Keep the Silence from Speaking

Poetry by Hubert Matiúwàa and Martín Tonalmeyotl as Ritual Responses to Drug Violence

Paul M Worley
Appalachian State University
worleypm@appstate.edu

Sarah E. Blanton
UNC-Chapel Hill
sarah_blanton@unc.edu

Whitney DeVos
Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de Mexico
whitney.devos@itam.mx

Abstract

Both hailing from the state of Guerrero, Hubert Matiúwàa and Martín Tonalmeyotl are two of more prominent voices in Mexico's contemporary Indigenous literary movement. This article addresses how Matiúwàa's *Xtámbaa/Piel de Tierra* (2016) and Tonalmeyotl's *Tlalkatsajtsilistle/Ritual de los olvidados*

(2016) mobilize Mè'phàà and Nahua ways of knowing, respectively, as responses to ongoing drug violence in the poets' home state.

Keywords: Indigenous Literatures; Mexican Literatures; Narcotrafficking; Drug Violence; Mè'phàà; Nahua

Resumen

Hubert Matiúwàa y Martín Tonalmeyotl son dos de las voces más destacadas del movimiento literario actual de los pueblos originarios en Mexico. En el presente artículo argumentamos que en los libros *Xtámbaa/Piel de Tierra* (2016) de Matiúwàa y *Tlalkatsajtsilistle/ Ritual de los olvidados* (2016) de Tonalmeyotl los poetas aprovechan el conocimiento Mè'phàà and Nahua, respectivamente, en su elaboración de su poesía como una respuesta a la violencia asociada con el narcotráfico en su estado natal de Guerrero.

Palabras clave: Literaturas indígenas; literaturas mexicanas; narcotráfico; violencia; Mè'phàà; Nahua

Responses to ongoing drug violence in Mexico certainly encompass all forms of artistic expression, from performances and street art to novels and film. While approaches that begin from a national framework are compelling for obvious reasons, these would seem place the artistic responses of the country's diverse Indigenous populations within a limited, perhaps homogenizing framework that glosses over how Indigenous Peoples understand and interpret these circumstances. This article examines how poetry collections by two poets from the Mexican state of Guerrero, the Mè'phàà poet Hubert Matiúwàa (1986) and the Nahua poet Martín Tonalmeyotl (1983) respond to the violence of the ongoing drug war in Mexico. Focusing Matiúwàa's *Xtámbaa/Piel de Tierra* (2016), literally "earthen skin," and Tonalmeyotl's *Tlalkatsajtsilistle/Ritual de los olvidados* (2016), "ritual of those forgotten," we argue that these authors conspicuously position their work in regard to Indigenous epistemological practices in which words have the power to alter reality, in essence turning the literary space into one to which people can turn for healing. This analysis not only aligns their respective projects with longstanding Indigenous language practices in Mesoamerica and elsewhere, but also situates them within broader contemporary Indigenous movements, in which Indigenous authors use their ostensibly literary texts to intervene directly in the world of the reader.

In the first section, we outline both the violence associated with drug trafficking since the 1980s, and recent literary responses to this violence. We then look at the recent critical turn towards the study of Indigenous textualities as way of understanding how these collections by Matiúwàa and Tonalmeyotl use ceremony as a way of ritually responding to the violence of Mexico's drug war in the authors' home state of Guerrero. In the following sections we explore how, rather than simply recounting this violence, providing testimonial witness to it, or denouncing it, these poets' work creates alternative spaces in which the dead are remembered and Indigenous narrative agency is used as a means of coping with, understanding, and ultimately exorcising the impacts of the

drug trade. Understood as ceremony, their words are not merely metaphoric or descriptive, but vital steps in using Indigenous discursive practices to engage with and change the contemporary world.

Contextualizing Drug Violence and Artistic Response in Mexico

Since the 1980s, drug traffickers and crime groups in Mexico, bolstered by corrupt state officials, have become organized and increasingly sophisticated. Drug trade networks and territorial conflicts between distinct groups has led to a rise in criminal violence, especially since 2007, resulting in the violent murder of approximately 60,000-70,000 individuals (Shirk and Wallman 1348). In addition to the steep homicide count in Mexico, kidnapping and extortion has also escalated; victims have included journalists, activists, and government officials.

These environments of violence and death have inspired artistic works that speak to the grim actualities facing most living in Mexico and the border region. Cristina Rivera Garza, in her 2013 book *Los muertos indóciles: necroescrituras y desapropiación*, theorizes how such dire realities affect literary production as it specifically relates to Mexico. Drawn from a newspaper column Rivera Garza wrote between 2006-13, *Los muertos indóciles* considers the ways in which presence is fabricated in historic and artistic representations, creating an "escritura de resistencia" in verse, song, and image (Rivera Garza 21). This "literature of resistance" builds its foundation on ancient debates regarding orality and literacy. Athenian philosopher Plato posited that writing displaced living thoughts coming from a human mind in orality to creating objects in the physical world that can be moved, manipulated, and live on beyond the speaker's death; in this way, writing is fundamentally connected to death.[1] This function of writing, he postulated, renders discourse and stories to become monstrous and dangerous.

Rivera Garza takes this concept a step further and applies it to the context of living and writing in contemporary Mexico, where death permeates daily life, and has become a "realidad cotidiana" (Rivera Garza 18) ("a quotidian reality." Complicating this long-standing relationship between death and the writer by situating it in the space of violence that permeates the Mexican State, she posits the question: "¿Cuáles son los diálogos estéticos y éticos a los que nos avienta el hecho de escribir, literalmente, rodeados de muertos?" (Rivera Garza 19). "What are the aesthetic and ethical dialogues that we are prompted to engage in by virtue of the fact of writing, literally, surrounded by dead people?" In this space, Rivera Garza discusses how purposeful writing embraces death and repurposes weapons of war as literary tools to confront neoliberal power; she theorizes this practice as "necroescrituras" "necrowritings." In Rivera Garza's view, a writer must not be concerned with presence, which was Socrates' concern, but be concerned with *fabricating* presence to make connections with a wider community of readers. By subverting systems of power through collaboration, archival investigation, and rendering stories through digital technologies and apparatuses, literature's purpose is, in fact, to live beyond the lives of those writing it; the stories will continue living in the realities of readers, creating "escrituras de la resistencia" (21) "writings of resistance". One of Rivera Garza's main questions, then, is: "¿Cómo afecta la producción literaria y artística, vivir en un mundo con muertos?" "How does living among dead bodies affect literary and artistic production?" She states that writers can use language to subvert power and "desarticular" "disarticulate" the grammar of power to combat war machines (19).

Ideas of necroescritura, reappropriation of history to fabricate presence, and drug violence in Mexico are evident in Sara Uribe's 2012 work *Antígona González*. Rivera Garza is noted in the dedication where she is quoted: "¿De qué se apropia el que se apropia?" (Uribe 9). This opening quote invites the reader to consider the ways in which mythologies, which have been passed

down by oral tradition, can not only be applied but recontextualized to speak to drug violence in contemporary Mexico. Indeed, this modern mythology, *Antígona González*, was inspired by the words of a real-life Antigone; in the journal antigonagomez.blogspot.mx, the activist Antígona/Diana Gómez, who was disappeared and later found dead in April 2006, said: "No quería ser una Antígona, pero me tocó." "I didn't want to be an Antigone, but that was my fate." In what Uribe describes as "una pieza conceptual basada en la apropiación, intervención y reescritura" "a conceptual piece based on appropriation, intervention, and rewriting," the author appropriates the Greek myth of Antigone, juxtaposing citations from Sophocles' work with the aforementioned text with that appeared in Gómez's blog (Uribe 15), the collective online project registering the numbers of violent deaths in Mexico *Menos días aquí* (13), testimonios published in *La Jornada* (61) and other Mexican news outlets, among other sources. A number of academic references on Antigone are recontextualized within Uribe's work, among them Esther Oliver's 2001 Spanish translation of Judith Butler's *Antigone's Claim* (2000) and Rómulo Pianacci's exhaustive study *Antígona, una tragedia latinoamericana* (2008).

While the classic myth tells of a heroine secretly giving her brother Polyneices a proper burial after the king condemns him for being a traitor, Uribe's Antígona is introduced as she searches for the body of her brother. Thus, Uribe takes the classic Greek heroine of Western literature and reimagines her as a citizen of Mexico. The protagonist represents a familiar story to many living in Mexico today: she yet another family member who is left to the often-hopeless exercise of searching for her disappeared, and likely murdered, loved one. Instead of creating a clear narrative about her brother's murder and ritual process of burying him, Antígona's story recounts her grief which lacks the closure of burying her brother's body.

The story recalls her brother's disappearance, though it is noted that "este

caso no salió en las noticias" (20) "this case wasn't covered on the news". This sentence, early in the piece, establishes that the truth that violence experienced in Mexico would not be found on any state media apparatus, but would only be circulated orally by the victims. Furthermore, the disappearance and *lack of a body* is what brings the protagonist anguish. She declares: "Yo les hubiera agradecido que a donde se lo hubieran llevado, mejor lo hubieran muerto, porque al menos sabría yo dónde quedó, dónde llorarle, dónde rezar. A lo major ya me hubiera resignado" (19). "I would have been grateful to them if, wherever they had taken him, they had killed him, because at least I would know where he ended up, where to weep for him, where to pray. Maybe then I would have given up". The depths of her despair are evident because the ritual proceedings and closure that burial entails are withheld from her.

Necroescritura, writing within a space of death as an act of resistance, acknowledges the extreme violence that those living in Mexico and the border region must endure daily and imagines a way of using writing as an act of rebellion, akin to Antigone's defiant burying of her brother's body. It additionally adds to discourses of writing, representation, and death to process collective trauma. Though Antígona González never recovered her brother's body, the act of writing and repurposing the Greek myth of Antigone is a way to process and respond to the onslaught of violent acts perpetrated by Mexican drug trafficking networks. We understand the ceremonial and ritualistic focus in this style of writing poetry about violence to differ in important ways from more mainstream genres about drug trafficking in Mexico and along the U.S.-Mexican border region. Specifically, Uribe's text, along with the work of Matiúwàa and Tonalmeyotl, offer us alternatives to the "narcocorrido," a contested borderlands form capacious enough to encompass forms of testimonial resistance literature as much as less complex glorifications of drug-related violence. Narcocorridos can "operate as a narrative form of geopolitical intervention, reflection, and critique" (Muniz

56), more specifically as "una forma de narrar el orden global en su interacción con la ilegalidad afianzada desde la 'Guerra contra las drogas'" "a form of narrating the global order in relation to the entrenched illegality brought on by the 'War on Drugs'" (Cabanas 56). Certain narcorridos can be understood and interpreted as Necroescrituras. Yet their narrative emphasis on storytelling generally ties them to a critical, rather than reparative, function vis a vis their appropriated subject matter. It is the potential of the latter function within ritual-based necroescrituras that is of central interest to this paper.

