidation tactics (Martínez Nateras et al., 2011:34). In Madera twenty five undocumented indigenous Triqui immigrants from Oaxaca were deported as part of the "sweeps" as documented in the film *En busca de un Futuro* (In search of a Future). Today, in 2014 deportations have escalated to nearly 2 million people today.

This is the place that my compañeras and I write from. I, along with my compañeras, write of the differences, so vividly lived in our understanding, struggles and experiences as Oaxaqueñas living in the place we call home. We write about our difference, not as a means of dividing lines, but foremost to begin a pathway to understand our struggle. As long as the unjust is unspoken, the divide will continue. So our writing is to begin a process to see our resemblance—to see each other—to connect with one another. In creating awareness, there is a tremendous possibility for bold movimientos and creativity.

## **ENDURING SILENCE**

“IT’S JUST THERE IN BLUE LETTERS: **OAXACA** [...] What if the cops see it? [...] What if they get my mom, dad and all of us? [...] I had a greater fear of being deported, of my family having to be sent back. Going to the detention center.” (Grisanti, Personal Communication, August 2013)

The words “Oaxaca” were spray painted on the wooden fence of Grisanti’s family home on the East side of Fresno during the same time of the 2007 “Operation to Sender” program. For Grisanti the written words evoked a sense of fear. She wanted to know: Who did it? Why they did it? Why do people have to know? (Grisanti, Personal Communication, August 2013). In her own neighborhood, living alongside second and third generation Mexicanos the message echoed a divide between “Mexicanos” and Oaxaqueños. According to Kearney (2004), as people from Oaxaca leave their “villages” to the North they come to be collectively identified by the Mestizo population as the “other” and members of a minority, and a despised one at that (301).

At the age of five Grisanti migrated to California from a Ayoquezco De Aldama located in the Zapotec region in Oaxaca. Now living on this side of the border, Grisanti along with her mother, sister, brother and father were fenced in. Her own home had

become a dangerous terrain. Terrorize by the thought of police and ostracize —betrayed by her own paisanos Mexicanos. Her home has become the Frontline of a redada (raid).

When I asked Grisanti if she felt her family was targeted, she responded “I did. I really did” (Grisanti, Personal Communication, August 2013). As Anzaldúa (2007) wrote *la mujer indocumentada*, is double threatened having to contend with violence (34). In this country people “without documents” are alienated denied of an existence—seperated. Without documents, *sin papeles* has meant walking a fine line subjugated and forced to remain silent— indistinguishable from enslavement. It means a life in the borderlands, always on the lookout. Afraid of the next redada. Restricted by similar boundaries, Anzaldúa (2007) speaks of her own borderlands “Alienated in her own mother culture, “alien” in the dominant culture, the woman of color does not feel safe within the inner life of her Self” (42).

From Grisanti’s perspective, the message of OAXACA also had another marker that would allow others to know that her family was undocumented. Grisanti stated “My whole thing was. If you’re saying that you’re Oaxaqueño, you’re kind of saying; you are undocumented” (Grisanti, Personal Communication, August 2013). Grisanti’s understanding of the ascribed meaning of Oaxaqueño also stems from another experience that she shared with me during our interview. Along with members from Autonomos, Grisanti was conducting outreach to inform high school students about the group during an annual Chican@ Youth Conference (CYC) organized by MECha (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán<sup>67</sup>) in Fresno State<sup>68</sup>. She explained that they were invited because of MECha’s stance on indigenous rights and fostering an understanding amongst young people about embracing their indigenous roots.

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<sup>67</sup> MECha is a student organization that is intended to address political and educational issues facing Chican@s .

<sup>68</sup> The conference has been held at California State University for over 40 years and according to Medeiros (2011) been attended by over 800 youth in California.



During the event, a young man of Mexican descent approach the booth and stated to Grisanti: “Oh, you are a Oaxaqueño group? So you are illegals right?” [Grisanti did not respond]...Reflecting on this encounter she states, “Obviously, I couldn't say anything because I had no right to be talking back”. (Grisanti, Personal Communication, August 2013)

This experience, as Grisanti remarks, elucidated “The racism within our own community” (Grisanti, Personal Communication, August 2013).

The fear silenced Grisanti. It re-created a divide between Mexicanos/Chicanos and Oaxaqueños. It echoed and supported the institutional structure that through its written law robs people of their humanity.

