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The ways of the water : a reconstruction of Huastecan Nahua society through its oral tradition
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For Huastecan Nahuas, water is a symbolic reference. This book describes the multiple values attached to water through the practice of tale telling in this society. It analyzes several local tales about water manifestations such as floodings, thunderstorms, and waterlords, and explores what these mean to Huastecan Nahuas in their present socio-cultural context. The author shows how tales about this element represent and discuss current themes like the village's right to exist, social cohesion among villagers, the need to show respect towards nature, and life and death. The book reveals how the study of tale telling provides a promising angle to address and better understand today's indigenous cultures in Mexico.

Anuschka van 't Hooft, Professor of Anthropology at the Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí, Mexico, is co-author with José Cerda Zepeda of *Lo que relatan de antes Kuentos tének y nahuas de la Huasteca*.

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Anuschka van 't Hooft · *The ways of the water*

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Anuschka van 't Hooft

The ways of the water

A RECONSTRUCTION OF HUASTECAN NAHUA SOCIETY THROUGH ITS ORAL TRADITION

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The ways of the water

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The ways of the water

A reconstruction of Huastecan Nahua society through its oral tradition

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Preface

This book addresses literary studies and cultural anthropology in an aim to shed light on the interrelation between text and context in a Nahuatl-speaking area called the Huasteca in the eastern part of Mexico (see map 1). I discuss Nahua narrative in relation to its socio-cultural context and look at anthropological concerns such as the articulation of identity, the concept of community, worldview, and expressions of differentiation in society on these matters.

Regarding the topic of identity, many publications have tried to get a grip on this slippery, yet appealing concept that comprises how an individual or collective sees itself and others. Authors on identity issues in the Huasteca area underscore its conflict-ridden character. Since precolonial days, several indigenous people from distinct linguistic families have forged a way of living together in this area --each an independent *señorío* or state claiming specific natural resources and territorial units to optimize living conditions. During the colonial period, the native population constituted by Nahua, Otomí, Pame, Tének, Tepehua and Totonac peoples was dispersed to more inhospitable zones on the slopes of the Sierra Madre Oriental, Mexico's eastern mountain range. Spaniards and mestizos occupied the fertile lands along the coast and in the valleys, and introduced sugar cane, cattle, and Negro slaves to work for them. Indigenous peoples continued to work largely as farmers, complementing their diet with fishing activities in the lakes, rivers and pools; yet, their political, juridical and religious structures were profoundly reconstructed under Spanish hegemony. Each group created its own strategies to respond to these changes in order to defend cherished values in this new and hostile environment. Tensions increased at the beginning of the twentieth century, when private property became ever more consolidated at the expense of indigenous lands; in this densely populated area, the forced dislocations emanating from this process

provoked protests fought out legally in court, and violent outbreaks of unconformity. Meanwhile, oil was found in the area. As a result, villages were displaced, soil was contaminated, and a very small number of local inhabitants enjoyed an ephemeral wealth. In the 70s and 80s, poverty, political instability, land invasions, peasant movements, repression and violence became synonyms of the area. The elements that today distinguish this area of contrasts and conflict run across ethnic boundaries (Schryer 1990), as do the cultural expressions that accompany them (Sandstrom 1991).

I became more and more interested in the topic of identity, as I became aware of the fact that to Huastecan Nahuas, credited oppositions like indigenous peoples versus mestizos or Nahuas versus other indigenous peoples are not always meaningful, and that in this multiethnic area, ethnic labels are not held to be primary in self-definition. Neither do Huastecan Nahuas attribute much value to the idea of being Huastecans --that is, inhabitants of the Huasteca--, which is remarkable in an area which, divided geo-politically over six states, is known for its struggle to become a recognized, autonomous entity within Mexican society (Lomnitz-Adler 1992) and is often seen by outsiders as a historical, climatologic, cultural or otherwise united entity. In my search for what is important in Huastecan Nahua society, I found another, more prominent factor that provides identity: the often-mentioned focus on the community.

For anthropologists working in rural areas, fieldwork at the community or village level is still one of the ways preferred for doing research, because of the deeper insight that can be gained that way as compared to projects that comprise larger collectives. When anthropologists carry out their fieldwork mostly alone, the community --especially small ones-- is a more comprehensive social unit to handle; this allows a more detailed understanding of the research topic. Alongside this practical consideration, the focus on the community is advantageous in academic respect. In indigenous areas in Mexico, identity is often articulated at this local level (Bartolomé 1997). Many daily activities are carried out within the community; religious, socio-political and other collective structures concern the whole village and its inhabitants. During my fieldwork, the chosen thematic approach on Huastecan Nahua tales took me to several neighboring communities in which narrators where willing to share some tales with me, yet, every time, their narratives were told from the perspective of the village of residence. In ordinary talks, village characteristics were often compared and opposed to those of neighboring localities when valuing the collective to which people feel they pertain. Huastecan Nahua discourse centers on the ideally conceived village as a homogeneous and cooperative social unit and offers a look into how people want to present themselves. In daily life, these

presentations come to stand against disruptive forces like individual interests and economic divergence between villagers that contradict this unifying ideal. A study of the tension between the ideally perceived village and socio-cultural reality will contribute to the understanding of how Huastecan Nahuas see themselves and others in contemporary Mexico.

In the Huastecan Nahuas' worldview, the community is a central concept as well. People place their village of residence in the center of the cosmos. The other realms in the world are related to the community through a series of time and space concepts that are, in turn, associated with socially accepted models for interaction between the entities inhabiting each of the realms. The survival of many precolonial cosmological concepts in present day conceptions (see, for example, Gómez Martínez 2002) is remarkable. Though now represented and interpreted differently, these old concepts enable a discussion on cultural continuity in present-day indigenous societies in Mexico, which places Huastecan Nahua narrative in a dynamic process of internal change and adaptation. Besides its academic relevance, I believe it is vital to draw on this issue of cultural continuity; it confers Nahuas today a cultural heritage of which they have been often deprived.

In oral tradition, both the representation of a specific narrative during performance and the audience's interpretation of it provide ways to create meaning. The flexible character of tale telling constitutes a unique means to express, discuss, and interpret current issues within a general reference framework. The interplay between the narrator's intentions –for which questions on who is telling what and when, and, especially, for what reason, must be tackled-- and the listener's understanding of a tale provides insight into both shared values and individual understanding of the issues included in the tales. The discussion of a set of narratives about the same theme will show different ways of conveying meaning, as well as the multiple options of interpreting these representations; this is a good starting point for analyzing the forms of differentiation in society. Not all people confer the same relevance to elements that articulate identity. Tale telling leaves room for diverging expressions, opinions and meanings. How it does this is one of the topics that interests me.

I am one of many who was drawn to the Huasteca area because of the encouragement of the late Luis Reyes García. I felt attracted to the Huasteca from the moment he showed it to me on a linguistic map of Mexico. The area stood out as one of the most densely colored; this meant many languages were spoken there and it was a predominantly indigenous zone. During my graduate studies with Dr. Maarten Jansen, to whom I owe not only my professional formation but also many insights on current indigenous issues, we had had many discussions on the importance of learning the

language of the people one works with. I became convinced that this would provide a better view on the concepts that the participants themselves used and valued. I had told Luis that I wanted to do research on "something" that involved fieldwork in an indigenous tongue. His Nahuatl classes at Leiden University, in which I learned the basics of this language, led to my evident choice of a Nahua-speaking village. Luis's colorful map and his promise to help me find a place to do my research settled the matter. I am very grateful to him for his outstanding consideration.

Luis' indications led me to Huejutla, the regional centre of the Huasteca in the state of Hidalgo. Next to parts of San Luis Potosí and Veracruz, this southern part of the Huasteca area is inhabited by Nahuas. Refugio Miranda San Román, director of the local Nahuatl Language Academy, kindly offered me his assistance. He not only found me a place to conduct my fieldwork, but also cleared up my many doubts on Nahua culture and sacrificed many afternoons while going through the tales I had taped and helping me with the transcriptions and translations into Spanish. I am not sure whether I should thank him more for sending me to the Xochiatipan *municipio* ("municipality") or for his generous cooperation during many afternoons that, spread over the last ten years, must have amounted to an enormous sum of time.