Textualities in Indigenous Literary Scholarship

There is an emerging body of Indigenous Studies scholarship throughout the Western Hemisphere that resituates Indigenous literary texts within particular Indigenous textual traditions. Broadly speaking, this scholarship does not seek to identify Indigenous aspects of a given text or connect a text to a static, presupposed "authenticity," but rather homes in on how many Indigenous works are literary in the traditional sense and thus participate in the ongoing vitality of specifically Indigenous discourses, arts, and sign systems. In his *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies* (2012), Chadwick Allen notes how, even though "Scholars have long looked to oral traditions as significant contexts and possible antecedents for written works," they have tended to ignore that "Indigenous writers and artists [...] often work in multiple media and [...] often juxtapose genres and forms, such as a written poem and a drawing, painting, sculpture, carving, textile, basket, photograph, moving image, or live performance" (xxii). With regard to the notion of scholarship and oral tradition, Osage scholar and critic Robert Warrior further problematizes the category of "orality" when he asserts that, "few seem to understand that naming Native discourse *oral* privileges linguistic and graphic representation in a way that skews toward Eurocentric norms" (xxviii). Given that our exploration of these collections by Matiúwàa and Tonalmeyotl hinges

on their positioning their poetry as ritual discourse, we will return to Warrior's arguments further down. For the moment, they serve to underscore how approaches not centered on Indigenous ways of knowing can inadvertently reproduce existing prejudices and hierarchies, as well as why we must place traditional literary analysis in dialogue with Indigenous knowledges when we approach Indigenous texts.

Before returning to the question of what many scholars have problematically termed "orality," we would like to further situate our discussion within the current textual turn in Hemispheric Indigenous Studies. Scholars such as Walter Mignolo have reinterpreted the invasion and colonization of the so-called Americas in terms of how Europeans privileged a specific European vision of text as a way of negating Indigenous sign systems and the knowledges they were used to record. Elucidating the work of fifteenth-century Spanish friars in his *Darker Side of the Renaissance* (2003), Mignolo makes a convincing case for how language and the written word were not merely tools but also ideological weapons. Confronted by Indigenous practices, for many of these men, "Material difference across cultures in writing practices, the storage and transmission of information, and the construction of knowledge were erased—in a process of analogy, a fight in the name of God against the devil" (75). By comparison, Gordon Brotherston's *Book of the Fourth World* (1992) focuses on the vast array of Indigenous sign systems and signifying practices that have been oppressed or lost as a consequence of European colonization. In doing so, Brotherston does a deft job of showing how Indigenous societies in the hemisphere were already highly "literate" (if we can use that term) when Europeans first arrived in 1492. He notes how a form like Mesoamerican iconic script, by "integrating into one holistic statement what for us are the separate concepts of letter, picture, and arithmetic, [...] positively flouts received Western notions of writing" (50). He goes on to add that when colonial Indigenous scribes consequently transposed such texts into Latin

script, they did so, "albeit with enormous semantic loss" (52).

In her provocative article "¿Literatura? ¿indígena?" (2015), the Mixe intellectual Yasnaya Elena Aguilar Gil outlines the ongoing political implications in Mexico of using these Western terms to describe Indigenous cultural production. Using the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson's concept of poetic function, Aguilar Gil argues that "literature [...] is a culturally and historically determined phenomenon," such that referring to frames such as "pre-Hispanic literature" and "oral literature" glosses over how such practices serve poetic functions within Indigenous communities, with the effect of ultimately assimilating these practices into Western aesthetic understandings.[2] She also notes that many Indigenous peoples in Mexico have narrative devices and use media that, at least in a traditional sense, would not be considered "writing" (¿Literatura?). Rather than being an outlier, her positions here is increasingly commonplace in scholarship being done by Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars throughout the hemisphere. Noting that the Western concept of "literature" "is deeply embedded in a vexed history of racism, classism, and arbitrary power" (16), Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice highlights how a perceived "lack" of a Western-style literary tradition places Indigenous peoples on the "'savage' side of the 'savage/civilized' binary created by imperialist cultures to justify [colonizers'] domination of supposedly 'backward' Peoples" (19). He goes on to reconsider alphabetic writing as a technology of inscription, with literature becoming a practice that includes such diverse media as "cane baskets, wampum belts, birchbark scrolls, gourd masks, sand paintings, rock art, carved and painted cedar poles, stones and whale bones, culturally modified trees, and so on" (22). Similarly, in *Unwriting Maya Literature* (2019), Rita M. Palacios and Paul M. Worley use the Maya concept of *ts'iib* to move beyond alphabetic writing and show how many Maya "literary" texts engage with textiles and diverse embodied practices. Miguel Rocha Viva's *Mingas de la palabra*, which won the Casa de las Américas Prize for Studies on Indigenous

Cultures in 2016, similarly engages these the topics of Indigenous textualities in a Colombian context, demonstrating how Indigenous authors in that country utilize a wide variety of non-alphabetic texts and genres in the production of their written work.

As part of this turn towards understandings of Indigenous textualities, the work of Cherokee scholar Christopher Teuton can help us further situate the role of so-called Indigenous orality in these literatures. In *Deep Waters* he develops a theory of how Indigenous literatures exist along a textual continuum that reflects oral, graphic, and critical impulses. In this context of this continuum, Teuton finds that, "Oral discourse in Native novels [...] may act as a critical intervention in a graphically dominated postcolonial context, offering models of how to engage and interpret the social narratives that effect characters and, by extension, readers" (xx). Understanding Indigenous oral discourse as an *intervention* in a written text thus allows us to better grasp the role that oral discourses can play in otherwise written texts. As Paul Worley argues, in many ways authors use the presence of these discourses "to destabilize the prestige of the written word and call readers' attention to the vibrant realities of [these] other non-Western traditions" (*Telling* 2). Further, we would do well to keep in mind Warrior's reservations about "naming Native discourse oral" cited above. As he goes on to point out, there are myriad signifying actions, from cooking to ceremony and ritual, that take place within Native American traditions that are, "not necessarily elucidated by textualizing them" (xxix). Moreover, "[e]mbodied discourse that relies on memory does not always or even primarily rely on language and speech acts" (Warrior xxix). Indeed, Teuton highlights how the reception and decoding of texts are embodied acts, with "Native American forms of signification actively engag[ing] presence and absence through two interdependent and reciprocal modes of communication, the oral and the graphic" (30-1).

How, then, might we understand the intervention that oral discourse,

if we can use that term, plays within these literary contexts? In particular, how does this help us understand these poetic projects by Matiúwàa and Tonalmeyotl? Following the work of the Muskogee Creek and Cherokee scholar Craig S. Womack in *Red on Red*, we can assert that oral discourse may be used in a text as way of "invok[ing] as much as evok[ing]" (16), both conspicuously situating the texts as a continual negotiation between the oral and the graphic along Teuton's textual continuum and signaling for the astute reader the host of embodied, extra-linguistic acts as Warrior points out. Although such interventions occur within the pages of a literary text, their ultimate effects cannot be confined to the strictly literary. In describing the difference between invoking and evoking, Womack maintains that, "The idea behind ceremonial chant is that language, spoken in the appropriate ritual context, will actually cause a change in the physical universe" (16-7). In other words, certain kinds of ritual discourses may be strategically deployed within a text as a way of not only breaking the graphic frame of the written word and invoking non-Western textualities, but in order to enact, to do, to impact, to change, or to somehow alter the world that the author, reader, and text all share. By specifically calling attention to their status as ritual, Matiúwàa's *Xtámbaa/Piel de tierra* and Tonalmeyotl's *Tlalkatsajtsilistle/Ritual de los olvidados* become Mè'phàà and Nahua rituals, respectively, that intervene in how drug related violence is understood and remembered in their home state of Guerrero.[3] In a sense, these gestures echo Catherine Rainwater's observations about Leslie Marmon Silko's work insofar as Silko seeks to cultivate, "her audience's repertoire of Silko-specific interpretive practices that conjoin author and audience in the shared creative process comprised of writing and reading" (3). By inviting their audiences into the text as ritual space, these poets make their readers accomplices in the works themselves as well as the change (or lack thereof) that happens once the text is read. As responses to violence, these texts demonstrate not only the relevance of Mè'phàà and Nahua epistemologies

and ontologies to the contemporary world, but also how these can be and are used as sources of resistance under extraordinary conditions.

You cannot be disappeared: a ritual for Ayotzinapa

The first poetry collection to be published in the Mè'phàà (Tlapanec) language, *Xtámbaa/Piel de tierra* was greeted with widespread praise upon its publication by the Indigenous-centered press Pluralia Ediciones in 2016. This debut rocketed its author, Hubert Martínez Calleja, who publishes under the pseudonyms Hubert Matiúwàa and Hubert Malina, to immediate acclaim. He holds a degree in Philosophy and Letters from the Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero, another in Creative Writing from the Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de Mexico, and an MA in Latin American Studies from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico (UNAM). From 2017-19, he also wrote a column on Mè'phàà philosophy for *La Jornada*'s "Ojarasca" supplement, a project that Carolyn Fornoff notes seeks to systematize Mè'phàà thought (123). Since *Xtámbaa*'s initial publication Matiúwàa has gone on to publish four more books, with the most recent being the trilingual *Mbo xtá rídà/Gente piel/Skin People* (2020). According to the author the work is based on stories told to him by his mother (Gutiérrez 94), and seeks to decolonize figures in Mè'phàà history who have been demonized since the colonial period (Matiúwàa "Mbo Xtá rídà"). By comparison, the other three books, *Tsína rí nàyaxà'/Cicatriz que te mira* (2018), *Mañuwĩĩn/Cordel Torcido* (2018), and *Ijín gò'ò Tsísídiín tsí nònè xtédè/Las Sombreras de Tsítsísiín* (2018) deal explicitly with the ongoing impact of violence in the Mexican state of Guerrero. Rather than constituting a break from this earlier work, however, *Mbo xtá rídà* continues the poet's sustained project of epistemic and ontological decolonization in which Mè'phàà history, culture, and being are a privileged point of departure. This position becomes all the more apparent when we examine the ritual character of *Xtámbaa/Piel de tierra*, and how it uses ceremony to reconfigure the relationships between

people, the land, and each other in the context of the Ayotzinapa mass kidnapping.