Hurdled like sheep by la migra.  
Hurdled by you mi paisano?

We seek no vengeance, no justice, but our humanity  
Man creates justice  
Humanity stems from our hearts

## **TALKING BACK FROM LO PROFUNDO-UNRAVELLING THE SHAMANISTIC WRITER**

II. You soy Zapoteca,  
Yo soy Oaxaqueña!  
I am Rigoberta Menchu fighting for the rights of her people  
[...]  
You don't have to be a man to fight for freedom.  
[...]  
I am UNDOCUMENTED and PROUD!  
I will continue to DREAM!! I will continue the FIGHT

—Grisanti

“Being from Oaxaca is Beautiful”  
(Juanita, Personal Communication, August 2013)

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To transform, and turn upside down the realities that shape our world is possible.  
We must grab and shape our own imagination. We must find our own voice. We must learn how to speak differently, and speak with endearment. To speak with genuineness, is

"seeing through the membrane of the past superimposed on the present, in looking at our shadows and dealing with them" (Anzaldúa, 2009:138).

In Audre Lorde (2007) essay *The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action* she declares that transformation emerges from the place we're most vulnerable.

And I began to recognize a source of power within myself that comes from the knowledge that while it is most desirable not to be afraid, learning to put fear into a perspective gave me strength. (40)

And so we must begin from *lo profundo*. *Lo profundo* lies deep in the heart and it is a form of knowing. I became *conciente* of the importance of *lo profundo* during a decolonizing workshop, attended by predominately Oaxaqueñas/os in Fresno, where one activity led us to discuss our understanding of words, such as *Indio/a*. In a large group, the facilitator asked why we chose to not identify with being *Indio/a*. In a heartfelt voice a Oaxaqueña woman, stated "Tiene implicaciones profundas que llegan hasta el corazón"<sup>69</sup> ("It [*India/os*] has profound implications that reach deep in the heart) (Anonymous, Personal Communication, Feb 7, 2012). Her words touched me, as they came from the place that bleeds, and that we hide. The place that we have not allowed to be transformed into a scar. In *lo profundo*, we have been "trapped". In *lo profundo* our strength lies. *Lo profundo* is an education of our heart. And so we must speak, write and act from *lo profundo*,

Teaching from *lo profundo* is not easy. It is a process that pushes the borders, in which we reveal ourselves and unveil our "Nakedness," as Anzaldúa (2009) put it (33). We show our scars, our imperfections, *hablamos de lo que no se habla* (we speak of the unspoken), and by doing so we are engaging in an act of transformation. We are practicing what Anzaldúa (2009) refers to as the shaman aesthetics, which is using writing and images

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<sup>69</sup> Workshop was titled *Decolonization* hosted by Autonomos a group of Oaxaqueño youth in Fresno, California and facilitated by Dr. Gaspara Rivera a researcher/professor from UCLA

to replace metaphors that are self-defeating with metaphors que nos sanan (heal us) and liberate us (121). Enacting, in the act of writing has this possibility to not only transform us, but also its audience. In the words of Anzaldúa (2007)

The ability of story (prose and poetry) to transform the storyteller and the listener into something or someone is shamanistic. The writer, as shape-changer, is a nahual, a shaman. (88)

A shaman uses his hands para curarar (to heal). At first it eases in slowly. It touches the untouched. It caresses donde duele (the source of pain). It allows the pain to reveal itself. It offers the profundo to speak. As it listens carefully, it searches for the words to name what has remained silent. In painful and bold acts the shaman begins to put the words on paper.

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The paper offers power. For us young mujeres Oaxaqueñas it offers an alternate order. Pen in hand. It means, drawing the “skeleton” of the past and at the same time laying the foundation for our futures. So I ask Grisanti why she writes.

[R] Why do you write poetry?

[G] Just talking to people, yeah you can make that connection but when you have it in writing, when you have it in a poem. Because it [referring to the poem] has so much emotion in there. And since [...] each poet reads their poetry in a certain way where it causes this emotion for other people to connect to. You know? I think that is why I choose to do it, in marches, rallies [...]

[R] What can emotion do to people?

[G] It can move people.

(Grisanti, Personal Communication, August 2013)

In a stroke of a pen, the writer transforms the silence into words. Pen in hand. We write our truths. Make a self-reclamation. An inner-outer transformation unravels. We transform. We transform you.