By 1993, when I first came to the *municipio* of Xochiatipan, not much research had been done on the area. The only sources available then were two thesis from the ethnolinguistic program coordinated by the Mexican *Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social* (Hernández Cuéllar 1982; Romualdo Hernández 1982), one general ethnography (Arroyo Mosqueda 1993), and a few manuscripts with valuable yet little information, drafted by its inhabitants (Del Ángel Bautista 1991; Hernández Beatriz 1989). In adition to these sources, my fieldwork was guided chiefly by data on Nahuas in the Veracruzan part of the Huasteca, where more anthropological research had been conducted, some including oral tradition (Ixtlamahua Montalvo et. al. 1982; *La Sal* 1982; Olguín 1993; Reyes García 1960; Reyes and Christensen 1990; Sandstrom 1991; *Seis versiones del diluvio* 1982; Williams García 1955a and 1955b, among others). Still, I found several differences between what was written about Veracruzan Nahuas and practices in "my" Nahua village. As a modest contribution to the information available, I wrote a general description of the village life I was able to discern in the community where I lived for almost a year. I hope this description conveyed the respect I came to have for the people who live in this exuberant, yet strenuous, area and who so kindheartedly opened their homes to me and helped me to gain a grasp on their culture.

My interest in tales came later. During my first stay, I had collected a set of tales as a means to learn the Nahuatl language. The possibility of listening to them again and again, from narrators or on tape, helped me to gain vocabulary and become familiar with common grammar structures. Soon, however, I became fascinated by the tales' contents, the ways in which they were told, and the means they provided to learn about Huastecan Nahua culture. The tales discuss all kinds of happenings that are crucial to people. Many tales are held to be true and belong to a type that is largely cherished. Others are seen as fictitious and are primarily meant to entertain. The tales were strikingly expressive and soon managed to direct me towards literary studies and their implications on anthropological research. If this study contributes to understand oral narrative as a way to express identity issues in contemporary indigenous societies, then this is, above all, due to the material and the people who passed it on to me. I want to thank all the narrators, especially Don Gregorio, for opening up this world of experiences to me, as well as Bonifacio for the telling and for helping me out on so many language issues I keep struggling with.

There are many others who have given me ideas, information, or other kinds of intellectual stimulus and whom I wish to mention here because of their assistance and support during my academic venture into the Huasteca. I can only mention a few. In the first place, I am in debt to my supervisors Dr. Mineke Schipper and Dr. Jarich Oosten for their critical comments and encouragement during the long years of shaping and reshaping this study on Nahua oral tradition. Due to my particular situation as an external Ph.D. student with a full-time job in a foreign country, I must have been anything but the ideal student, and I thank both for their professional and personal considerations towards me.

When Hungarian anthropologist György Szeljak came to the Xochiatipan municipality to study identity topics, I met the colleague I had so often craved for; with him, I could discuss *in situ* my doubts and ideas on the material I had gathered. His well-grounded theoretical reflections were always very helpful and his sensible way of approaching people was a first-class lesson in fieldwork techniques. To him, a special thanks for his presence and cooperation. Another credit goes to José Antonio Flores Farfán for stimulating my interest in linguistic issues. I have not been able to carry out all his suggestions on how to present the tales, taking into account the performance aspects, yet his views on the subject were valuable when deciding on the best way to present the material I wanted to discuss. To Arturo Gómez and François Lartigue I want to express my gratitude for their insights and company on trips to the Veracruzan part of the Huasteca so I could get a more general view on Huastecan Nahua culture.

Furthermore, I want to thank Jesús Ruvalcaba and Juan Manuel Pérez Zevallos of the Huasteca Program at the *Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social* (Ciesas) in Mexico-City for having organized the *Encuentros* of researchers working in the Huasteca area; for me, this was one the main platforms for presenting and exchanging views on Huastecan Nahua oral tradition with other scholars and students. They include, in addition to those mentioned above, Miguel Aguilar Robledo, José Cerda Zepeda, Román Güemes Jiménez, Ildefonso Maya Hernández, Alan Sandstrom, Franz Schryer, Roberto Williams García, and Rafael Martínez de la Cruz, among many others. In the Netherlands, I am grateful to Jette Bolle, Laura van Broekhoven en Pieter Hovens for their academic discernment, practical assistance, and emotional support. I cherish a special appreciation for my family who has been always there for me, however exotic my academic interests must seem to them.

Several organizations and institutions were involved during the shaping and realization of this study. Preparations to secure details in the field before drafting the final research proposal were supported by the Fund *Catharina van Tussenbroek* in the Netherlands, as well as Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During the research project's implementation, which lasted six years, the CNWS Research School for Asian, African and Amerindian studies of Leiden University provided the opportunity to carry out fieldwork. A stay as guest-researcher at the Mexican *Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social* (Ciesas) made it possible for me to write this book's first draft while using its academic facilities. At the end of the writing period, I gratefully took adavantage of a two-months leave granted by the Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí (UASLP) to work on the last adjustments for the book's final version.

Notes on Nahuatl translation and orthography

Every transcription, translation and presentation of oral communication is a form of analysis and evaluation of the source material, an initial filter through which the reader receives the original information. The material's final edition carries the stamp of the transcriber/translator as a second voice that unwittingly gives a novel meaning to the text. In an attempt to account for the filter applied to the material discussed in this study --the voice that can be heard through the texts-- I will elaborate here on the process I pursued in reproducing Huastecan Nahua tales.

A majority of the tales presented in this study was prepared in close consultation with the narrator. When feasible, a first transcription and translation of the taped material into Spanish was made with the narrator, or (s)he was given the Spanish translation for authorization. Obviously, for the monolingual narrators the translation procedure was not practical, and the English renderings could not be revised by any of the contributors. Yet, the existence of an authorized Spanish version helped in many instances solve dilemmas while translating into English; problems about the intended meaning of central concepts, expressions and metaphors could be discussed. An effort was made to stay as close as possible to the original, respecting repetitions, parallelisms, sentence endings, and so on, which allows a close reading of the original text for people who are not familiar with Nahuatl. Although the narrators make the voices in the tales speak clearly, explanatory or interpretative notes have been added where this seemed necessary. Whenever the use of a Nahuatl term with multiple meanings is ambiguous, the choice for a specific translation is explained and accounted for in an accompanying note. Apart from the narrator's explanations, the following sources have been consulted in order to justify these choices: Frances Karttunen's *Analytical Dictionary of Nahuatl* (1992, -FK in its abbreviation), the *Huasteca Nahuatl (Hidalgo) Fieldworker's Vocabulary* compiled by Neville Stiles

(1980, -NS), and, to a lesser extent, Rémi Siméon's voluminous dictionary of Nahuatl language (1994, -RS), as well as the sixteenth century Nahuatl vocabulary edited by Alonso Molina (1992, -AM).

All Nahuatl textual extracts in this book are printed in a two-column presentation, in which the translation follows the original on the right side. Where discussing a long tale or comment, the lines have been given a number, and references to these numbers are made in the text. On the few occasions in which the textual quotation is derived from a conversation or a tale telling session in Spanish, only the English translation is given.

One must keep in mind that reading the tales presented presupposes a certain awareness concerning the oral narrative's unique features, which conditions the reading of these tales and sets them apart from written narrative. Style elements such as accumulations, redundant speech, or parallelisms, as well terms and expressions in sentences, distinguish oral thinking and expression, as they are necessary tools for memorizing and transmitting oral tales (Ong 1996:40-42). Meaning is transmitted through means other than just lexical elements; by way of gestures, pauses, and the softness or loudness of speech, which enliven the performance, giving it a particular rhythm or accent that often unveils the narrator's personal attitude towards the subject matter. Moreover, in oral transmission there is no way of correcting an error, for no pronounced term or expression can be retracted. Hesitation on part of the narrator is an indication of the difficulties faced during verbalization, while choosing the narrative structure (at the start of a narrative), the beginning of a sentence (searching for special features of the characters and events), or words and expressions (while coding objects and events), which reveals the condition of a narrator as a conscious, occasional or passive bearer of the cultural knowledge being transmitted. When dealing with a tale, some of the most salient features or qualities of style and performance are represented as follows in the written version. A new line accounts for pauses; hesitation without the uttering of sound is transcribed as three dots. Sentence endings are represented by a period, without this necessarily implying a pause. Emphasized words are written in capitals, whereas those softly pronounced are put in brackets. The tales include false starts, fill-ins, and other minor flaws, the same as the narrator uttered them. Square brackets are employed in the original when the tape is not clear enough to discern what is being said; the same brackets allow additions in the translation to clarify certain meanings. Occasionally, a significant detail concerning the performance is presented in a footnote.