Given that *xtámbaa* is the name of both the volume itself and the eleven-part poem that closes the collection, the volume goes out of its way to center *xtámbaa* as a particular Mè'phàà practice. However, the first reference to what *xtámbaa* is comes in a footnote on the first page of the Mè'phàà version of the aforementioned final poem, and even then the footnote simply states in Spanish that *xtámbaa* is the "ceremonia piel de tierra" or "earthen skin ceremony" (Malina 72). Only in a brief essay at the end of the volume entitled "Los Mè'phàà" does the poet render a full description of this ceremony, the purpose it serves, and its relationship to the text in the reader's hands. Specifically, he tells the reader that *xtámbaa* is performed "when a child is first born as a way of finding out who the infant's brother animal is, and so entrusts him to the earth, the woods, and the rivers so that they will take care of the him" (Malina 95). As Fornoff points out, the ritual thus establishes a reciprocal relationship between the child and the land and brings about "an ontological transformation in which the individual becomes other as s/he enters the more than human community" (134-5). Given our reading here that *xtámbaa* functions as a ceremony and a book/ceremony, it is important to note that the poet says that the ceremony emphasizes three facets in its articulation among contemporary Mè'phàà people.

a) Existing in the world in the same way that all other beings do
b) Having an animal brother that is the same as oneself
c) Recognizing that we are not alone and that we are responsible for these "others" who are also "us," where we build our sense of territory. (Malina 95)

Interestingly, in an *Ojarasca* essay about the same ceremony, Matiúwàa adds to these the labels, "ser" "being," "ser otro" "being another," and "ser territorio" "being the land." In light of this essay, we find that Matiúwàa consciously deploys the book as a ceremony, not so much as a literary conceit but as a way of initiating the reader into a Mè'phàà space/time in which humans, animals, and the spiritual, are all intimately imbricated one with the other.

The eleven poems that comprise *Xtámbaa*'s titular sequence are dedicated, "A Mauricio Ortega Valerio, desaparecido el 26 de septiembre de 2014 en Iguala, Guerrero" (72) "To Mauricio Ortega Valerio, disappeared September 26, 2014 in Iguala, Guerrero'. Readers already well aware of Guerrero, its place in Mexico's ongoing drug war, and the disappearance of 43 students from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teacher's College, will likely correctly infer that Ortega is a victim of the state's ongoing violence, if not more specifically one of the disappeared students from Ayotzinapa. In concert with the Guerrero Unidos cartel and the 57th Infantry Battalion of the Mexican Army, local municipal police detained and forcibly abducted a bus full of students who, following a tradition of commandeering transport, were headed to Mexico City to commemorate the 1968 student massacre at Tlatelolco. Indeed, according to the website Ayotzinapa, Ortega was an artist and teacher from a small Mè'phàà town with fewer students than the university he attended. Instead of being a rebel, he wanted to be a carpenter and a teacher whose revolution was "in workshops and classrooms" (Cantú). Readers less familiar with the specifics of the Ayotzinapa case are, by contrast, more likely to simply connect the young man's disappearance to Mexico's drug war in a more general way. By leaving out the details of who Ortega was, how he was disappeared, and why, Matiúwàa's dedication facilitates the poems' becoming a ceremony that intervenes in the world of the reader on two fronts. First, the eleven poems themselves fill in this background information by providing a general sense of

life in Guerrero, and of the violence of Ortega's disappearance itself. As we will address in more detail further down, at the end of the poem Ortega has not so much disappeared as he has reemerged as an inescapable part of the landscape, the poetic voice, and the reader. Not directly naming the events that the poems are tied to also enables them to illuminate how the violence of the disappearances, endemic throughout the region, permeate the landscape and the lives of those who live there, including but extending beyond the case of Ayotzinapa. Second, by providing the reader with Ortega's name and the date of his disappearance, the dedicatory passage nonetheless gives the reader enough information to track down what happened to the flesh-and-blood person, Mauricio Ortego Valerio. To borrow Womack's words above, this extra-literary act on the part of the reader, "invokes as much as it evokes," reinforcing how the poems are not merely description or an invitation to solidarity, but constitute a ceremonial gesture with the power to alter reality.

In recounting the circumstances surrounding Ortega's disappearance and presumed death, the eleven poems themselves move from a prophecy about the young man's future to the events of his disappearance, its aftermath and his eventual rebirth as part of the natural world. The sequence opens with an eagle flying over the town at night prophecies that "que tus hijos se convertirían en *kaagu*" (Malina 73) "that your children would become *kaagu*,' with the first poem resituating the reader within Mè'phàà space/time in which the West's epistemological and ontological boundaries between the human, plant, animal, and spiritual worlds are redrawn.[4] Further, translating the word *kaagu* as "wisepeople" or "seers" in a footnote as opposed to the body of the poem reinforces that the reader is entering into an Indigenous Mè'phàà understanding of existence through the medium of the poem. Poem III, in this spirit, employs deictic language to construct the present of the poem as the space of mutual encounter, interconnection, and ongoing transit linking the

speaker and addressee: “en donde amarrados/ cruzamos el espacio” (77) “here where we are bound/ crossing this space.’

Matiúwàa’s poetic rendering of contemporary Guerrero undermines romanticized notions of rural life in Indigenous communities, even as *Xtámbaa* resists stereotypes on the other end of the spectrum that portray such places as backwards, decrepit, and hopelessly ruined by impoverishment. Instead, the series evokes a dialectical process involving the impacts of numerous forms of structural violence, many of them centuries-old, as well as the communal rituals performed in response to these oppressive forces. Poem II, for example, initiates a ceremony in which the poetic speaker and others make offerings to the “señor sagrado del cerro” “holy man of the hill’; their petitions indicate an urgent need for protection:

> Renovemos el año,
> quememos flores
> en las cuatro narices del mundo,
> entreguemos la sangre
> al señor sagrado de los cerros
> para que nos cuide de los perros,
> de los hombre armados,
> del silencio de las calles,
> de las pozas llenas del color de la tarde,
> de quienes se llevan a los hijos del pueblo,
> de ellos, que están en la casa del trabajo. (Malina 75).

> Let us renew the year.
> Let us burn flowers
> to the four corners of the earth.
> Let us offer blood
> to the Lord of the hills
> that he protect us from the dogs

from the men with guns
from the silence in the streets
from the sunset-colored wells
from the ones who carry off our children
from them, the people in the places we labor.

These images suggest a range of problems that these people take to the Lord of the Hills, from drug related violence ("men with guns," "silence in the streets," and "the people in the places we labor") to environmental devastation ("sunset-colored wells"), with the image of needing protection from "the ones who carry off our children" possibly speaking to the aforementioned drug violence or to the stream of young people who immigrate to El norte. In speaking to these twenty-first century concerns, this ceremony within *Xtámbaa*'s larger ceremony also registers how traditional Mè'phàà ways of knowing are vital, ongoing practices that continue to be strategies through which Indigenous communities confront the challenges they face. Some of these practices take place within the "real time" of *Xtámbaa*. Much of the poem is written in direct address, to an unnamed "you," creating a slippage between the "you" of the dedication—Ortega—and the reader of the poem. The inclusion of the "you" within the first-person plural imperative in poem II can thus be read as an invitation toward communal, and potentially transcultural, healing processes.

The following four poems elaborate on the disappearance of an unidentified "you," perhaps Ortega, and moves from these scenes of prophecy and foreboding to hiding in caves, the presumed murder, and the impact of the murder on the speaker. Foreshadowing the end of the sequence, poem V speaks to the aforementioned sense of interrelatedness and reciprocal independence evoked by the ceremony. The first three lines read,

Mi voz se hizo nido
el día que te agarraron,
¿Que no saben que todo lo que te hagan me lo hacen a mí? (Malina 81)

My voice became a nest
the day they took you.
Everything they do to you, don't they
know, they do to me?

The image of the disappearance turning the speaker's voice into a nest resonates throughout the poem. On the one hand, the image of the voice as a nest suggest that the speaker's voice now holds, guards, and keeps the memory of the disappeared person. We could perhaps go so far as to argue that the voice of the disappeared are held within or speak through the voice of the poet in much the way that a young bird may sing from its nest. The image of the nest ties back in with the theme of reciprocity among all beings, with the voice now caring for those who would be all but forgotten if they were not metaphorically held in this way. The intimacy of this relationship is then underscored in the next verse, when the voice asks if those who have abducted the young man do not understand that they have not simply disappeared one person, but wounded many, many more.

In VI, the poetic voice recounts the impacts of the presumed murder and "esa bala que vio tu nombre" "the bullet that bore your name' that ripple across the natural world. The bullet kicks up dust "shocking the trees," while a scream falls along the "thorns / of a rising sun." In response, the cicadas perform a ritual act of burial, interring:

... el ombligo de agua
y sembraron en la cara del mundo,
la raíz que envuelve nuestra historia
por los que vienen tras nuestra sangre. (Malina 83)

a watery umbilical cord
before the entire world,
to grow roots that will nurture our story
for future generations.

In the absence of the victim's family, the cicadas take on the responsibility of a symbolic burial, one that references the common Mesoamerican ritual whereby the umbilical cord of a newborn is buried to ensure that a child always returns home, even as an adult. The moment of an unnatural death is thus transmuted into a moment of birth, of a story that will not be silenced, but will nurture future generations. If poem VI depicts this inter-species ritual, poem VII begins simply with the word, "*Xtámbaa*," a gesture that re-emphasizes that poems' own status as ritual. As this happens near the sequence's literal center, we can place this verse within a larger Mesoamerican cosmovision and think of it as constituting the poem's symbolic navel, which binds it to the universe. It is thus fitting that the voice in this poem shifts from that of the speaker to that of the disappeared. Given this shift, the poem is worth citing in its entirety:

Xtámbaa,
estoy contigo en el mundo,
en el trueno que trae la noche,
en baile de ánimas sin rostro,
sin brazo,
sin descanso,
estoy contigo en las velas,
en el humo que engendra el camino,
en el olor del copal que recoge
el agua de ojos
de las mañanas sin voz. (Malina 85)

Xtámbaa,
I am with you in this world,
in this night of thunder,
faceless among the dancing spirits,
armless, ceaseless.
I am with you among the candles,
in the smoke that paves the road,
in the aroma of copal collecting
in the watery eyes
of all these voiceless tomorrows.

In these verses the voice of the disappeared reappears through the medium of the poem in order to outline how the disappeared are nevertheless present. Of course, they are not only in the "faceless spirits," but also in the "candles," the copal's smoke and its aroma, all of which are elements of diverse rituals throughout Mesoamerica. In short, the voice of the disappeared claims a particular presence within the spirit world that the living can access via ritual, whether we understand these rituals as being those described in the poem (candles, copal) or as the poem, "Xtámbaa," itself.