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NO LONGER UNDERGROUND. We cringe at the idea of remaining underground,  
complacent and SILENT.

We replace the silence. We push the borders. CRUZAMOS La FRONTERA

Us being together [...] is a big protest to what basically society has been teaching us all of our lives: We're not worth the time of day. "You are not really a person: you are "Indio". [...] 'You are below'. So us protesting that [...]. Protesting what is beauty. Protesting [...] our identities. [...] (Juanita, Personal Communication, August 2013)

## CHAPTER 4: WEAVING OUR RELATIONS

*After my father had watered the plants, fed the chickens, dogs and cat, we sat for breakfast on a summer morning. The totopos crackled, perfect with frijoles and caldo de calabaza (squash soup) that accompanied it. Having learned, a few words in Mixteco I shared with him these words, and he came to talk about the palabra refinada (refined word). The palabra refinada was mastered by my grandmother, for the purpose of upholding the bienestar (well being) of our pueblo. My grandmother came to recite these palabras on behalf of our pueblos of San Francisco Higos to welcome visitors from neighboring towns, to our pueblo. (Florencio, Personal Communication, August 2013)*

These palabras spoken in Tu'un Savi came down from our pueblo, recited by my grandmother, and learned by my father. I write them here.<sup>70</sup>

So glad you came,

Bless the god of the rain [dzaui<sup>71</sup>] that you arrived to my pueblo

Like the god of the rain said

You are people of the god of the rain we are too

You arrived to my pueblo, it is a humble pueblo

You have a place where to eat, a refuge, where to stay,  
where to be fed

Bless the god of the rain that you arrived to my pueblo



*El Templo De Mis Abuel@s*  
Inspired by the "Temple of Death"  
Carved by: Rosalba Lopez Ramirez

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"Culture isn't pure, it is dynamic, it is a kind of dialectic, it is something that progresses and evolves. As for purity, who can determine what that means?" — (Rigoberta Menchú, 2005, 133)<sup>72</sup>

<sup>70</sup> This excerpt of the conversation took place in Mixteco and Spanish. My father recited the words in Mixteco and Spanish I translated them here.

<sup>71</sup> Distinct disagreement exists regarding Dzaui but it can mean "rain", "god" or "god of the rain" (Jensen & Pérez Jiménez, 2009:7).

Conversations and moments like the one I shared with my father shifted my perspective. They were joyous, intoxicating cheerful moments, more than often I could not contain smiling from cheek to cheek. They fed my soul, *mi ser* (my being/my soul). These insightful understandings provided me with comfort, and joy, often I would listen to the recording, and watched video recordings over and over. *Es otro saber*, a dignified knowledge system that makes sense of the world differently.

This world manifests itself in *nuestra forma de ser* (way of being/way of understanding/ our knowledge) when we write poetry, speak Mixteco, pray, perform, and *cuando damos vuelo* to our dreams. We find that in the thinking of Mayan and Mesoamerican pueblos are no binaries between chaos/order, light/darkness, heaven/hell, masculine/feminine, rational/irrational, [...] these energies harmonize to build the foundation of a cosmic dynamism” (De La Garza, 1999: 41-42). The *pensamiento dual* is illustrated in The Mixtec codices, which are historical documents that tell us of an important spiritual encounter with Lady 9 Grass “*Qcuañe*”<sup>73</sup> and Lord 8 Deer “Jaguar Claw” in *Ñuu Ndaya* (Chalcatongo) “Place of the Underworld” or “Place of Death” (Jansen & Jiménez Pérez, 2007: 193). Through a historical and cultural perspective I analyze this encounter as a practice of *mantenimiento*, reciprocity that continues to be embedded in the practices of the Mixteco communities.

The expression of this distinct understanding is reflected in the language, which has a role in culture (Watson-Gegeo et al., 2001: 241). *Tu’un Savi* (Mixteco) language, one of the sixteen recognized indigenous languages of Oaxaca, exemplifies this vast knowledge system that Miguel and Rey have come to share with audiences through hip-hop. Their rap

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<sup>73</sup> Lady 9 Grass is also comparable to “*Cihuacoatl* of the Mexica who is the Spirit of the *Piciete* and Lady of Milky Way” (Jansen & Pérez Jiménez, 2007, p.195). In Guerrero and according to Alvarado’s orthography, she is called on as *yi’ya si’l yichi* or *yi’ya si’i ñuu*, “Lady of the Road, Lady of the Night,” that is, “Lady of the Road of the Night Sky” or “Lady Milky Way” known to be the Mother of Tobacco and Pulque” (Jansen & Pérez Jiménez, 2007: 195).

alters our perceptions as they weave Mixteco, Spanish and English in their lyrics. They provide us with a deeper understanding of the dialectical relationships that a young generations of Oaxaqueñas/os has with past generations as they integrate aspects of the practice of sahu (paragon in Spanish) “ceremonial discourse” (Jansen & Jiménez Pérez, 2007: 9).