By no means does this method of representing narrative claim to do justice to the abundance of details expressed during the performance itself. Non-verbal expressions during performance, like visual elements, are lost. The

possibility of grasping the narrators' artistic qualities by reading the translation is reduced. Neither can the session's atmosphere (emotions, tension, irony, differing voices) be adequately reflected in the translation. Apart from the fact that my main concern is with the interrelation between the tales' semantic values and their cultural context, and not so much with the narrator's style or vocal qualities, the recording situation would perhaps not be suitable for a type of presentation that takes all non-verbal aspects into account, for no tale was ever represented in a typical, natural telling situation (see Chapter 2). In any case, access to the original renderings will undoubtedly enrich the tales' appreciation and improve the understanding of tale telling in Huastecan Nahua society. Those who wish to revise the original tales may contact me for a copy of the tapes.

Nahuatl orthography continues to be a problematic issue. Almost five hundred years after having adopted the Latin alphabet in written Nahuatl, partly substituting the precolonial pictographic writing system[1], its orthography has not been standardized yet. In today's literature, it seems that every author uses an alphabet he or she likes best. The forms employed range from the phonetic alphabet (for example, Edmonson 1980), classic Nahuatl (for example, Hill 1985; Stiles, Maya and Castillo 1985), a form between classic and modern Nahuatl (for example, Beller and Beller 1978; Sandstrom 1991; Stiles 1980), and modern Nahuatl (for example, Hernández Cuéllar 1982; Reyes Antonio 1982; Segre 1990), to personally designed alphabets that best suit the local linguistic situation (for example, Flores Farfán 1997; Reyes García and Christensen 1989). All these forms have their own merits and advantages, but also contribute to an increasing heterogeneity in Nahuatl orthography. To avoid adding more variations to the landscape of Nahuatl orthography, I have chosen to follow classic Nahuatl when dealing with precolonial or early colonial concepts, in order to distinguish them from present-day ones, and one of the more customary forms of writing today's language, that is, using the alphabet established in 1982 by a group of Nahua representatives at a conference held in Pátzcuaro, in the Mexican state of Michoacán (López Mar and Reyes García 1982). This alphabet consists of the following characters:

vowels[2]:	a, e, i, o, u
semivowel:	y
consonants:	ch [č], j[3], k, l, m, n, p, s, t, tl [λ], ts [ȼ], x [š]

One of the advantages of this alphabet is its growing familiarity among Nahuas, at least in the Huasteca area. It is authorized by the Secretary of Public Education for writing the language and is used in its official schoolbooks (at primary level and in its adult literacy program) in the areas where Huastecan Nahuatl is spoken (*Nauatlajtoli tlen Uaxtekapaj tlali* 1997;

Instrucción del alfabetizador 1996[4]). Though not many adult native speakers are accustomed to reading Nahuatl --and even less, to writing it-- today's schoolchildren and adults taking the literacy programs are taught to use it. In addition, I found a broad intelligibility among Huastecan Nahuas who are literate in Spanish in reading texts written in this alphabet[5]. Though this last finding does not mean that other spellings would not be understood, the communities' acceptance of the 1982 spelling is a good base for choosing this way of writing.

A final reason for using this alphabet is an ideological one. Perhaps the modern alphabet's main achievement, apart from its establishment by Nahua speakers, is its attempt to become independent from the Spanish language. Different from the classical way of writing Nahuatl, which was developed in the sixteenth century by friars dedicated to studying the Aztecs' language and culture and was framed in the Spanish language, it was felt that it should not have to be necessary to know Spanish spelling and pronunciation rules when reading or writing the indigenous tongue. Adjustments were made in order to obtain this self-rule[6]. Though not fully obtained, the still-existing dependency on Spanish rules does not hamper the efforts to develop and use a new spelling as proposed by Nahuas themselves.

A few points in the Nahuatl alphabet used are questionable, mainly regarding orthography. A first problem concerns the occasional omission of vowel length. In the 1982 spelling, vowel length is written as /j/ at the end of a verb, but is excluded at all other positions (where a /j/ stands for a fricative or aspirate [h]), even if the difference between long and short vowels in Nahuatl is a phonemic one. In this way, the noun written as "metstli" can signify both "leg" or "thigh" [metstli] and "moon" [me:tstli]. The reader has to infer from the context which of the two meanings the author intends, and, if reading aloud, pronounce the noun with either a long or a short vowel sound according to this interpretation[7]. In accordance with the official spelling, in this study all vowels are written as a sole vowel, irrespective of their length. This might be confusing with respect to the word's correct pronunciation, but prevents two other problems: First, the writing of a /j/, if not at the end of a verb, is now surely read as either a fricative or intervocalic [h]. Secondly, the writing of a double vowel (which is the way more often proposed to write vowel length) indicates a double pronunciation of that vowel, not vowel length. *Kijtoua* ("he says it") can now unmistakably be pronounced ki-ij-TO-ua; *kuaakanoa* ("wooden canoe") reads as kua-a-ka-NO-a.

A second inconvenience of the new orthography relates to the omission of stress, which may produce disorder when reading a text. In Huastecan Nahuatl, stress falls on the penultimate syllable, but deviation from this

standard is common in abbreviations, such as *nelí* (from *nelía*, true), ijkí (from *ijkini*, like this), or nojkí (from *nojkino*, also). In the municipality of Xochiatipan, this case is especially intricate, as the present tense of verbs ending in -ia or -oa is generally abbreviated: in the present tense of verbs, the pronunciation of the final syllable is omitted, without changing the original stress pattern, which causes stress to fall on the last syllable. The verb *tlachikuenia* (pronounced tla-chi-kue-NI-a, to wash clothes) is not used in its formal present tense *tlachikuenia* (tla-chi-kue-NI-a, he/she washes clothes), but pronounced *tlachikuení* (tla-chi-kue-NI, he/she washes clothes). Due to this phenomenon, the distinction between the present and past tense is sometimes only marked by a shift in stress. Past tense *tlachikueni* (tla-chi-KUE-ni, he/she washed clothes) differs from present tense *tlachikuení* (tla-chi-kue-NI, he/she washes clothes) only in stress. Another example is the pair *kipakti* (ki-PAK-ti, he/she liked it) and *kipaktí* (ki-pak-TI, he/she likes it). Despite the fact that the official alphabet does not use diacritical marks, on occasions stress is a distinctive element to interpret a Nahuatl text correctly and be able to pronounce a word properly. As stress has become phonemic in the local variant of Nahuatl, I have chosen to use an accent mark whenever the stress falls on any other than the penultimate syllable.