Subsequent poems then address the long-lasting effects of Ortega's disappearance on those around him, describing him at one point as the "venadito que iba a ser maestro" "the little deer who was going to be a teacher" (Malina 87). These laments bring us to the final poem which, as with "VII," begins by immediately asserting the continued existence of Ortega and all of the other disappeared. In this case the poetic voice, presumably that of Ortega, talks to the living tree, saying it "guards my Mè'phàà voice" and "the song of my name," and bears the weight of all of the young people who were disappeared that night. The poem ends with the image of the voices and shadows of the town's elders hanging in the tree's branches. This final image, of course, can be read both literally, as old people speaking in the tree's shade,

and metaphorically, as the ancestors who, like Ortega, now dwell within it. The latter interpretation also entail's Ortega's own re-birth as an ancestor to future generations.

In line with the ceremony whose name it bears, as ritual this series of eleven poems closes by effectively re-inscribing Ortega and the other disappeared students into the natural world. For Fornoff, the sequence's final poem, "connects the future of Mè'phàà language and culture with ecology and the material violence that now exists in the subsoil, now protected by its skin of earth" (136). As the poems make clear, this act does not mitigate the state's ongoing drug war or diminish the pain that stems from violence associated with this conflict, but rather serves to memorialize those lost in a way that maintains the integrity of the community in the face of forces that would otherwise tear it apart. Given that the *xtámbaa* ceremony is, according to Matiúwàa, one in which a young person learns about the reciprocal relationship they have with the world around them, these poems serve to resituate both the reader and Ortega within these relationships. In terms of the aspects of *xtámbaa* from Matiúwàa's essay cited above, the reader now exists differently in the world (being), recognizes the plight of others (being another), and sees these relationships as part of land itself (being the land). The poem, having achieved its purpose, has transmuted Ortega and others so that they are now found in ceremonial elements (candles, copal) and in the natural landscape (tree), even as uncertainty about the ultimate resting place of the 43 students from the Ayotzinapa Rural School persists. In some sense they become almost omnipresent, with nature itself being an unflinching reminder of this injustice. The reader, even if he or she does not act upon this information, has nonetheless been initiated into this new series of relationships via these new associations with the natural world. By comparison, Ortega re-enters the community from which he was stolen, not exactly reborn but not completely disappeared, either. Rather, he has been

taken on another role within the community as part of its spiritual kin, with the final poem articulating his new place within the ritual practices and tree as a site of ancestral memory. In either case, these are changes that the poems enact within the physical world via their own self-ascribed status as *xtámbaa*.

Rituals of Unforgetting

Also from the state of Guerrero, Nahua poet Martín Tonalmeyotl has published several bilingual poetry collections (Nahuatl-Spanish) and currently coordinates *Xochitlájtoli*, the Indigenous language section of the online literary magazine *Círculo de poesía*. In this same capacity, he recently compiled the multilingual poetry anthology *Xochitlájtoli. Poesía contemporánea en lenguas originarias de Mexico* (2019), the first mainstream anthology of Mexico's multilingual literatures to feature a member of one of the nation's pueblos originarios [Indigneous communities] as editor. He obtained his licenciatura in Hispanic American Literature from the Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero like Matiúwàa, and went on to receive an MA in Indoamerican Linguistics from CIESAS. Tellingly, the biography on the inside fold of his latest collection, *Istitson ueyeatsintle/Uña mar* (2019) lists his occupations as "Campesino, professor de lengua náhuatl, narrador, poeta, y articulista" "Farmer, professor of the Nahuatl language, narrator, poet, and essayist.' The fact that "campesino" or "farmer' comes first may invert the expectations of many readers. Beyond self-identifying with a specific racialized class position here, a Nahua writer claiming to be a "campesino" also signals his participation in Indigenous agricultural practices, such as the Mesoamerican crop-growing system known as the *milpa*, that preceded and has outlasted the history of European invasion. In doing so, Tonalmeyotl defies the logic of those who would claim that education de-Indianizes Indigenous subjects by showing that one can be a campesino *and* a holder of advanced degrees, with there being no apparent contradiction between these two categories. Of relevance to our argument,

this self-declaration also situates Tonalmeyotl within a network of traditional, community-based agricultural rites used to petition protection over their fields and for rain.

As suggested by its title, Tonalmeyotl's 2016 collection *Tlalkatsajtsilistle/ Ritual de los olvidados* is consciously situated by the author within a Nahua ritual framework. This framework, we observe, represents one node within a larger network of Mesoamerican ritual that includes Matiúwàa's *Xtámbaa*. Although more generally about the social problems in Tonalmeyotl's hometown of Atzacoaloya in the state of Guerrero, and taking up topics ranging from immigration and education to racism and the environmental devastation resulting from extractivist logics and policy, *Tlalkatsajtsilistle* similarly turns the text into a ritual to deal with the violence of the drug trade. The collection opens with one of the more famous poems by the recently deceased Maya K'iche' poet Humberto Ak'abal (1952-2019):

Hablo
para taparle
la boca

al silencio.

(I speak
to cover
the mouth

of this silence.)

As a way of entering into *Tlalkatsajtsilistle*'s poetic project, the epigraph suggests Tonalmeyotl's poems do not "break" the silence but keep it at bay, preventing it from "speaking" and thus obscuring the reality the poems reveal.

While none of the poems in the volume explicitly reference the drug

trade, the poem "Carnicero" is the first poem in *Tlalkatsajtsilistle* that takes up the violence associated with it. According to Adam Coon, in *Tlalkatsajtsilistle*, "narcotraffickers and state officials are indistinguishable in a massive-scale illegal economy that nulls even the thin promises of neoliberal multiculturalism" (27). Unlike the more somber tone struck by Matiúwàa's work, "Carnicero" consists of a wry wordplay involving two usages of the word "carnicero," or "butcher': literally, as someone who processes dead animals for living and sells their meat to the public; and, as slang that refers to someone who wantonly murders others. According to the poem's speaker, his father is beside himself because his "competitores son mas sangrientos que él" "competitors are bloodier than he is,' as they "hacen trizas a sus propios hermanos/ mientras que él/ solo lo hace con marranos" "cut their own brothers to pieces/ something he/ does only to pigs' (Tonalmeyotl 18).[5] The poem ends with the father having seizures and his heart failing, consumed by the fear that "sus nietos pierdan la vista/ y lleguen a ser/ carniceros" "his grandchildren will lose their way/ and become/ butchers themselves' (Tonalmeyotl 18). The polysemy of the word "carnicero" here opens the poem up to any number of potential readings, the most obvious of which is that the grandfather fears his grandchildren will grow up and work for the cartels, like so many young people wind up doing. Alternatively, read more literally, "Carnicero" ultimately "invokes" more than it "evokes," yet within the greater context of the collection as a whole, this piece exemplifies a certain genre in Tonalmeyotl's work that, in aggregate, presents a composite portrait of the ongoing, transgenerational cycles of structural violence in Atzacoaloya that require, as a response, the invented ritual "of those forgotten" set into motion in *Tlalkatsajtsilistle*.

The poem that most directly connects with the theme of *Xtámbaa* is "Los padres de las tortugas también saben volar" "The fathers of turtles also know how to fly' (57), as it ends in a direct reference to the disappeared students from Ayotzinapa by repeating the number forty-three. In Nahuatl, Ayotzinapa

means “place of the turtles.” The animal has become an emblematic symbol in survivors’ struggle to hold the state accountable, with one attorney commenting “La justicia, como la tortuga, es lenta, pero implacable” “Justice, like the turtle, is slow, but relentless’ (Rojas). In Tonalmeyotl’s poem, the father turtles and their actions take up this communal, struggle-oriented semiotics, as symbols through which the poet can talk about Ayotzinapa and the 43 disappeared students while also transmuting them in a ritualistic way. Like *Xtámbaa*, the poem reorients the reader’s relationship with the landscape, with father turtles flying surrealistically over “pantanos” “swamps’ and “fossa clandestinas” “unmarked graves’ at the beginning of the poem (57). Juxtaposition between swamps and unmarked graves treats these burials and violence that produces them as things that occur naturally within the state’s geography. Although Western sign systems often render turtles as cowardly creatures for pulling in their heads and legs when attacked, in Mesoamerican cosmovisions the turtle is a sacred being associated with the strength, wisdom, fortitude, and—crucially, resistance—required for living a long life. In Tonalmeyotl’s poem, the parents of turtles “saben luchar” “know how to fight’ for their families, wives, children, and culture (57-8), “tienen hambre/ Hambre de encontrar a sus hijos/ Hambre de poder tocarlos, besarlos, abrazarlos” “[they are] are hungry/ Hungry to find their children/ Hungry to touch and kiss them, to hold them’ (58). This “hunger” motivates the parents to continue to “nadan y nadan/ sobre mares arremolinados” “swim and keep swimming / across whirling oceans’ (58). Through the repeated use of “cuarenta y tres” “fourty-three’ at the end, the poem takes on a relentless, ritualistic cadence that underscores the seemingly endless search of the turtle-parents for their disappeared loved ones:

> Los padres de las tortugas también son cuarenta y tres
> cuarenta y tres puños levantados
> cuarenta y tres gritos de esperanza

cuarenta y tres
cuarenta y tres
cuarenta y tres... (58)

There are forty-three parents of turtles
forty-three fists in the air
forty-three screams of hope
cuarenta y tres
cuarenta y tres
cuarenta y tres...

The poem concludes with the speaker articulating one of the most emblematic chants of the struggle for justice for the students of Ayotzinapa, one that parents' "forty-three screams of hope" will inevitably repeat day in and day out: "cuarenta y tres/ cuarenta y tres/ cuarenta y tres." When read aloud, the reader will thus assume the same position, as a participant in solidarity with parents in demanding state accountability for the disappearances. Once again, the poem as ritual keeps the memory of these students alive and the search for their remains in the public sphere.

The poem "Chilapeños" takes an even more muted approach to describing such disappearances, as a dog named Fear stalks the speaker and his father. At the end of the poem we are told that

lo único que persigue es hacernos
como él, para cazarnos más humanos
y convertirlos en miados de perro. (25)

all he's after is making us
like he is, hunting more people down
and turning them into dog piss.