In the words of Rey, a “new cycle” (Rey, Personal Communication, August 2013) is being initiated or better said, is underway. It means scraping the lies, incorporating los pensamientos that binds us to our past and embracing the deep culture that is integral to our nuestro ser.

### **LADY 9 GRASS, LORD 8 DEER & THE TEMPLE OF DEATH**

I. They said the “cave” was home to the “devil”  
The concept of the “devil” did not exist  
From the colonizer lens, death was associated with evil  
[...]

Lady 9 Grass whom they called the “devil”  
She was our healer  
[...]

She was our connection to the world of the Ancestors  
Knower of the secrets of life-death-life  
Knower of the deepest mystery

—Rosalba<sup>74</sup>

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“They were taught that her spirit is flying and her view [referring to mother] is that when a butterfly shows up in the house that our abuelita (grandmother) is visiting us” (Miguel, Personal Communication, November 2012)

In the native land of my mother, located in the most mountainous and elevated regions of La Mixteca there was once a cave, in the ancient kingdom known as Ñuu Ndaya

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<sup>74</sup> This an excerpt of a poem I read at the first Native American Studies Graduate Studies Symposium hosted by the UC Davis Native American Studies Department in the Spring of 2012.

(Chalcatongo) in the state of Oaxaca. The cave “served as portals to the underworld” (Joyce, 2010: 241) where bodies of Ñuu Dzavui village-state rulers were bundled (Jansen & Jiménez Pérez, 2007: 192). Suggested in the codices, the cave was a sanctuary, a liminal place, and venerated by the entire Ñuu Dzaui region (Jansen & Jiménez Pérez, 2007: 192). The cave was a temple, under the protection of its spirit guardian Lady Grass “Lady Quañe” (Jansen & Jiménez Pérez, 2007: 135). In the Mixtec codices Lady 9 Grass appears as a skeletal feminine figure wearing a huipil<sup>75</sup> and a long skirt. At times she is seated on a petate<sup>76</sup>, jaguar cushion<sup>77</sup> or stands firmly on a temple engraved with skull images, known as the Temple of Death. Lady 9 Grass is regarded as the “keeper of secrets of life-death-life” (Estes, 1992: 266 as cited in Jansen & Jiménez Pérez, 2011) she was sought by the Ñuu Dzavui lords and ladies because of her ability to communicate with deceased ancestors. Some have regarded her as “one of the first ancestors” (McAnany, 2010: 350) and as Joyce (2010) writes “it was believed that ancestors, particularly deceased rulers, could intervene with the gods on behalf of their descendants” (58).

Her temple, resided in a cave on the top of a mountain that would become the final resting place for rulers from Tilatongo and other regions. The cave was visited by nobility with Lady 9 Grass acting as a mediator, ending factional disputes, reducing political tensions by arranging marriages or by encouraging warfare (Rincón Mautne, 2005:121). Documented in three codices<sup>78</sup>, the encounter of Lady 9 Grass and Lord 8 Deer in the Temple of Death proved to be a critical turning point in the dynastic history of the Ñuu Dzaui (Jansen & Jiménez Pérez, 2007: 196). The visit took place in a time period (eleventh and twelfth century) in Oaxaca with unstable political conditions (Joyce, et al., 2004: 285).

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<sup>75</sup> A women’s shift like shirt

<sup>76</sup> Description is based on pages 7-8 of the Codice Selden: Lady 6 Monkey confers with an oracle, Lady 9 Grass (mesolore.org)

<sup>77</sup> According to Jansen & Jiménez Pérez, (2007) Lady 9 Grass appears seated on a jaguar cushion, which indicated her royal status (198).

<sup>78</sup> Codice Nuttall (1987), Codice Bodley (1960), Codice Colombino-Becker (1892)



Peresumably for Lord 8 Deer, it was also a time of sorrow as he endured the absence of his father, whom had recently passed away.