Besides the use of diacritical marks indicated above, and in order to pave the way for a better understanding of the tales' Nahuatl version, I have made two further small adjustments regarding orthography.

a. The irreducible hybridism of all languages is overtly present in Nahuatl as well, as it draws on material from a variety of sources, among others, those concerning lexical terms that have been borrowed. Frequent words loaned such as time indications (hours and days), numerals, interjections, first names and toponyms, have been deeply integrated in modern-day spoken Nahuatl and enrich the language in several ways. Some of the words borrowed have been adapted to Nahuatl phonology and/or word building: *kontrataroa* (from Spanish *contratar*, "to hire" or "to engage"), *kuartiya* (from Spanish *cuartillo,* "measure of five liters"), *ipapá* ("his father", from Spanish *papá*), *chote* (from Tének *tzote'*, "*cuajilote*") or *chaka* (from Tének *tsaka*, *bursera simaruba*). The words loaned are used in their Nahuatl orthography whenever possible. The incorporation of the words loaned in the present spelling explains the sporadic use of the letters /b/, /d/, /f/, /g/, /ñ/, /r/, /v/, /w/, or /z/ in Nahuatl texts.
b. In the case of proper names and topographical indications, the commonly known and accepted –Spanish-- orthography is used. The village called Acanoa is, therefore, written with a /c/ instead of a /k/, observing its official writing; the name Juan is written as such and not as "Ijua", its most common pronunciation[8]. In all other instances Nahuatl orthography applies; the name of the corn spirit, Chikomexochitl, and the local hill called Chikauas, among others, are written the new way. I have

made but one exception to this principle: in Nahuatl, according to the 1982 spelling rules, the voice "Nahua" should be written as "Naua". As a reminiscence of Spanish spelling rules, the /h/ is now omitted in Nahuatl because of its muteness and, consequently, it lacks phonological qualities as a sound. A larger number of people, mostly speakers themselves, eliminate the /h/, not only when writing in Nahuatl, but also when translating into Spanish. However, in the Spanish and English orthography, the /h/ is more often than not preserved. This is the situation of the indigenous people better- known as "Nahuas", including the /h/, that is, in the arrangement adopted in classic Nahuatl. For the sake of clarity, both in English as in Nahuatl, the /h/ will be respected in the words "Nahua" and "Nahuatl".

Despite the existing alphabets, the lack of a standard for writing Nahuatl, together with the many existing variants, make it difficult to write the language "well". As dynamic as each language is, it is most common to find one and the same person change a word's pronunciation in the same conversation. *Kamauia* is a variant of *kamouia* ("to talk"), and both are accepted pronunciations, fully understood by all speakers. The same applies to the personal pronouns *yajuantin*, *yejuantin*, *inijuantin* (at times without the pronunciation of a final [n]), which provide us with six different, recognized ways of saying "they". The shorter *sa* is often used instead of *san* (only, solely). The verb *mauiltia* may also be pronounced *mauiltiya* (to play). It is not for me to decide which of each term's variants should be adopted as the standard in Nahuatl writing. I have tried to be faithful to each narrator's pronunciation, and, as a result, almost all possible variants pop up in the texts. This decision may make it more strenuous for the reader to understand the original text, but I hope it helps disclose the richness of Nahuatl as a spoken language.

Introduction

For Huastecan Nahuas, an indigenous people[9] living in a subtropical region called the Huasteca, Mexico, water is an encompassing, cosmological category that delimits life in time and space, and is used as a symbolic reference of essential concepts such as birth and death, origin, and fertility. Water, embodied in a universal flood, paved the way for humanity today and is, therefore, related to the end of times, to death, and to a new creation of mankind. Called Apan, the Water World, the liquid represents one of the realms of the universe and, thus, marks spatial bounds. Water is present in the sacred hill around which village life is constructed; it evokes origins and the right to exist. In the form of fresh rains, water brings fertility to the crops, yet by means of anti-social Water Lords that live in its depths, it can also drown people and become a place of death. Water establishes society norms; it is a regulator of interpersonal relations between villagers and with outsiders.

Water's central position in Nahua life may also be noted in Nahua oral tradition[10]. There are many tales[11] about water; prayers are directed to the water guardians, and anecdotes circulate about the latest case in which someone nearly drowned in a certain locality. As part of a society's discourse through which cultural knowledge is conveyed and valued, oral tradition serves as a guide of what is considered relevant and what must be learned, defended and remembered. Narrating past and present events reflects, discusses and values an agrarian indigenous society's current issues and concerns (cf. Reyes García and Christensen 1990:14). The recurrence of topics involving water in Huastecan Nahua oral tradition suggests that these topics are meaningful to people. Based on a sample of Huastecan Nahua tales concerning water, I will analyze how they confer meaning to a series of issues that are relevant to today's agricultural society in this part of Mexico.

Oral tradition selects and keeps experiences that are considered important, and serves as a kind of selective collective memory (Gossen 1974). At the same time, the performance (the actual execution or practice of verbal art forms) offers the opportunity to reflect on these experiences. In this way, oral tradition is entwined with the learning, the conservation and the reinterpretation of norms and values, and serves as a mechanism for a collective's desired internal social functioning (Taggart 1983). However, the mechanism does not restrict itself to this internal functioning. It also guides relations with other people or with saints, guardians and spirits. In a direct or symbolic way, consciously or unconsciously, each narrator presents and values current issues that a society is dealing with, as well as the way in which the present should be lived. The material handled by oral traditions serves to explain how to conceive and relate oneself to those of the own group, and to the outside world. By doing so, the narrator and his listeners reconstruct social identity (cf. White 1994). My aim is to understand the specific way in which Huastecan Nahua oral narrative --as a part of discourse-- works in this articulation and reconstruction process of identity.

Since the 70s, identity issues have become an increasingly more important research subject in social science studies. Many definitions have been proposed; yet, its dynamic character as a changing, relative and subjective process involving many fields of human interaction makes it almost impossible to tangibly pin down the concept. People derive identity from many factors, like their profession, the ethnic group they belong to, the village where they live, or the family position they hold, to name but a few examples. Each of these identities is expressed and assessed according to particular social contexts in which the participants choose to stress certain aspects of their identity (cf. Oosten and Remi 1999).

Identity has to do with ideas about how a collective sees itself in relation to others, and with practices that express those ideas (Schipper 1999). In social anthropology, this selfdefinition and its articulation have mostly been studied from the outside, that is, by an external observer who establishes relationships, patterns, and similar things on issues such as socio-political organization, ritual, modes of production, and other aspects of contemporary life. By demonstrating how identity issues are treated in Huastecan Nahua oral tradition, this subject is studied from the people's own viewpoints, seeing how the participants discuss, reconstruct and value these during a performance. By staying close to each tale's literal version, just as it is narrated in the Nahuatl language, and discussing the meaningful elements indicated by the narrators and their audience, the aim is to produce a view on Huastecan Nahua identity as reproduced by the people involved. The set of tales to be discussed was collected in the Xochiatipan municipality situated in the state of Hidalgo, one of the six federal entities that constitute

this subtropical, multiethnic, and rural area on the northeastern border of Mesoamerica[12], called Huasteca.

In Huastecan Nahua society, the reconstruction of identities opposes individuals and communities as it emphasizes the characteristics that mark differences between them. In water tales, these identities have cosmological foundations. Nahuas oppose others who live in realms differing from their own. These oppositions reveal ideas on worldviews, in terms of spatial categories. The considered time depth of each tale connects these spatial categories to time aspects; this makes it possible to study this worldview more completely. As time categories are linked to tale type and, as a result, to assessment, the tale's truth-value can be treated in relation to current socio-cultural conceptions about water. Relationships between the realms as described in the tales define others, but also the community itself as the entity that is opposed to it: the community's existence is cosmologically founded by means of water; cosmological agents that relate to water, structure social life. Behavior attributed to protagonists living in the water correlates with behavioral norms towards them, and values attached to the water realm relate to the community's valuations. The analysis of these relationships and values not only reveals cosmological and cultural conceptions of the water in its manifold aspects; it also presents how Huastecan Nahuas situate themselves in relation to the liquid.

The selected tales on water shall not be discussed according to their composition, style or other qualitative merits, but rather, on what they contribute to social and cosmological questions and how they do so. Thus, the subject of oral narrative is approached in an interactive, process-like way. Oral narrative as a process implies an emphasis on the performance context, the existing differentiation in society, and current processes of change and continuity within Huastecan Nahua communities. It also means that one does not only pay attention to "ancient" forms that have been transmitted throughout history (often called tradition), but rather to the whole array of verbal descriptive expressions in present-day society. As a living tradition, oral narrative is dynamic, and comprises ancient and new forms or tale types. It entails different interpretations and valuations in the course of time and, according to local and/or personal circumstances, involves various forms of tales' presentation and representation.