These lines echo the recruitment of young men to be cartel assassins ("make us/ like him") and the disappearance of cartel targets into territorial-marking waste ("turn them into dog piss"). By comparison, the poems "Mi gente" "My People' (46), "Mi mundo" "My world' (48), and "Jueves de pozole" "Pozole Thursday' (68-9), make more pointed references to the violence the drug war has brought upon the state. In "Mi gente," vultures have arrived in the speaker's town, "lastimaron al viento y le cortaron la cabeza" "wounded the wind and decapitated it,' with day and night themselves now finding themselves kidnapped by these "sucios y violentos pajarracos" "vile, vicious scavengers.' "Mi mundo" ends by upending the significance one of the global symbols of progress par excellence, the car. Tonalmeyotl writes:

> la noche cambia su silencio
> por rugidos de autos
> y gritos irritados de metralla. (48)
>
> night exchanges its silence
> for the roar of cars
> and the irate cries of shrapnel.

As the image unfolds, it feeds into the reader's own experience of the night and cars, as well as what the arrival of cars in a town like Atzacoaloya would mean, specifically more deeply-entrenched forms of capitalism, promulgated by the state in the name of "progress" and economic development. As Aura "Lolita" Chávez Ixcaquic has pointed out, the state and multi-national corporations use the narrative of promised development to dispossess Indigenous peoples of their lands (25). What she calls "las trampas de desarrollo" "ruses of development" only increase the already-rampant impacts of state violence, including corruption, militarization, and collusion with organized crime

(26-29). “Jueves de pozole” depicts a quotidian scene that indexes such disruptions: a family eating pozole together is interrupted by a disappearance that happens in real time. With references made to guns, drug violence, and the town’s subsequent militarization, the poem ends by saying it is “injusto” “unfair’ that one should have to leave “una tierra propia” “one’s own land’:

> por el único delito de haber sido testigo de algo
> o por delito de intense gravedad
> que es el de ser fuerte y joven. (69)
>
> for the sole crime of having seen something
> or for the high crime
> of being young and strong.

Being a potential witness to “something” may get you killed, while just being “young and strong” means that you are potential recruit, with the distinction between the military and the drug cartels blurred.

The poem “Mi lengua náhuatl” “My Nahuatl Language’ merits special attention here in so far as it uses the language of drug violence to describe the situation of Náhuatl in the twenty-first century. The poem begins with the speaker stating:

> Cuentan que a mi lengua náhuatl
> le han cortado la cabeza,
> amarrado los pies
> y vendados los ojos. (87)
>
> They say my tongue Nahuatl
> has had her head cut off,
> her feet bound together
> and her eyes blindfolded.

In personifying the Nahuatl language as a victim of a narco-style execution, Tonalmeyotl opens his poem by portraying language loss as a spectacularly violent process. While dominant discourse frames the steep decline in Indigenous language speakers somewhat passively, as evidence of "disappearance" or "extinction," these four lines underscore, much as Aguilar Gil did in her address to Mexico's legislature that, "Nuestras lenguas no mueren solas, a nuestras lenguas las matan" "Our languages don't die by themselves; they are killed' ("Las lenguas"). By using imagery associated with violence from the drug war (decapitation, blindfolds, tying up one's feet), the poem suggests that language murder is linked, like narcotrafficking, to forms of state-sanctioned violence. Such a position is backed up by statistics: while many assume colonization to be the primary culprit of language loss, the establishment of the Mexican state and state institutions, including the national education system, was in fact far more damaging to Indigenous linguistic communities. The statistics Aguilar Gil cites are stark: "En 1820, después de trescientos años de colonialismo ejecutado por la corona española, se calcula que 70 por ciento de la población de este país hablaba una lengua indígena. Doscientos años más tarde, en 2020, solo constituimos el 6.5% de la población" ("In 1820, after three hundred years of colonialism carried out by the Spanish crown, it is estimated that 70 percent of the population of [Mexico] spoke an Indigenous language. Two hundred years later, in 2020, we only make up 6.5% of the population") ("Ni triunfo" 27).

Today, the state promulgates a celebratory multicultural discourse, even as "linguistic pluralism has not been encouraged by the very institutions and agents of the state" (Cruz 11). The state continues to offer only one homogenous and ineffective Spanish-language school curriculum that is detrimental to Indigenous languages and prevents Indigenous students from pursuing higher education (Cruz 14). Emphasizing the resilience of such communities, and their languages, despite the quotidian forms of structural violence they are

subjected to, Tonalmeyotl's poem ultimately disavows the power of would-be language murderers by assuring us that its opening image is only hearsay:

> Yo, un hombre de Atzacoaloya,
> mostraré lo contrario,
> ella tiene cabeza,
> goza de pies ligeros,
> y una vista inalcanzable. (87)
>
> I, a man from Atzacoaloya,
> will show otherwise:
> Nahuatl has a head,
> quick feet
> and an insurmountable gaze.

Though Nahuatl is the most widely spoken Indigenous language group in North America, as a language group it is made up by many different, geographically specific Nahuatl languages. Tonalmeyotl estimates that a generous estimate of the number of speakers of his "lengua Nahuatl," Atzacoaloya Nahuatl, are in the low thousands, if that. Still, it remains the language of daily life in his community (Tonalmeyotl *Documentación lingüística* 63). Contesting claims that the local language has been destroyed and making it his job to "show otherwise," the speaker assumes the task of demonstrating this to a public that, as the Spanish versions of this bilingual collection suggest, the author envisions as extending far beyond his hometown of Atzacoaloya. This turns us back to the epigraph from Ak'abal at the beginning of the volume, and to the notion that the collection itself constitutes a kind of ritual. After all, these poems, some written first in Nahuatl, some translated into Nahuatl afterwards ("El estado"), not only "cover the mouth" of Nahuatl's alleged silence, they are proof of the poet's understanding of his vocation as an imperative to show that his language is still alive. Moreover, that its poetry is connected to

a centuries-old classical literary tradition whose power is interminable. In his words, "Soy el fruto de Nesaualkoyotl,/ la palabra que nunca se acaba" "I bear the fruit of Nezahualcoyotl,/ the word that never ends." (30)

Nonetheless, at first gloss, the volume's final poem, "Recommendation," strikes a much more ambivalent tone about writing. Instructing an unidentified listener using second person direct address, the speaker orders their addressee not to go out, speak, think, cry, laugh, or even breathe. Doing so would mean "se perderá el mundo/ que parece de los vivos/ cimentado sobre una tierra de muertos" "it will be lost, this seeming-world/ of the living,/ built over a land of the dead' (97). The poem's final stanza then closes with advice that would seem to be directed to the poet himself:

> No pienses,
> no sonrías,
> deja de escribir,
> que el presente hable por sí solo. (97)
>
> Don't think,
> don't smile,
> stop your writing:
> let the present speak for itself.

The volume's ending on this series of negative commands would seem to suggest that the poet takes the speaker's advice, literally ceasing to denounce the situation in Guerrero and, as the speaker suggests, thus let "the present speak for itself." In a sense, these interdictions have the force of actual violence behind them, as seen in the poem, "Jueves de pozole." When we read them as closing the volume's titular "ritual of those forgotten," however, we find that other potential meanings emerge. Like *Xtámbaa*, the collection as ritual has inscribed these people into the living landscape and thereby made them

an undeniable part of the reader's existence. The poet's work is thus done, and his letting the present "speak for itself" is not so much an abdication of his poetic labor as it signals the fact that the reader is now implicated in understanding the present and how the voices of the so-called forgotten are present within it.

Conclusions

Settlers have discounted the efficacy of Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing for over 500 years. As laid out in the second section of this paper, this rejection has much more to do with justifying colonization, the displacement of Indigenous Peoples from their lands, and the exploitation of Indigenous communities than an understanding of Indigenous ways of being. As the textual turn in Indigenous literary criticism demonstrates, these Indigenous practices are not only ongoing, but have become points of departure for the creation of contemporary Indigenous literary texts, texts that are both "literary" in the traditional sense *and* examples of other kinds of textualities. As we have seen in these works by Matiúwàa and Tonalmeyotl, ritual and ritual discourse can serve as a powerful framework through which Indigenous authors understand, negotiate with, resist, reimagine, and reconfigure the contemporary world. These poets demonstrate how, rather than being overwhelmed by the drug violence in Guerrero, ritual practices can be adapted to the needs of communities and help them persist under brutal conditions. Like Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, these are not the supposedly timeless ceremonies of anthropology textbooks, but new ceremonies born out of necessity, as "only this growth keeps the ceremonies strong" (126). As texts that deal with the impact of Mexico's drug war in Guerrero, both collections perform ritual functions for their readers and communities and intervene in the physical world, creating avenues for Indigenous memory and survival in the midst of atrocity.

Appendix I: Hubert Matiúwàa

Translated by Paul M Worley

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Xtámbaa

Ajngáa rí màrma'áan àkuíáan ló' ju'yáa dxáma Mauricio Ortega Valerio.

I

Nìfrámuu bìyú dó'on ná tsúdúu xuajén,
ndi'yée xuwia ná ma'níin xàñúun ga'khúii,
nìndíao rí ijiàn mòne mi'naa kaagu,
xpún xpún, xpún xpún,
ni'thée rí:
—Gájmàá i'díuun mùrú'thin ga'khó
rí mùnii go'óò mbi'i
khamí ràjuíín maxtrákháa xngrí'í ná rawún xkrúgóo xuajín,
rí màndxà'wáa ñàwúun xà'wí khamí à'óo bègò
tsí mà'nii xtíñún nìmii Júbà ló'.

II

Mò'ne nuxii ló' tsígu,
mùtsikáa ló' rè'è
ná akhó ràkóo numbaa,

khamí mùxnàxíi ló' i'di
inuu àkhúún júbà
ikàjngóo màñawá' ló' inuun xùwán,
inuun xàbò tsí jùdá' ajuàn',
mí ná rìga wìyúú jambaà,
ná ìñá rí gàjnii rí nà'níí wàkhii,
khamí inuun xàbò tsí nàgu judíin ìjíín xuajín,
ìkhíín tsí trà'iin awún gu'wá ñàjún.

III

Ná xthú'ún wajéen,
nà'ká adée ñawún tsí násjngàma numbaa
tsí nà'ka rayaxììn tsí'yóo tsí nìndíawá ló'
ìdo nìxthó'o ñawuá ló',
ná nìnújnguun jùdáan' ló'.

Ná nàtsúu ràjúun ajuàn',
nìraxnúu mbí'ya ló'
ikàjngóo màgoo mùdii wàjíi inuu xàbò
rí nigìwáan ñúwiin ré'è ná awún ìtsí,
ikháa rí nàyáxii xúge ga'kúii xtá skiyá' ló'.