In current times the spirit guardians of the caves continues to be summoned in La Mixteca Alta, to contact ancestors, request for rain, vision quests, and for consultation (Ríncon Mautner, 2005:122). Communities will perform ritual ceremonies, making offerings and sacrifices to summon the cave's guardian, believed to possesses the power over the earth's occurrences (Ríncon Mautner, 2005:122). In the process of examining these rituals, misconceptions can be (re) created consisting of what Bonfil Batalla (1996) describes as a consistent pattern to subsuming categories, on indigenous beliefs (27).

As Jansen & Jiménez Perez (2007) point out, contemporary speculations regarding Lord 8 Deer's visit to Lady 9 Grass's Temple of Death include his sheer ambition for power, due to his lack of direct connection to the ruling lineage of Tilantongo (195-197). Meeting with the malignant spirit in the cave has been equated to "making a pact with the devil" (Jansen & Jiménez Perez, 2007: 195). Because the conception of the "devil" did not exist in pre-colonial communities, it is surely influenced by colonial Spanish notions of "encomendero or hacendado", owner of great power and richness, to which indigenous people gain access only by giving up their dignity" (soul) (Jansen & Jiménez Perez, 2007:195).

While the traditional rite in The Temple of Death came to be "foundational" for Lord 8 Deer's ability to establish a new polity in Tututepec and later a dynasty in Tilatongo, the encounter went beyond personal ambitions of power (Joyce, et al, 2004: 283). When we examine current practices and records, a different understanding emerges that is based on *mantenimiento*, reciprocity. Reciprocity between the gods and people is at the heart of communities, with caves and their spirit guardians being mediators for the past

and future, legitimacy of rulers, and assistances in times of need (Carmagnani, 1988:47-48 as cited in Ríncon Mautner, 2005: 143). This is explicit in the offerings made by Lord 8 Deer, and his companions to Lady 9 Grass, which included a heart, jewels, and ritual garments (Jansen & Jiménez Perez, 2007: 198).

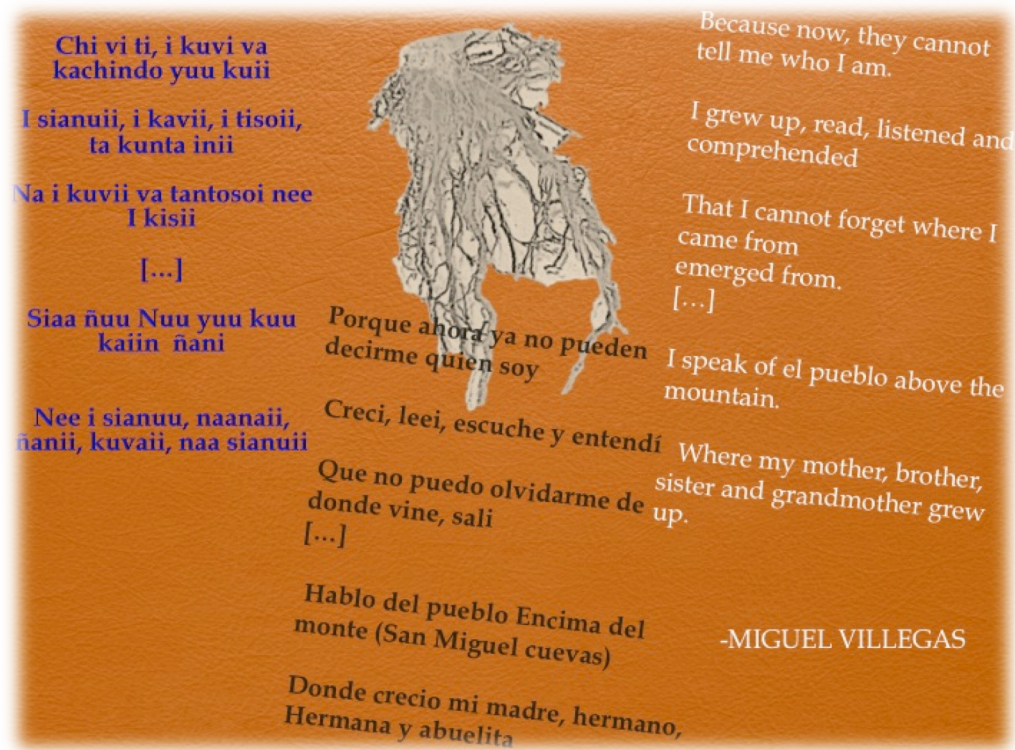
Through this exchange a balance is restored as humans appease and renew their relationships with the gods, in a space occupied by the “divine” and those which the community is embedded in (Carmagnani, 1988:47-48 as cited in Ríncon Mautner, 2005: 143). This balance is inclusive of the inner healing accompanied by the *mantenimiento*, reciprocity of our relationships with our ancestors. As late Elena Avila (2000) a *curandera* wrote, maintaining our relationship with the ancestors is a healing practice that is encompassing of the emotional, physical and spiritual (23). This practice, founded on the basis of reciprocity, allows us to broaden our view of the encounter of Lady 9 Grass and Lord 8 Deer that has been described as “profoundly emotional and religious event” and a “spiritual journey” (Jansen & Jiménez Perez, 2007: 197).