The participants' interpretation of this varied material is based on cultural conventions of how to understand certain themes, characters, motifs and metaphors, and the values attributed to them. Also, the understanding of oral tradition is bound to cultural models for thinking and experiencing. At the same time, and based on this common reference point , there is certain flexibility in the comprehension of the socially established standards. Though

narratives are selected to carry given cultural meanings, in line with prevailing belief systems, meaning is, in the first place, a dynamic interaction between the narrator and his audience (Siikala 1990). Oral narratives acquire their meaning through the narrator's interests or intentions and the listener's needs as positioned subjects, that is, as persons with interests, intentions, and needs that are framed by the performance context, and include the audience's composition, the time of year, the place of telling, the narrator's expertise and other circumstances. A tale's meaning is the product of the narrator's artistic contribution, personal background, and motives for telling, as well as the listeners' interpretations: the metaphors and symbols employed in the tales allow various opinions about the ideas expressed. Thus, individual standpoints may be both expressed and received through narrative.

A contextualization in which cultural and cosmological concepts, outlooks on life and perceptions of oral tradition are outlined, allows me to establish parallels and divergence between the oral presentations of the values on the one hand, and socio-cultural reality on the other; through this, the interaction between the tales and current Huastecan Nahua life can be shown. Based on a study between the tales and the socio-cultural context, two disciplines have been relied upon to show this interaction: literary studies and cultural anthropology. The main goal of combining these two disciplines is to analyze the forms of changing identities in present-day Huastecan Nahua society, through the study of its oral tradition. The aim is to analyze the interrelation between Huastecan Nahua socio-cultural reality and its literary produce in order to see how identity issues are presented and reconstructed through narratives dealing with water. This will broaden the understanding of the dynamics of Huastecan Nahua oral tradition --and, more specifically, its narrative-- as well as the ways in which social and cosmological concepts of identity develop within a particular society.

How this book is organized

The first chapter deals with the cultural background of Huastecan Nahua tale telling. The description of Huastecan Nahuas' socio-cultural situation today interrelates concepts, activities, social and cultural expressions, and their valuation as found in daily life. In this chapter, the characterization of one village projects this daily life above all as a communal way of living evolving around a cycle of ritual acts. On a cosmological level, the rituals express relationships with beings living outside the community. Towards this outer world, public rituals establish, affirm and harmonize relationships with beings that interact with Huastecan Nahua life and influence its course, such as water, earth, wind, fire, and corn spirits. Within the community, the activities involving rituals initiate, confirm or revitalize ties between villagers.

As a whole, the community's ritual cycle shows how people define themselves first as *maseualme* (persons) and *vesinos* (villagers), and specifies cosmological relationships that are important in this agricultural society.

The tales chosen for this study are the mere tip of a constantly increasing number of tales' versions present in society; each performance is a unique happening that cannot be repeated, in which a tale is recreated in agreement with momentary circumstances. These circumstances mold the representation and the listeners' subsequent interpretation in any given session. Hence, they also influenced the course of my fieldwork and the conclusive arrangement of this book. The personal background and views of the people who told the tales, the recording context, my relation to the narrators and particular interest in their tales, all these factors shaped the tales' representation and, consequently, the tales' selection and presentation here. A short presentation of the narrators and an explanation on how this study came about, might throw some light on the role of contextual matters in Nahua tale telling in general, and on their influence in this study in particular; this will be presented in Chapter 2.

Besides methodological questions, Chapter 2 also provides a commentary on this study's conceptual framework and the way the narratives were analyzed. The Huastecan Nahua category of a *kuento* (tale) and its subtypes is the first to be reviewed. Prevailing ideas about narrative in this society see the tales as an unchangeable and authoritative set of narratives on important or less important topics. The clash between this static view and the dynamic practice of tale telling is most prominent in tales that are considered to be truthful, and in which an account of a real happening is told. Deviations from a theoretically conceived standard performance are not tolerated and, when necessary, the audience corrects the narrator. The tension between the reality of tale telling and the conceived ideal telling is one of the topics to be discussed here. The theme of identity and the ways it is expressed through oral narrative will be dealt with as well.

The next three chapters contain a presentation and discussion of Huastecan Nahua tales. The decision to insert the full tales was made based on the arguments that the material is not familiar to every reader, and that a more thorough understanding of its meaning may be generated through a careful examination of the type of language used. Despite a rising interest in studying oral traditions of Mesoamerican peoples in the last decades (see, for example, Burns 1983; Gossen 1974, 1999; Knab 1983; Reyes and Christensen 1990; Taggart 1983, 1997; Tedlock 1986), the study of this subject in the Huasteca area has not really developed[13]. Huastecan Nahua tales, familiar as some of them may seem to those acquainted with indigenous oral traditions from other parts of Mexico, have not reached

great audiences and their specific traits are not widely known. Their inclusion is meant to be a modest contribution to fill this gap in the material now available. Also, the insertion of the transcriptions makes it feasible to highlight special features of the type of language use in its form, context and content, in order to follow the discussion of the tales more closely. Without pretending to be an exclusively linguistic exercise, these features and their interpretation provide insight into the meaning of these oral tales in everyday life. By including the transcriptions and translations in each of the chapters where the tales are discussed, the material is given its place as an integral part of this study.

The first of these chapters deals with the Nahua flood tale. The fulfillment of the threat of destructive celestial waters forms the background against which a series of cosmogonic and cosmological issues are addressed. These issues range from the hare's symbolic meaning as the Lord of Time and Huastecan Nahua cyclical conception of time, to ideas about postdiluvian existence as a completely new and improved existence of mankind. The tale places Huastecan Nahuas within the present world, both in time and space, and helps understand a series of considerations on cultural continuity within present day society, as expressed through oral narrative. The flood tale's discussion in both a synchronic and diachronic perspective situates current Huastecan Nahua society within Mesoamerican culture traditions.

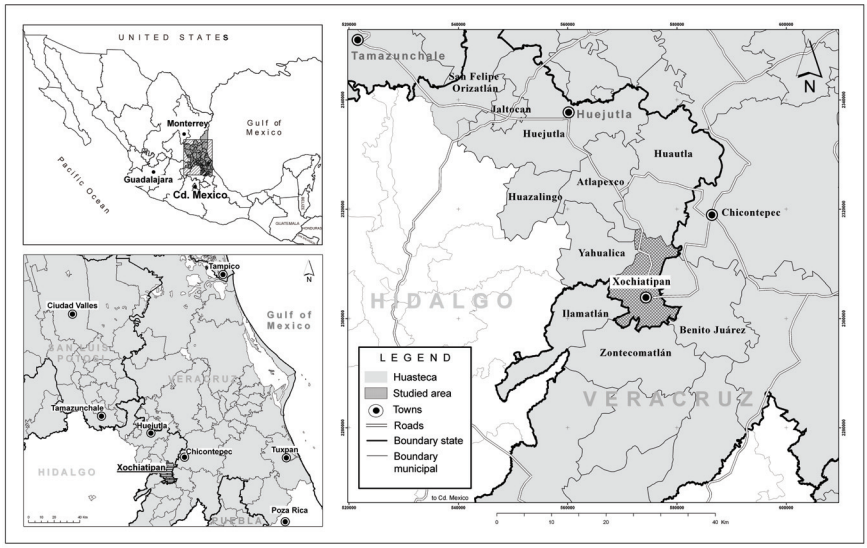
Chapter 4 reviews the role of rain, storms, thunder, lightning and other celestial aspects of water. The tellurian waters, that is, the sea, rivers, wells and other terrestrial aquatic reservoirs, will be discussed in the fifth chapter[14]. Chapter 4 is dedicated to the appearance of flooding water creatures and their acts --creatures that install themselves near villages and start to cause inundations. Here, hurricanes, mermaids, dangerous water snakes and other destructive characters and phenomena enter the narrative stage. The threat of perishing in a local flood stirred up emotions in ancient times and the events involved are among the favorites of Huastecan Nahua tale telling. The tales not only provide information on how the need for an equal distribution of water --especially rain water-- in time and space is expressed, but their many versions and variants open up the possibility to broach the subject of differentiation in Huastecan Nahua oral tradition and society concerning the existing norms and values.