IV

Àtrakhá'o mìnaa ná ìñúun itsí,
àrà'thiin màgátháa rùjmba
asndo rí mànbúún mùxkha xàbò,
tsí dùyaa xùù xuwia ló'

nagóo judèe xnun'daa ló'
ná xkrajndí rí nangúaa thángaa,
asndo xó ru'wa ja'ñúun ná xàbii nùxkháa ló'
khamí nùràxnúú ijíín ñàwún
numaa ló' tsáa jùwá ló' ná Júbàá,
tsáa gìdá' ngu'wá ñàwuáa ló',
tsáa màñà' júbà ló',
tsáa jùwáa ló' ná go'óò Lucio.

V

Nè'ne xàñúun a'ó
mbi'i rí nìrugáan,
àtsíyáa rí xùgii rí núñaa ikháán núñí ikhúún nye',
nìndxá'wa ló' ná nixphíbí rìga ràwúan,
ná nìgrigá' ló' gàjmíí anjgián' ló'
khamí xuge' nángua rá,
náa màro'ó gà'khó rìge rá,
tsá jàyá ìdxúu xuajíín ro',
naa krùse màxtrigùùn ñò'ón tsí nudii a'ó rá,
naa júbà màxkhámaa nàkuáa'
xùge rí nanbra'á mìnaa ngàmí xùbía'
khamí nàgajáa iñúu tsìá' ló' rá.

VI

Ikháa xjndúu ajuàn' rí diyá mbí'yaa,
nìyáxìì yojnda'
khamí gàmàkuu ixè,

mí ñù'úún,
ná natsùu tsúwúun àkha',
nìrakha a'wuà'
nè'ne xndú mìnaa nè,
ikhíi nìdiin chikììn rumìì iya
khamí nídiin màngáa jùma ná inuu numbaa,
ikháá rí nambrá'a àjmùù mbí'i tsíama
numuu tsí nàguwá tsùdúu i'díáa ló'.

VII

Xtámbaa,
xtáa gájmàá níndxàa ná inuu numbaa,
ná a'wá rí jàyáa mbró'o,
ná nùtsía nímà tsí ndàa inuu,
tsí ndàa ñàwúun,
tsí tsíyaa xúún,
xtáa gájmàá nìndxàa ná wàjún ndèla,
ná inuu nguni' rí nàxná jambaà,
ná gii' xùù wuájià rí nàyaxii
iya ìdúú mi'chá rí ndáa a'óo.

VIII

Nìge'è gìnúu agu'
ná inuu tséndo',
gájmàá ajngáa rí gàmàkhu ni'túun ìdi khamí tsíxnda
numuu tsina' rí jàyá àna' ló',
nìràxii náa numuu nigajnúu inuu

adáa àñà' tsí ma'ne maestro,
náa numuu nìwuáji'díin dxájúun
tsí mòne kí'nii ixè xàphóo xuajián' ló'.

IX

Mauricio,
nàdxáa
asndo xó ru'wa ná Júbàá,
ndayá ra'áa awún',
khamí ná wíí rigaan
nagàjaa tsíòon xuajián ló'
ìdo narma'áan akúiin ithane.

X

Ndxájo',
¡àraxuu rá!,
atiaxii tsìnuu xubíaa ló',
atiaxii xó grigòo rudá ló',
atiaxii rí phú síàn' ijxmii mbí'yaa
asndo náa màxkámaa.

XI

Xtàa ixè,
ixè rè'è akhíu',
nàkhuá' rí jùbà' nàyáxiin a'ó Mè'phàà,
àjmùù rumía'

ñàjúun ajmúú mbí'yu',
ná ñáwuán ríga ga'khuii awún
nùmúú ijián' tsí nànguán nìtangíín,
tsí nì'gí ìdúú xuajín bró'on rí nìgàdii ì'di,
ixè Iguala,
ná xtáyaa xtáa a'wá tsíngína
khamí xkàmixùùn xì'ña ló' rí nàmbáñàa ló' è'ne.

Piel de Tierra

A Mauricio Ortega Valerio, desaparecido el 26 de septiembre de 2014 en Iguala, Guerrero.

I

Voló sobre el pueblo el águila de la noche,
buscó tu carne para anidar su dolor
y auguró que tus hijos se convertirían en
xpún xpún, xpún xpún:
—Con sangre cortarán el adobe
para construir la casa del día
y su lengua colgará el garabato en la puerta del pueblo,
para llamar el brazo del cangrejo y el trueno del rayo
que vestirá el corazón de la Montaña.

II

Renovemos el año,
quememos flores
en las cuatro narices del mundo,

entreguemos la sangre
al señor sagrado del cerro,
para que nos cuide de los perros,
de los hombres armados,
del silencio de las calles,
de las pozas llenas del color de la tarde,
de quienes se llevan a los hijos del pueblo,
de ellos, que están en la casa del trabajo.

III

En manojo de muertos,
viene el dedo que alumbra el mundo
y levanta los fantasmas del augurio
en donde amarrados
cruzamos el espacio.

En el desvelo de las lenguas de plomo,
nos contaron los días
para enterrar las máscaras,
que engendraron
el cordel de corolas,
en el vientre de las piedras,
las que levantan ahora,
el ansia de nuestra piel endurecida.

IV

Escóndete en la cueva,
espera que baje la neblina
y termine la caza,
los que huelen la carne
se llevan nuestros sueños
en autobuses que no tienen vuelta,
en su sigiloso acecho se visten de lluvia
y cuentan los dedos
por los que estamos en la Montaña,
los de la mano oculta,
los de la tierra roja,
los que vivimos en la casa
de Lucio.

V

Mi voz se hizo nido
el día que te agarraron,
¿Que no saben que todo lo que te hagan me lo hacen a mí?,
aullé el relámpago en tu boca,
donde anduvimos con los nuestros
y ahora, ya no,
¿Dónde amarraré este dolor que enciende la esperanza?
¿Quién traerá la cabeza del pueblo?
¿En qué cruces colgaré aves que sepultan mi lengua?

¿En qué tierra he de encontrar tus pasos,
ahora, que tu cuerpo se acobija en el miedo
y crece la espiga de nuestra rabia?

VI

Esa bala que vio tu nombre
levantó el polvo
y el asombro de los árboles,
que allá,
en la espina del sol naciente,
tu grito,
cayó echo bola,
las chicharras enterraron el ombligo de agua
y sembraron en la cara del mundo,
la raíz que envuelve nuestra historia
por los que vienen tras nuestra sangre.

VII

Xtámbaa,
estoy contigo en el mundo,
en el trueno que trae la noche,
en baile de ánimas sin rostro,
sin brazo,
sin descanso,
estoy contigo en las velas,
en el humo que engendra el camino,

en el olor del copal que recoge
el agua de ojos
de las mañanas sin voz.

VIII

Se sentó triste la lumbre
en la delicada piedra de moler,
con respeto le habló a la cal y al fogón
sobre la cicatriz de nuestro padre,
del por qué desollaron
al venadito que iba a ser maestro,
por qué desaparecieron a los hermanos
que llenarían de colores su mesa.

IX

Mauricio,
de la Montaña
vienes de lluvia,
abrazas mi estómago
y en silencio
crece el fuego
de nuestra tierra en tu memoria.

X

Hermano,
¡levántate!,
mira la cicatriz de nuestra piel,
las vueltas de nuestra madre
y el coraje con que teje tu nombre,
hasta encontrarte.

XI

Vives árbol,
árbol flor de corazón,
tu pie de tierra guarda mi voz *Mè'phàà*,
tu raíz de ombligo
la canción de mi nombre,
en tu brazo el pesar de mi vientre,
por tus hijos que no regresan,
los que sentaron el ojo del pueblo
en la noche de sangre,
árbol de Iguala,
en tu tallo, el acento triste
y la sombra de abuelos que nos mueve.

Earthen Skin

Translated by Paul Worley

for Mauricio Ortega Valerio, disappeared September 26, 2014, in Iguala, Guerrero

I

The night eagle soared over the town
looking to increase your suffering
with a prophecy
that your children become *kaagu*,
xpún, xpún, xpún, xpún:
that they cut this adobe with blood
to build a house made of dawn
that at the entrance to the town they hang,
scrawled in their language, a prayer calling upon
the crab-armed lightning and the crab-armed thunder
to clothe the heart of these Mountains.

II

Let us renew the year.
Let us burn flowers
to the four corners of the earth.
Let us offer blood
to the Lord of the hills
that he protect us from the dogs
from the men with guns
from the silence in the streets

from the sunset-colored wells
from the ones who carry off our children
from them, the people in the places
we labor.

III

A finger that illumines the world
unfurls from a clutch of flowers for the dead,
stirring the ghosts of prophecy
here where we are bound
crossing this space.

Burying these masks
they have numbered our days
in the language of bullets'
leaden insomnia, these masks
born of pistils and stamens,
in the wombs of rocks
they are turning over
the thirst of our hardened skins.

IV

Go hide in the caves.
Wait for the mist to fall,
the hunt to end.
They are out for blood,
to carry off our dreams

in buses with no return. watchful,
stealthy, dressed in rain,
and counting us on their fingers,
counting as we hide in the Mountains,
we of the hidden hand,
we of the red earth,
we who dwell in the House of *Lucio*.

V

My voice became a nest
the day they took you.
Everything they do to you, don't they
know, they do to me?
I howled lightning into your mouth
where with our friends we walked
and now . . . now no longer.
Where shall I hang this pain that burns hope?
Who shall lead our community?
Where shall I crucify these birds that buried my tongue?
In what world shall I have to follow your footsteps
now that your body is wrapped in fear
now that our rage sprouts from the earth?

VI

The bullet that bore your name
kicked up dust,
shocking the trees as,

along the thorns
of a rising sun,
fell
your scream
and broke, the cicadas burying
a watery umbilical cord
before the entire world,
to grow roots that will nurture our story
for future generations.

VII

Xtámbaa, I am with you in this world,
in this night of thunder,
faceless among the dancing spirits,
armless, ceaseless.
I am with you among the candles,
in the smoke that paves the road,
in the aroma of copal collecting
in the watery eyes
of all these voiceless tomorrows.

VIII

The sad fire sat down
on the delicate grinding stone.
It spoke to the lime and the hearth
about our father's scar,
about why they flayed

the deer who was to be a teacher
and why they disappeared our brothers
who would have surrounded the dinner table with colors.

IX

Mauricio—
you come from the Mountains,
you come from the rain,
you embrace me,
and in silence
the fire of our land
burns in your memory.

X

Brother—
get up!
Look at the scars on our skin.
Look at our mother's wandering.
Look at her rage
as she weaves your name,
searching until she finds you.