The exact motives that led Lord 8 Deer to seek Lady 9 Grass may never be known. But yet the codices elucidate a different understanding that continues to live. They are evoked in the acts of reciprocity, that live within the community. These acts of reciprocity are forces that bind them inclusive of- good/evil and death-life. Wilson (2008) put it this way, “In reality, spirituality is not separate but is an integral, infused part of the whole in the Indigenous worldview” (89).

I am the ember seed in  
light/dark  
I am  
Woman Who Glows in the dark  
I'll stay awake forever  
If I have to

— (Avila, 2000)

## TU'UN SAVI A BREATHING HIP-HOP POEM



Poem written by Miguel Villegas. Designed by Rosalba Lopez Ramirez<sup>79</sup>

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“Tu'un Savi (Mixteco) is another language that's out of this world because it's like a poem breathing in your tongue” (Rey, Personal Communication, August 2013)

To the beat of Tupac Shakur I conducted an interview with Rey, who was born in San Miguel Cuevas. Before the interview, Rey had set up a small speaker, in order to have Tupac Shakur rap as part of the background music that played throughout the interview, and resulted for good ambiance for our conversation. On this warm day outside of his family's home in Fresno, Rey came to share that at age twelve he began memorizing and reciting various rap songs inspired by Chicano and Spanish rap. He was also encouraged by his mother who, despite being a single mom of eight children working as a farmworker was

<sup>79</sup> With the permission and approval of Miguel I translated the English version of the poem, which was originally written in both Mixteco and Spanish. The background to this illustration is the root of a *plantain* plant known for its healing effects and is abundant in North America.

able to purchase a recorder for Rey. Throughout his middle school and high school years he continued listening to rap, it was almost an outlet as he avoided becoming affiliated with a gang and navigating school.

Rey had attested to the harsh reality of gang affiliation, which resulted in his brother ending up in a hospital after being attacked by another rival gang. At the same time he also navigated what Barrillas Chon (2010) describes as “(un)welcoming” nature of the school as he attempted to grasp both Spanish and English since he primarily spoke Mixteco, which was difficult, especially because of the discrimination remarks he received from his Mexican peers due to his skin complexion and for speaking Mixteco<sup>80</sup>. As Kovats (2010) and Barrillas Chon (2010) both found schools are often unaware of the discrimination Oaxaqueño youth face and therefore have been unable to mediate and address their needs.

As a response, to the discrimination Rey has come to exert his own means of mediation through hip-hop. However, Rey is not alone in using hip-hop as a means of mediation and for many years he has rapped alongside Miguel. They are neighbors-friends-and also paísanos from San Miguel Cuevas, who both ventured together to rap in Mixteco-Spanish-English. Their lyrics weave the border between *aquí y allá* (here and there) and between us/them, reconstituting it as one world. For the ears that listen, and the minds that follow, their verses echo the message of the Mayan people of Chiapas “Un mundo donde quepan todos los mundo” (A world, where all worlds fit). So for audiences whom like myself have experienced both Miguel and Rey perform it as though through hip-hop, we are in a prism able to hear, see and feel these multiple worlds that are distinctly different, but which we experience as one.

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<sup>80</sup> Rey expressed vividly the reality he faced at a young age as he navigated school and remarked “there is a point that you don't like school anymore because they are discriminating you” (Rey, Personal Communication, August 2013). I believe his statement is a harsh reality faced by many Oaxaqueño and Mexican Indigenous youth in many of our school's today.