Tales about the drowning Water Lords of Chapter 5 complement the tales about Huastecan Nahua relationships with water and its valuation with ones in which the same themes are applied to terrestrial water reservoirs. Here, the Water Lords who live in wells and rivers, and their interaction with people constitute the main subject matter. The Water Lords are not less menacing than their celestial counterparts; they too are associated with potential

perishing. Tales in which they appear deal with sustenance, death, the belief in *nauales* (man´s animal counterparts) and the proper behavior towards water and the life it contains. Differentiation is, again, one of the topics concerned in order to discuss the interrelation between oral narrative and cultural reality.

Addressing the problem of ethnographic truth, Gossen rightly stated that "telling a tale is also a telling tale" (1999:xv), thus reminding the reader that objectivity as such does not exist in ethnographic studies, and that each written product is framed by the author´s conscious objective and a series of conscious and unconscious "omissions and distortions" --a true but unavoidable fact. By presenting here my tale telling on Huastecan Nahua oral narrative about the water, a great many issues of Huastecan Nahua tale telling will remain uninvestigated and some problems will remain unsolved. The study of the water´s cosmological and social conception in tales and their relation to ideas and values of identity is only one approach in the study of Huastecan Nahua oral narrative today. It is meant to throw light on one of the many cultural expressions through which an understanding of the world is framed, articulated, and discussed, and through which positions are taken to best preserve this understanding.

Map 1. The Huasteca area



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Chapter 1
A Nahua community in the Huasteca

Nochipa xijtoka uan nochipa titlakuas.
Always sow and you'll always eat.

Down a winding dirt road through the north-eastern slope of the Sierra Madre Oriental in the southern part of the Huasteca, one can see fields, subtropical woods, a stream or two, cattle enclosures, and a few settlements --some too small to be called a village. Against the slopes, an occasional group of men is seen working on the fields called *mila*; these are tiny plots of land, chiefly sown with corn and beans and destined to fulfil the needs of a subsistence farmer and his family. The woods interspersed among these fields are plots of land lying fallow; in this part of the Huasteca almost no wood is pristine anymore, whereas the climate allows the area's lush vegetation to grow rapidly. It is here that occasionally coffee is grown, animals are chased, mushrooms and wild plants are gathered, and wood is fetched. The streams, once more abundant, meander through the lowest parts of this terrain and provide water to the cattle pasturing along the sides. Now and then, one can discern some women at the riverside washing clothes or bathing. The settlements, conglomerations of houses built of stone, mud or fabricated materials such as a cement stone called *block*, lie scattered around. Some are situated close to the streams so as to benefit from the water and the flat, lowland areas; others are higher on the slopes where farming plots are exploited. Near the houses, fowl and dogs search after crumbs and scraps among the citrus fruits, banana trees and curative plants found in the patios.

After a three-hour ride through this landscape from the region´s center, the town of Huejutla, one reaches the *cabecera*, the head of Xochiatipan's *municipio*

(municipality). Homonym of the municipality, the *cabecera* is the administrative, political and economical center of the area. The *presidente municipal*, the highest civil servant in the entity, rules here and no government program, federal or otherwise, can be implemented in the municipality without his permission or before he has stamped on it his personal seal as if its implementation were a local achievement. The weekly outdoor market or *tianguis* attracts buyers from all over the municipality; it is a place to exchange local, regional and occasionally international products, such as used clothing, and it is a site of social interaction. All kinds of news generated in the area are communicated; employers, friends and acquaintances are asked to become ritual kinsmen at a wedding or baptism; women meet their relatives whom they had to leave when they married in another village.

The head of the municipality is the center of services as well. The municipality's only high school is located here, and a tiny pharmacy has been open for the past five years. Food, tools, stationery and *uino* (sugarcane liquor) are the main articles sold in the local stores. These stores lack articles such as clothing, shoes, household appliances, furniture and other commodities, which must be purchased at the *tianguis*. Telephone service is scarce and only a few villages have their own local phone, but there is a booth or *caseta* in the municipality that may be used when its owner is home and the clouds do not obstruct the use of the line fed on solar energy. Newspapers and magazines do not reach the municipality; these must be bought in Huejutla. Bus services, dating from 1994[15], leave from the *cabecera* to reach Huejutla over the dirt road that was constructed in the 80s. The highway from Pachuca (Hidalgo's state capital) to the port of Tampico in the state of Veracruz dates back to the 70s; Huejutla is six hours from Pachuca, and it takes another three hours to reach Tampico.

With no more than 2000 people, Xochiatipan's *cabecera* is a medium-sized, rural village built on a hill. Following the colonial scheme of spatial arrangement, the *cabecera's* church, municipal hall and main stores are laid out around the central plaza. But outside this area, the housing pattern deviates from the conventional chessboard design introduced in colonial times. In these parts, the inclined terrain enforced its own rules of settlement, to the degree that paved roads and houses alongside curve and go up and down wherever needed. The village's position, on a rather high level compared to other settlements in the area, is probably due to strategic considerations influenced by the founders' cosmological model (see Chapter 4 on the concept of the sacred hill); it provides spectacular views on the communities and fields below. Though the exact date of Xochiatipan's foundation is not known, at the time of the Spanish Conquest the place where it is located was one of the autonomous, Nahuatl-speaking tributary states to, or allies of, the independent state of Meztitlan (Gerhard 1972:242-244).

Apart from the *cabecera*, the municipality consists of 38 *komunidades* (from Spanish *comunidad* or community, a territorial unit –that is, the human settlement and the lands belonging to it-- together with the people inhabiting it), which are also called *ranchos* (from Spanish *rancho* or hamlet, village). These places are ethnically homogeneous, inhabited by Nahuas, which make up 99% of the population: approximately 17.000 persons (INEGI 2000a). The indigenous communities lie dispersed over the area; the nearest to the *cabecera* is a twenty-minute walk, the farthest is a four-hour, or more, ride up and down the winding slopes. Most villages can be reached by car, for dirt roads opened up parts of the municipality in the 80s and 90s. And yet, a vehicle ride is not necessarily the quickest way to reach a village, as the dirt roads prevent speeding and wind around the hills's many curves. Nahuas, who do not usually own cars, travel on the footpaths that cut off the stretch, going over the hills.

The few mestizos[16] who live in the area, mostly concentrated in the municipality head where they reside next to a Nahua majority, combine several activities: some have land and cattle, others work in commercial activities and own local stores or act as middlemen. Others work in the *presidencia* (the municipal administration), are schoolteachers, or carry out other kinds of services. In the villages, the daily life centers on agricultural activities and other kinds, carried out mainly within the *komunidad's* boundaries. The indigenous communities --some have only a hundred inhabitants, while two are larger than the municipality head-- are to some extent autonomous entities, since the most important social, ritual, economical and political activities take place at this local level. The division between Nahuas in the *ranchos* and mestizos in the municipality head does not represent a dichotomy between Nahuas living on subsistence agriculture and mestizos occupied in large-scale farming or cattle breeding as well as in non-agricultural activities. Schryer already mentioned that the southern part of the Huasteca to which Xochiatipan belongs has Nahuatl-speaking landowners and non-indigenous peasants working as day laborers (1990:58-59). In the Nahua villages, some have more land than others, breed cattle or own a vehicle --few people do-- or engage in other activities besides agriculture to earn a living (cf. Romualdo Hernández 1982:24-25). Though most people live on subsistence farming, not all share the same economic activities or standard of living.

Nahuas work and live in their village. Since the village is one of the main nuclei of interaction, an understanding of its conception among Nahuas and how they value events at this local level is a good starting point when entering the field. In my view, this conception and valuation may best be understood by analyzing the words of the villagers themselves about their *komunidad*. Just like in the following chapters the verbal expressions that have

been moulded into narratives will serve to analyze the Nahua discourse on the concepts they have expressed in them, this chapter deals with the conceptualization and valuation of the current living situation through a Nahua viewpoint, that is, from the participant's perspective. The main reason for choosing this approach is that the participant's perspective provides a view of the insider's cosmological and social model, of themes, which to them are important, and the valuation of both. It opens up the chance to explore this model and these themes from within, that is, from the Nahuas' concepts and verbal ways of expression. Hence, rather than give a brief sketch of the village in a more or less academic introduction on the topics usually considered when describing the field from an anthropological perspective, I would like to present the way the Nahuas think about their village and how they live it in their own words.