XI

You are alive in the tree,
a tree that flowers hearts.
Your foot-turned-earth shelters my Mé'pháá voice,

your navel-turned-root the song of my name,
your arm the weight of my abdomen.
You live for your children who won't return,
who sat in full view of the town on that bloody night.
Tree of Iguala—
the shadows of our ancestors and their sad accents
in your flowering branches bring me to tears.

Appendix II: Martín Tonalmeyotl

Translated by Whitney DeVos

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Tlamiktijketl

Notajtsin melauak yotekikualan,
tlauelchoka,
ixtenchachapaka ika choka.
Kijtoua tej kinkixtis ixtololojuan
niman kintlalpachos ijtik tlajle.

Xok kineke kisas ipan ojtle kampa kijtoua
ne kiyauak yemiyak nemej tlamiktijkej,
tlakamej uan xteiknelianej,
uan kimimiktsiaj inminiktsitsiuan
niman yajua,
san kimimiktsia ipitsotsitsiuan.

Sanka on tlamantle,
iyoltsin yepeua kualo.
Tetekuika kechka ueye itlakayo,
kimakase kampa mostla noso uiptla,
ixuiuan maixpoliuikan
niman noijke makisakan
tlamiktijkej ken yajua.

Carnicero

Mi padre está cruelmente molesto.
Llora de rabia,
derrama amargas lágrimas.

Quiere arrancarse los ojos
y enterrarlos bajo tierra.
Reniega mirar a la calle
porque sus competidores
son más sangrientos que él,
hacen trizas a sus propios hermanos,
mientras que él
sólo lo hace con los marranos.

Por ello,
el corazón comienza a enfermársele.
Se le forman sismos en todo el cuerpo
porque, mañana o pasado,
sus nietos pierdan la vista
y lleguen a ser
carniceros.

Butcher

Tormented, my father
sheds bitter tears
of rage.
He wants to gouge out his eyes
and bury them in the earth.
He refuses to look out into the street
where rivals
bloodier than he is
tear others to pieces.
Something my father does
only to pigs.
And so,
his heart begins to fail.
Quakes ravage his body,
terrified that, one day or the next,
his nietos will lose their way
and end up
butchers themselves.

Intajtsitsiuan ayotsitsintin no uelej patlanej

Uelej patlanej inkuatipan sokitlalkontin
inkuatipan miktlalkontin
Uelej patlanej inkuatipan tepossayolimej
Ipan ojtin techichikuitoltikej niman xalyojkej
Uelej kinyekana miyakej ayotsitsintin
Chikauak oyouaj kampa xaka najnauate
Kitekotonaj on tlatsakuajle kampa nemej
on tekapotschichetsopilomej uan kamelauak texipaltikej

Intajtsitsiuan ayotsitsintin no kimpiyaj
inmastlakapaluan
Inmastlakapaluan uan amo kaman siouej
Inmastlakapaluan uan melauak yolchikajkej
niman tlamachaj ika tonajle niman ika yeuajle

Intajtsitsiuan ayotsitsintin no uelej nejnemej
Nejnemej ixtlapojtiuej
nejnemej ixkualantiuej
maske tej nochojchokaj
ueye kinajmanchiua on uitstsintle
uan tlalaktok tlatlajko inyolo

Intajtsitsiuan ayotsitsintin tlakuiteuaj
Tlakuiteuaj kampa kitlasojtlaj inyesyojtsin
kampa kintlasojtla insiuatsitsiuan
kampa kintlasojtlaj inkoneuan

Amo kinokauiliaj inka manomapojpouakan
intlaluayotsitsiuan

Intajtsitsiuan ayotsitsintin no melauak apismikej
Kinekisiaj kiminextisiaj inkonetsitsiuan
Kinekisiaj kinkitskisiaj, kintenkuasiaj, kinnapalosiaj
Ipal on tlamantle tej amo nokauaj, kintemouaj
niman kintemouaj ipan inauiuilakachuan on ueyeatl
atlanelouaj ipan inayeualuan on tetojtomaktikej
tsopilokotsmatiltin
uan xtla kimatej, uan amo itla kinkokoua

Intajtsitsiuan ayotsitsintin no omesempoaltin iuan yeimej
ome sempoaltin iuan yeye tlakamej uan nomateketsaj
ome sempoaltin iuan yeye tlakamej uan tsajtsej ika yekpakilistle
ome sempoajle iuan yeye
ome sempoajle iuan yeye
ome sempoajle iuan yeye...

Los padres de las tortugas también saben volar

Volar sobre pantanos
y fosas clandestinas
Volar más allá del ruido de las moscas de fierro
Volar sobre carreteras curvosas y arenosas
Dirigir a miles de tortugas
Romper y burlarse del silencio
Romper los cercos
de perros-zopilotes hambrientos

Los padres de las tortugas también tienen alas
Alas de aliento incansable
Alas de fuerza para sobrevivir
bajo días y noches de espera

Los padres de las tortugas también saben caminar
Caminar con la frente en alto
con la mirada llena de rabia
aun a pesar de las lágrimas
aun a pesar de la espina
clavada en el centro del corazón

Los padres de las tortugas también saben luchar
Luchar por su sangre
por sus esposas
por sus hijos
Defender la dignidad humana
desde sus raíces

Los padres de las tortugas también tienen hambre
Hambre de encontrar a sus hijos
Hambre de poder tocarlos, besarlos, abrazarlos
Gritar con ellos para crear ecos
Por eso nadan y nadan
sobre mares arremolinados
sobre lagos de pingüinos gordos
e inhumanos

Los padres de las tortugas también son cuarenta y tres
cuarenta y tres puños levantados
cuarenta y tres gritos de esperanza
cuarenta y tres
cuarenta y tres
cuarenta y tres...

The Parents of Turtles Also Know How to Fly

To fly over swamps
and unmarked graves
To fly beyond the noise of the iron flies
Fly over highways, winding and sand-covered
To steer thousands of turtles
To shatter and mock the silence
To tear down the fences
of hungry buzzard-dogs.

The parents of turtles also have wings
Wings of tireless breath
Wings of strength to survive
the waiting, under the days and nights.

The parents of turtles also know how to walk
To walk with a head held high
with a look full of rage
in spite of the tears
in spite of the thorn
lodged in the core of their heart.

The parents of turtles also know how to fight,
To fight for their blood
for their wives
for their children
To defend human dignity
at its roots
The parents of turtles are also hungry
Hungry to find their children
Hungry to touch and kiss them, to hold them, to be able
to yell with them, to create echoes
That's why they swim and keep swimming
across whirling oceans
across lakes of penguins fat
and inhuman
There are forty-three parents of turtles
forty-three fists in the air
forty-three screams of hope
cuarenta y tres
cuarenta y tres
cuarenta y tres...

Chilapeños

Tajuamej
uan ne tiualeuaj ikxitlan Teskitsin
niman kechka iyeualijkan Chilapan,
kan tsiouej melauak techkuitlapanuia
se chiche tejtex uan ijtoka Nejmojtilistle.
Kamaniantika san ompaka tiyanaj niman xtechita.

Kamaniantika iuan topanouiyaj
niman tikchiuaj kampa xtikitaj.
Yajua, noijke kichiua kentla xtechita,
kentla xtechijnekue.

Kamanian maske melauak tlakpak tipatlanej,
yajua te no ompa yo techtokatij,
san uejkatsin techikxiijnektij.

Notajtsin
se tota uan sa kech ye tajtle,
uajtopone intlakotsin se kech yemankatlajtojle:
"kijtoua kampa on diablito ikonetsin
techkuitlapanuiaj san pampa yotechuelitak"
najua noijke nikijtoua kampa kineke
techixpolos, techyolmaxalos niman kema
techtekitiltis, techtlalis matikimasikan tokniuan
uan uelis tikinkuepaskej ken chiche itlapiyas.

Najua tej melauak nechyolajmana on tlamantle
niman nikualane kuak nikita nempoliue on ueye chikaualistle
uan ijtoka "pakilistle".
Najua tej kampa nitlakachilapeño,
san nikuajtoloua nokualak
niman amo nikmoya notlajtotsin
kampa tla onikmoyaj,
on nejmotilistle nechinuatojtojkilis itskuiuan
niman kuajton tej,
tlanesis ompa nitlajkaltos san nikojkoyoktik.

Chilapeños

Nosotros
los nacidos al pie del Teskitsin
y a las orillas de Chilapa,
caminamos por donde nos acosa
un perro que carcome llamado Miedo.
A veces nos escondemos cerca sin que él lo note.
Otras veces, nos cruzamos los pasos
y hacemos tuerta la vista.
Él también hace tuerto el olfato
para fingir que no ve.

Otros días, a pesar de volar muy alto,
nos damos cuenta que nos sigue.
Desde lejos olfatea nuestros pasos.

A mi padre,
de casi la edad de los huehues,
se le caen de la boca palabras sensibles como:
“ese hijo de la chingada
nos sigue sólo porque le gustamos”
y concuerdo al darme cuenta
que lo único que persigue es hacernos
como él, para cazar más humanos
y convertirlos en miados de perro.

A mí me causa coraje y rabia,
al ver contaminado ese aliento antes llamado
“alegría”.

En mi impaciencia de chilapeño,
trago mi propia saliva
y trato de no hacer llover la palabra
porque si no respeto eso,
el Miedo me mandará a sus perros
y estoy seguro que amaneceré
con el cuerpo incrustado de plomo.

Chilapeños

Those of us
born at the foot of the Teskitsin
and on the banks of the Chilapa,
wherever we go he stalks us—
a dog called Fear, gnawing, gnawing.
Sometimes we hide nearby without him noticing.
Other times, we cross paths
each turning a blind eye.
He closes a nostril,
pretending he's not on guard.

Other days, when we think everything's okay,
we realize he's there following us.
From way far off, his snout is tracking our steps.

My father,
almost the age of the huehues,
words fall out of his mouth like:
"that sonofabitch

he's only following us 'cuz he wants us, too"
and I agree, realizing
all he's after is making us
like he is, hunting more people down
and turning them into dog piss.

It makes me seethe and rage,
seeing corrupted a wind once called "joy."
Full of Chilapeño unrest
I swallow my own spit
and try not to let a single word tumble out
since if I don't obey,
Fear will sic his dogs on me
and I'll wake up
body caked in lead.