To the beat of hip-hop, Miguel and Rey come to dissolve what others understand as “separate” worlds. It is a world of its own that bridges temporal and physical boundaries, from the lands of the mountains and caves of San Miguel Cuevas in the state of Oaxaca, and “Desde Fresno a Madera”<sup>81</sup>. Not merely physical boundaries, their lyrics and performances emerge from a complex knowledge system vivid in Miguel’s explanation when I asked him how he balances what I conceived as beings “two worlds” that he navigated. Miguel states:

“As me, being someone who was born in Oaxaca in San Miguel Cuevas, Juxtlachuaca. I seen/I know. I have that connection with the madre tierra [mother earth], with the forest, with the rain [...] because it rains lots [referring to amount of rain La Mixteca acquires]. [...]. I guess everywhere you go don't forget where you come from or don't forget where your parents are from. I guess take the positive stuff about it and practice it wherever you go. It doesn't matter where you go but you will have that connection with it. You can't lose it (Miguel, Personal Communication, August 2013).

After Miguel stated this so eloquently, he gave an example as to how he personally negotiates his relationships:

The way I balance it, if we talk about hip-hop. Hip-hop is not from my town. Hip-hop is not the Ñuu Dzaui [...] but I am using hip-hop and talking Mixteco. So maybe, taking advantage of all this stuff (Miguel, Personal Communication, August 2013).

As Miguel clarified, and made me understand, the worlds that we navigate are bound to one another and become one. In the words of Watson-Gegeo et al., (2001) the notions of two worlds “evaporates” as people come to interact across former cultural boundaries (239). It is part of the process of defining our identities by what we include, rather than what we exclude (Anzaldúa, 2009: 209, 245). In some sense, hip-hop becomes an equilibrium through which these worlds speak to one another. In some sense, hip-hop becomes an equilibrium through which these worlds speak to one another and despite hip-

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<sup>81</sup> (Observation, August 11, 2012)

hop not having origins to the Ñuu Dzaui people, it is a method of expression that allows both Miguel and Rey to honor their relationships with the land, people and place of origin.

Digging deeper, to the significance that Mixteco has for Miguel, he remarks,

“Through the language you can see the cosmovision of that culture. It's not the same you can't explain it in Español or Ingles. You can't. It's unexplainable until you feel it, until you see it, until you hear, until you smell it and then you will see what I'm saying”.(Miguel, Personal Communication, August 2013).

As Miguel explains, language is a knowledge system. Mixteco specifically is a language that is poetico as Miguel later described it. Ever graceful, Mixteco is atmospheric and deeply rooted in metaphors (Jansen& Pérez Jiménez, 2009: 119). It is both a means of comprehending the world and way of creating knowledge. And language provides one venue that can reveal an understanding that knowledge encompasses feelings, sight, hearing and smell.

Classen (1991b) echoes a similar message, which is that all cultures have a different way of making sense of the world. Classen's (1997) explanation underlines the premise of the anthropology of the senses, and “That is, sight, hearing, touch, taste are not only means of apprehending physical phenomena, but also avenues for the transmission of cultural values” (401). It is primarily through our senses that our knowledge of the world derives from (Classen, 1993: 3). By the same token, because all cultures develop and change over time, their sensory orders are ever evolving. And yet as sensory orders change, emblems of the knowledge continue to be manifested in their language, rituals, and myths (Howes & Classen, 1999: 259).

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The Ñuu Dzaui legacy of sahu “formal discourse,” is foremost a moral message that derives from the belief that the power is connected to respect (Jansen & Pérez Jiménez, 2009: 115). To obtain respect, one's message must identify with the legacy of the ancestors

and cosmic forces and commit to upholding the common good of its people (Jansen & Pérez Jiménez, 2007: 293). The practice of sahu continues in the rap songs of Miguel and Rey while evidently expressing a deep connection to the hip-hop culture.

Rey explains this dynamic relationship.