Bonifacio's account

I asked Bonifacio to tell about his *komunidad*. The young narrator, who had so often helped out on issues concerning Nahua life (see Chapter 2), was to describe his village as if talking to a person who had never been to his home. I did not point out who this fictitious discussion partner could be, nor did I suggest possible subjects to be discussed. An unrestrained act of narrating about a Nahua village would, I thought, help understand how villagers conceive their community and how they want to present it to others. I wanted to let Bonifacio feel free to choose the topics he considered somehow typical of his home situation, and I asked him to tell me in extent about the place where he lived and how people lived there. At first, this request seemed, of course, a little strange to him. Bonifacio wanted to know what matters he had to talk about. 'About whatever you want', was the reply. 'Just pretend you meet someone who wants to know what your village is like and give a large description.' When I made my request, Bonifacio had already helped me out with many transcriptions and translations of recorded tales and he himself had become a most contributive narrator. Though surprised by the fact that I did not ask him to tell a tale but to report about his village, he grasped the idea of narrating about his community as if it were a tale without problems; he was aware that I would record his performance as usual, and that afterwards we would be working together on the transcription and the translation of the recorded text. He kindly consented to speak.

I chose Bonifacio to be the narrator of the description because he was a friend and I had seen him perform, not because his village had any particular characteristics. Gran it, it had some unique traits –it was the former home of knowledgeable traditional doctors, it is neares to the *cabecera*, and its women dress in slightly shorter skirts than those in surrounding communities-- but Bonifacio's village is a medium-sized, agricultural locality that has many

things in common with other Nahua communities in the municipality. The content of Bonifacio's account is not meant to be representative of the situation of Huastecan Nahua villages in general. It is, in the first place, a means to approach the way in which village life is conceived and valued by Nahuas.

Bonifacio's narration was recorded at his own home. At first no one else was present, but after a while Bonifacio's three-year-old brother came in to join me, and listen. Through the years, Bonifacio had learned of my interest in certain types of events, such as ritual and traditional healing. There is no doubt that this knowledge influenced how he organized his description of the topics. Yet, our main theme of discussion, Nahua tales, was not mentioned at all during the performance. One of the issues we had just talked about, the *tepitsa* or ritual bath of a newborn (see Chapter 5), was left out as well. Despite his close cooperation in my research, his description followed a fairly autonomous route.

Bonifacio's efforts to describe his village give many clues on how he perceives his living situation. Through the terminology he uses, his explanation of certain types of events, and the order in which these are presented, a kind of cognized world is being framed, providing insight into the villagers' daily life, their outlook on life and their set of shared social values. Since this way of comprehending one's own reality is indirectly compared to that of a person who does not share the same reality, he highlights the village's singularities, looks at its differences with others, and handles some issues strategically:

1	Nikamatis se ome tlen ne na nokomunidad nika kampa ni tiitstoke[17]	I'll talk a bit about my community, where we are.	1
	Nijpeualtis nikijtoski tlen kenijki mochijki ne nokomunidad.	I'll begin by saying how my community was founded.	
5	Pues eltó ome komunidad[18]	Well, there were two communities	5
	eltó se ne ika tlani, kampa atlajtempa, miyake itstoya, seki itstoya asta ne tlachikili.	there was one over there below, at the river side, a lot [of people] lived there, others lived on the hill.	
	Teipa tlen ne atlajtipa itstoya ualtlejkoke[19]	Then those who were at the river went up.	
10	Teipa setsi komunidad kichijke.	They made one sole community.	10
	Ni komunidad itsto ke kuatlaixtipa, achi axkana tlamayantipa tlauel.	In this community they live on a slope, they don't live on a plain.	
15	Nikani ni timaseualme, pues Tomotlamakaj[20] san ken tiuelij, san ken tijtlantiuij.	Here we people, well, we feed ourselves the way we can, any way we go earning [money].	15
	Ijkiyaja san tlen ika tiyoltoke, tiitstoke.	This is how we survive, how we live.	
	Axueli mas timotlakentiaj, axueli mas	We can't clothe more [better], we can't	

	titlakuaj kuali.	eat better.
20	Nikani axmotlani patiyo ni tekitij mila.	Here, those who work in the field don't earn much.
	Namantsi kitlanij apenas treinta y sinko pesos se tonal, mopaleuia[21].	Now they hardly earn thirty five pesos a Day, helping.
25	Teipa nikani tlen ni tokomunidad totlayime[22], tlen mas ika tiyoltoke ni sintli, etl, ya tlen mas kitokaj.	Here in our community the men, what we live on is mainly corn, beans, that's what is mostly sown.
	Ni sintli kema motoka achtó yauij tlayiti.	When corn is sown then they go clearing first.
30	Kemantsi axtona, kemantsi kema uaki tlasoli uajka ualkisa atl, uetsi atl.	At times the sun doesn't shine, at times when the rubbish is being dried the water comes, it rains.
	Oui tlajchinoa.	It is difficult to burn the rubbish.
	Kemantsi axtlajchinoaj, san kuatlachpana, pero tla tlajchinoayaj kitokatij sintli.	At times they don't burn the rubbish, they just sweep it away, but if they burn it, they'll sow corn.
35	Kimeuase, ompa momeua, uan teipa yaui tlen pixka.	They'll clean [the field], it is cleaned twice, and then comes the corn harvest.
	Tlen etl nojkí tlayij.	They also clear the beans.
	Tlan axueli tlajchinoaj noja san kiochpanaj nopa tlasoli.	If they can't burn the rubbish they again just sweep the rubbish away.
40	Kimeuaj ya san patsi momeua.	They clean [the bean field], but once it is cleaned.
	Uan kiouitekij nopa etl, euitekij kiiluiaj kema kikalakiyaj nopa etl.	And they harvest beans, they sift them as they say when they bring in the beans.
45	Teipa tlen chili, pues, ax mas motoka nika ni tokomunidad, pampa ayok kineki elis.	Then the chili, well, it is not sown a lot in our community anymore, because it doesn't want to produce anymore.
	Mas eli ni etl, ni chili nikijtó.	The beans produce more, [the chili I say.
	Uan sayá nopa etl tlen titlatojtokaj mas	And only beans is what we sow more
50	tlen ne kejne kuatlajkayotl, ne eyojtli, tlemach tlakuajkualistli tlen nikani tijpiyaj.	*chayote*, pumpkin, a lot of vegetables that we have here.
55	Motoka pero san nompaya ne sintli itsala o ne emila o chilmila, noponi tlen kitokaj sekinok tlakuajkualistli.	It is sown, but only under the corn or in the bean field or among the chili, there they sow the other food.
	Ni komunidad ipa eltok naui apile[23] uan achi ne tlani ika no eltok... panotok se atlajtli.	In this community there are four basins and further down there is also... a river crosses.
60	Tlen eskuelas apenas nama kitlalijtokeya kinto grado tlen primaria.	About the schools, now they've hardly installed fifth grade of primary school.
	Achtopa ya onkayaya apenas tersero tlen primaria.	First there've hardly third grade in primary.