Jueves kuak nokua posojle

Melauak tej amo kualtsin kuak se tlakatl uan kana kipiya 35
niman yeuatok ipan se silla istak mixpan kixteke
ome tlakamej, se kana de 18 niman okse kana de 23
kampa ipan on naue inmauan kuikaj ome miktepostle

Xkualtsin tej mamitskuiteuakan kana 11:30 ika okualkan
kuak kinaman otikonsele moposol
kinaman tiktlaliliaya achijtsin orégano
chiltsintle chichiltik niman xonakatsintle uan sa chokatok

Xkualtsin kampa ipan se jueves kuak nokua posojle
yaka uan monakastlan yeuatok xuele kimate iposol
kampa ixpan yejko se chivo ika iteposkuakuajuan
niman ikuitl teposyoj
iuan se miktepostle pitentsin uan melajke kuajtekitlajtlastij

Xkualtsin tej kuak timotlalia itlajkotsian motonan
niman mochpotsin uan sa yektle niman sa /kualtelotsin
niman kema mamitsuikakan sankaseka
niman xok kaman uelis tikimitas

Xkualtsin tej kampa nikan ipa in ueye kalpan kampa
noye tlalneltokalo
kampa chantej miya tokniuan uan tlamachijchiuaj
uan tokaj mijla
aman tlatentok ika uachotepostlauilanaltin
niman ika tlakamej tekajkapostikej uan tentsajtsaktinemej ken sanamej

Xkualtsin tej kampa ika tonajle niman ika yeuajle
mikipijpiyakan ajakatsintle ipan ojtin
niman san kana omponka kalkuitlapan yokonkajkayajkej on tlapijpixketl
niman sa chokatok se siuatsintle uan kana kipiya 30 niman okse kana de 7

Xkualtsin tej kampa ipan se viernes okualkan
ipan se periódico oksejpa tikitas on tepostlauilanajle istak
on telpochxayakatl, on tsontsintle uan kine okonxinkej
niman on ixtololojtsitsintin yejyeualtikej sa tlaltsintle, sa tlikonextle

Xkualtsin tej tikajteuas motlaltipak san tleka
ompa tinemiya kan onochij se tlamantle uan amo kualtsin
noso kampa chok tinejnentsiaya yolik ipan ojtle niman otitlaixnamikito
noso kampa san tleka tej, noye tichikajtok kampa
titelpochtle

Jueves de pozole

No es lúcido ver que un hombre de 35
sea levantado de una silla blanca
por otros de 18 y 23 siendo la gran diferencia
cuatro manos jóvenes y dos fierros de muerte

Es anormal privar a alguien a las 11:30 am
de un pozole que apenas se prepara
con olorosas hojas de orégano
chile rojo en polvo y las lágrimas anticipadas de una cebolla

No es agradable ver que en un jueves de pozole
el de la mesa de a lado no pruebe su pozole
porque se le adelanta un chivo con cuernos y excremento de fierro
junto con una súper de corto alcance
mirándolo a los ojos

Es injusto sentarse en medio de la esposa
y una hija de alegre y tierna sonrisa
para después abandonarlas involuntariamente
hasta un tiempo de jamás regreso

No es lúcido ver una ciudad antes tan religiosa
llena de artesanos y campesinos
la cual hoy es invadida por tanques de guerra
y hombres con rostros de zanate

Es anormal mantener vigilado día y noche
al viento traicionero de las calles
mientras que a dos cuadras del vigilante
se revientan unas lágrimas femeninas de 30 y 7 años

No es agradable que un viernes por la mañana
en un periódico local, uno vuelva a mirar al mismo coche blanco
el mismo rostro joven, los mismos cabellos recién cortados
y los mismos ojos redondos hechos polvo y ceniza

Es injusto tener que abandonar una tierra propia
por el único delito de haber sido testigo de algo
o por delito de intensa gravedad
que es el de ser fuerte y joven

Pozole Thursday

It's not great to see a man of 35
yanked from a white chair
by two men, 18 and 23 being the big difference
four young hands and two pistols

It's not normal to, at 11:30 AM, deprive someone
of a hot pozole prepared

with fragrant oregano leaves
red chili powder and tears brought on by chopping onions

It's not nice, on pozole Thursday, to see someone
at the next table unable to eat his pozole
because a horned goat packing iron shit sits in front of him
at very close range
looking him straight in the eye

It's unfair to sit in between one's wife
and daughter, smiling happily and tenderly
before leaving them against your will
never to return

It's not great to see a city once so religious
once full of artisans and campesinos
today invaded by war tanks
by men with zanate faces[6]

It's not normal to keep watch
over a treacherous wind in the streets
day and night, while two blocks away
tears fall from cheeks 30 and 7 years old

It's not nice that, on a Friday morning
in the local newspaper, one sees the same white car
the same young face, the same freshly cut hair
and the same round eyes, turned to dust and ashes

It's unfair to be forced to abandon one's own land
for the sole crime of having seen something
or for the high crime
of being young and strong.

Nochanijkauan

Se tonajle nochanijkauan okinemilijke yeskej ken se tototsintle
yaskej uejka niman patlaniskej itsalko moxtle.
Chika yolik okinemilijkej
oyejkokej tsopilomej niman inka intentlatekiluan
okitetsojtsopinijke niman okechtsonteke on ajakatsintle.

Aman tej
tlayouisyotl niman xochitonaltsintle
inuaxka on xkuajkualtin tsopilotexipaltin.

Mi gente

Mi gente quiso ser ave un día
por el simple placer de volar sobre las nubes,
pero tardaron en decidir
y llegaron los buitres, y con sus filosos picos,
lastimaron al viento y le cortaron la cabeza.

Hoy por hoy,
el día y la noche secuestrados están
por esos sucios y violentos pajarracos.

My People

My people wanted to be a bird for a day
to have the simple joy of flying above the clouds,
but we took too long in deciding which
and the vultures drew closer, and with their sharp beaks,
wounded the wind, decapitated it.

As of today,
morning and night are being held hostage
by ugly, vile, vicious scavengers.

Notlaltipak

Notlaltipak melauak ueye
niman noijke ueye inejyamanyo.
Aman tej chika nojuitsia tonaltsintle
tlayouisyotl notlajtolpatla
ika inkualankachokalis tepostlauilanaltin
niman inkualankatsajtsilis miktepostin.

Mi mundo

Mi mundo es diverso
y triste por su ambivalencia.
Cada día que pasa
la noche cambia su silencio
por rugidos de autos
y gritos irritados de metralla.

My World

My world is varied
and sorrowful about its own ambivalence.
Each day that passes
night exchanges its silence
for the roar of cars
and the irate cries of shrapnel.

Nonauatlajtol

Kijtouaj kampa notlajtol nauatl
yokechtejkej,
yokikxisalojkej
niman yokixtlapachojkej.

Najua uan niualeua Atsakualoyan,
niteititis kampa xmelauak.
Yajua kipiya itsontekontsin,
ikxiuan makajtokej
niman melauak tlacha uejka.
Najua nikmastika
kampa notlajtol nejneme,
kampa xtsasalijtokej imauan niman iyoltsin,
sa tsikuintok ken se aokokapostsintle.

Mi lengua náhuatl

Cuentan que a mi lengua náhuatl
le han cortado la cabeza,
amarrado los pies
y vendado los ojos.
Yo, un hombre de Atzacoaloya,
mostraré lo contrario,
ella tiene cabeza,
goza de pies ligeros
y una vista inalcanzable.

Estoy seguro
que camina,
que posee brazos libres y que su alma
palpita como el corazón de un encinal.

My Náhuatl

They say my tongue Náhuatl
has had her head cut off,
her feet bound together
and her eyes swathed in gauze.
I, a man from Atzacoaloya,
will show otherwise:
Náhuatl has a head,
quick feet
and an insurmountable gaze.

I assure you,
my Náhuatl walks
arms free, her soul
beating like the heart
of an oak forest.

Amo xchiua

Amo xkisa,
amo xmotlalo,
amo xtlanemile.
In ikxiojtin kimpiyaj intlapijpixkauan
uan ijtokaj tlakaajakamej,
siuakojkoltsitsintin
niman xochikokonej.

Amo xchoka,
amo xuetska,
amo xmijyote.
Kampa tla timijyotsia poliuis tlaltipaktle,
tlaltipaktle kan chantej toniuan uan tlachistokej,
tlaltipaktle uan ijkatok ipan se miktlaltipak.

Amo xtlanemile,
amo xisteuetska,
yamok xtlajkuilo,
xkinkauile san noyajuamej matlajtokan tonaltsitsintin.

Recomendación

No salgas,
no hables,
no pienses.
Las veredas que pisas tienen sus espías
llamados hombres-viento,
mujeres-abuelas
y niños-flores.

No llores,
no rías,
no respires.
Porque si respiras se perderá el mundo
que parece de los vivos,
cimentado sobre una tierra de muertos.

No pienses,
no sonrías,
deja de escribir,
que el presente hable por sí solo.

Recommendation

Don't go out,
don't speak,
don't think.
On the paths you take are spies,

called men-wind
women-grandmothers
and children-flowers.

Don't cry,
don't laugh,
don't breathe.
If you breathe it will be lost, this seeming-world
of the living,
built over a land of the dead.

Don't think,
don't smile,
stop your writing:
let the present speak for itself.

Notes

1 This debate is famously deliberated in Plato's *Phaedrus*, where he considers the difference between orality, which was the tradition, and the more recent development of writing and literacy. He was skeptical of writing and argued that it was inhuman; Plato states in *Phaedrus* that "writing is inferior to speech. For it is like a picture, which can give no answer to a question, and has only a deceitful likeness of a living creature. It has no power of adaptation, but uses the same words for all. It is not a legitimate son of knowledge, but a bastard, and when an attack is made upon this bastard neither parent nor anyone else is there to defend it" (Plato 9).

2 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are our own.

3 The authors do not speak or read Mè'phàà and, while one of us has a basic level of Náhuatl, citations in this article refer to and translate from the Spanish versions of these poems. As Luz Lepe Lira and José López Jiménez's recent article on Tsotsil ritual discourse in Manuel Bolom's award-winning *Fiesta de la chicharra* (2017)

makes clear, examining the Indigenous-language versions of such texts opens up a whole new world to readers and requires intentional intercultural collaboration between Indigenous and settler researchers.

4 English translations of "*Xtámbaa/Piel de Tierra*" are Paul M. Worley's, and first appeared in *Asymptote*. The full citation can be found in the Works Cited section.

5 All English translations of Tonalmeyotl are based on translations made by Whitney DeVos, some of them revised since they first appeared in print. Additional modifications have also been made in the interest of accuracy and clarity. See the Works Cited section for the complete citations of these translations.

6 The zanate, also known as the great-tailed grackle or Mexican grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*), is a medium-sized passerine bird native to North and South America.

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