“Oaxaca lives in me, as the same as hip hop lives in me. It's a culture it's a mixed culture. [...] So it lives, like when I freestyle I need to represent Oaxaca. It just comes out naturally. I have to say that I'm from here. This is what I represent and this is why I came for and I came back to let you know that there is no way to keep us down. No way, there ain't nobody putting us down anymore. [...] We are growing up and were seeing the new generation and were blowing up. We're out there. And we're from Oaxaca and we're not considering ourselves Oaxaquitas no more. (Rey, Personal Communication, August 2013)

In accordance with a formal speech, Rey conveys a deep level of respect by informing the audience of his origins and therefore recognizing his connection with the land and its people. At the same time, he reflects on the historical exploitation of the Oaxaqueño community, that is underline by his reference to the pejorative term of Oaxaquita<sup>82</sup> synonymous with “poor” and “ignorant” (Bartolomé 2003:37 as cited in Kovats 2010: 24). And yet, Rey has come to both reject, and confront the present and historical forces that have subjugated the Oaxaqueño community. It is an uplifting message that signals the resiliency of the young Oaxaqueño, and growing young generation whose strides are inspired by the precious knowledge and courageous acts of current-past generations. And it is perhaps because sahu is at the core of Rey's and Miguel's rap that even elders have complimented them, noting that their lyrics are powerful and valuable to the community<sup>83</sup>.

## **DEEP CULTURE-DEEP ROOTS-CREATING OTRO MUNDO**

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<sup>82</sup> Kovats (2010) further explain that Oaxaquita is a diminutive term that is used to describe a person from Oaxaca, or any person that looks “indigenous” for that matter. The term along with Indio is often used loosely by people without consideration of the historical implication that it has (24)

<sup>83</sup> Rey commented that after performing an elderly man, from his hometown of San Miguel Cuevas approached him. According to Miguel he came “with a big smile” and told him in Mixteco that he really liked how he “rapped”. Rey went on to explain that a brass band that was also present at the event also shared their enthusiasm for his rap and for “representing Oaxaca”. The event was organized by Autonomos and was called *Noche Oaxaqueña* (Rey, Personal Communication, August 2013).

There are moments when the world seems to “crack,” causing a shift in our perception, how we relate to people and our surroundings, which Anzaldúa (2007) refers to as *nepantla* (310). These are moments of transformation when connections are made and new insights are gained. Through this crack we are able to experience another world, a world of its own.

The *soledad* of walking alone in between worlds disappears. Alongside, *te encuentras* with more than your own shadow. You are part of a movement of people. You find yourself creating *otro mundo*. We Oaxaqueños are transgressing borders. It is a time of embracing our deep culture, which is the cultural diversity that lives within us and is rooted in a deeper level of understanding and thinking (Watson-Gegeo et al., 2001: 241)

Bridges span that link us to our parents, our ancestors and our pueblos, as they are a reflection of *nuestro ser*, our self-being or soul. *Nuestro ser* is our power that we must feed and that we cannot deny. If we deny its existence it might leave us, replaced by the fear that immobilizes our bodies. We can find ourselves walking unknowingly and boundless—*Sin propósito* (without purpose). And so, we must guard *nuestro ser* as it as it our sun, our moon, our stars, our world.

In the name of *nuestro ser y bienestar* (well being) of our pueblos, we scrape the imposed labels, frameworks and theories. This is vividly expressed by the last words of Juanita’s poem: *Soy Mixteco*.

III. Now is the time to look into the eyes of my father  
and scrape away the lies  
Los insultos que esta socieda le aventado  
[The insults thrown at him in this society]  
Because I am him, I am his blood, I am his flesh

—Juanita  
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As we scrape lo que hace daño, nuestro ser emerges. It is a source of power without limitations that draws us closer to our deep culture. Deep culture is an understanding manifested in the consciousness and practices of a young generation of Oaxaqueñas/os elucidated so well in Juanita's description,

Our history is like really, really old [...] We carry it in our clothes, in our language, in our everyday lives. The way we think about our families-our communities. We just wear it. It's so engrained in us that [...]. I don't know. [Juanita pauses, thinks and she goes on to explain]

It's like a tree with roots [her eyes brighten as she says this]. You see it and its just sitting there. But it has deep roots. And you think about when that seed was planted and it's been a long time. You know. And so that's what I meant. Deep roots they're just in you. You can't deny it. So that's why I was like no wonder I was so unhappy back then. I was trying to deny this tree that was right in front of me. [...]. That's what I was trying to say with the whole tree metaphor [...]

Deep Culture-Deep Roots!

(Juanita, Personal Communication, August 2013)

As she ends her thought, she smiles and gives a gleeful chuckle and I find mi ser smiling back.

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