	Uan tlen monekiyaya kitlamiltise primaria yauiyaya ika ne seyok	And those who had to finish primary school went to another
65	komunidad.	community. 65
	Uan yauiyaya asta ne altepeko[24] kitlamiltiti iniprimaria.	And they went as far as the municipality head to finish primary school.
	Tlen kostumbres tlen mochiua, nochi ni se xiuitl tlen pejteua asta ontlami	About the customs that are performed, all in a year from its beginning till the end
70	ni xiuitl.	of the year. 70
	Pues iyojyok mochiua tlen ne yankuik xiuitl, kampa se yaual itstoke tiopa.	Well, first they carry out [the celebration of the New Year, in which they are a night long in church.
	Miyake tlaonij, uajkai miyake tlakuaj,	A lot of people drink and many eat, they
75	tlemach tlachiuaj, tlen paki, kiijtouaj, para kitl kiajsitijkeya seyok se xiuitl.	do a lot of things, because they are happy, they say, to have concluded another year. 75
	Teipa uala tlen ne Karnaval, mekojtistli tikiluiaj.	Then comes Carnival, *mekojtistli* as we name it.
	Nikani... mochiua, kemantsi febrero	Here... it is held, at times it comes to be
80	mochijtiualayaya, nama elito mochiua asta ne marso.	held in February, now it was celebrated till 80 March.
	Kampa motlalijtoke kapitanes, tikiniiluia kapitanes tlen kisenkauaj ne mauitilistli.	Where they have appointed captains, we call them captains, those who organize this game.
85	Kampa inijuanti kintemouaj tlatsotsonani ma tlatsotsontinemika tekalteno.	Where they search for musicians so that 85 they may go playing outside the houses.
	Tlen ni komunidad konetlakame, seki ueuentsitsiya[25], mas miyake koneme mekojtij.	In this community young people, some grandfathers, and much more the children disguise themselves.
90	Moixtsakua, motlakentia ken inijuanti kinekij, mokentia vestido, seki falda	They cover their faces, they dress the way 90 they want to, they put on a dress, a skirt
	seki ueuentsitsi motlakentia, seki tenantsi, seki tlen ne Tlakatekolotl ixayok motlaliliya iniixko.	some get dressed like elderly persons, others like grandmothers, others put on [the mask of] the devil's face.
95	Miyak tlamantli mochiua para mijtotijtinemij tekalteno, tsajtsitinemij, kemantsi iuintiya.	A lot of things are done in order to go 95 dancing outside the houses, they go shouting, at times they are drunk.
	Nama ijkí nopa tlen kapitanes kichiuaj.	Now that's what these captains do.
	Kemantsi kema ontlami ni mekojtistli	At times, when the *mekojtistli* is finished,
100	kichiuaj baile, kikontrataroaj se grupo tlen ma tlatsotsonaki nika uan mijtotiyaj tleyo.	they hold a dance, they hire a group to 100 come playing here and they dance at night.
	Uan kemantsi axkana, san ika banda kalpanoj[26], san ya nompaí kitlamiltiyaj	And at times they don't, and they just go out with the music band, just like that they
105	ika nopa mekojtistli.	end the *mekojtistli.* 105
	Uan kema tlami noja, san iyiyojtsiya uajka sekinok kintlaliaj kapitanes para ika seyok se xiuitl ma mekojtise	And when it's being finished, last they appoint other captains to disguise themselves the following year

	noja inijuanti ma kisenkauase nopa tlaixpiyali[27]	so that they go organizing the celebration.
	Teipa uala nopa *miércoles de ceniza*.	Then comes Ash Wednesday.
	Ni mierkoles de senisa ni moijtó para tlen ni timekojtike.	This Ash Wednesday is for us who disguise ourselves.
	Tla timekojti, kiijtouaj titlajtlakolchiuaj [28], pampa kiijtouaj ne Tlakatekolotl mauilti uajkaí.	If you disguise yourself, they say we are sinning, for they say the devil is playing, that's why.
	Uan tojuanti noyaya iuan timauiltiyaj.	And we are also playing with him.
	Uajka kiijtouaj tlajtlakoli tijchiuaj para timekojti.	So they say we are sinning for disguising ourselves.
	Uan yeka tiyauij tijkuitij nopa... tinexkuitij tikiluiyaj para tomokixtilise totlajtlakol.	So that's why we go and bring these... bring these ashes so as to take away our sin, as we call it.
	Se krus timotlaliliyaj ne tokuajtoltipa.	We put a cross on our forehead.
	Tlen ne tonantsitsi[29] ayok kualme, kintlatiya.	About the [portraits of] Saints that are no longer of use, they burn them.
	Bueno, ayok kualme nikijtó, pampa tlen ne kikuajkeya xopepeme, tlen ne amatl tlen tlauel xaxakaultik elkí, teipa kitlatiyaj.	Well, I say that they are no longer of use because they have been eaten away by cockroaches, they are papers that are very ill-treated, then they burn them.
	Kichiuaj para kuanextli uan ya nopa temakaj nochi ni komunidades tlen ni munisipio.	They make ashes out of it and that is what they give to the people in all the communities of the municipality.
	Teipa uala tlen ne Semana Santa.	Then comes the Holy Week.
	Ni Semana Santa nika tijchiuaj...	During the Holy Week, here we do...
	Achtopa mochiuayaya san tlayaualoua, san kiuikaj se krus, kikuanauajtiuij ijkikiyaja.	Before, they held it just with a rocession, they only carry a cross, they go embracing it, that's all.
	Nama ualajki se padre nikani tlen axkema..., bueno, tlen kuali tekitik nikani, itoka padre Agustín.	Now a priest has come here who never... well, who worked well here, his name is father Agustín.
	Ya kinejki iyojyok ma mosenkaua se..., ma kiixnextika maseualme tlen ken kichijke Jesús, tlen ina María, tlen... nochi tlapartisiparoa noponi.	He wanted that for the first time would be arranged... that they would represent the persons [of the *via crucis*] the way Jesus did, his mother Mary, of... all who participate in it.
	Nochi no kinejki ma mosenkaua.	He wanted everything to be arranged.
	Teipa kichijke se *vía crucis* tlen nelí kiixnextike ken ne altepetl[30] kiixnextiyaj.	Then they held a *via crucis* that they really represented, just like they represent it in the city.
	Nika no kichijke.	Here they did it as well.
	Uan nopa padre Agustín, yaí kinejki ken nopa ma mochiua, ya techmachtiko.	And father Agustín, he wanted it to be done, he came to teach it to us.
	Kisenkajki nochi uan kena kisenkajki,	He arranged everything and yes he

	tijchijke.	arranged it, we did it.
155	Nama ualtiuala[31] nikita noja poliuisneki pampa axayak akiya tlen nelí tlamachtis nika.	Now it has come here [but] it is disappearing again because there is no one who really teaches it here.
	Uan ne Semana Santa ualauij kiniluiaj misioneros.	And during the Holy Week come those who are called *misioneros*.
160	Nika ualasij, tlen ualauij tlen ne Guadalajara euaj.	They arrive here, those who come from Guadalajara.
	Sejkanok ualauij tlen ne Puebla euaj.	From the other side come those who are from Puebla.
165	Ejeliuis ualauij ika ni munisipio.	From a lot of places they come to this municipality.
	Uan inijuanti no ualitstoke se semana.	And they, too, are here for one week.
	Inijuanti kalpanotinemij, kuikaj iniuaya koneme, mauiltiyaj iniuaya.	They go from house to house, they sing with the children, play with them.
	Akiya mokokó yauij kipaxialotij.	They go visiting who is ill.
170	Inijuanti kitiochiuaj nopa kuaxiuitl.	They bless the palm branch.
	Nochi inijuanti kichiuaj nopa semana, se semana ualitstoke.	All this they do in this week, one week are they here.
	Uan kema yauiyaj kintlamakaj, kinxochimakaj, paki kiniitaj.	And when they go they give them food, they give them flowers, they see them happy.
175	Kemantsi asta tomi kinimaka para ma yajkaya.	At times they even give them money so as for them to leave.
180	Teipa kema tlami ni Semana Santa ni abril mochiua, teipa uala tlen dies de mayo, tikiluiaj "tonajnajua iniilui".	Then, when the Holy Week held in April is over, then comes the 10th of May, we call it *tonanaua iniilui* [lit. "the feast of our mothers"].
	Uajka axtlake mas kichiuaj.	They don't do much then.
	Tonayá tlen kichiuaj mauiltilistli, mauiltilistli tlen ika ne pelota, tlen basketboll motlani.	During the day the things they do are games, ballgames, a basketball competition.
185	Kemantsi uan san ya nopa tlayó kichiuaj baile, kikontrataroaj se grupo uan sayá kichiuaj.	At times and only that night they organize a dance, they hire a band and that's all they do.
	Tleyó kinixochimakaj uan yajasa nopaí tlen dies de mayo.	At night they give flowers [to the mothers] and that's all for the 10th of May.
190	Teipa uala ne tlen mes de junio.	Then comes the month of June.
	Uajka tlen ueyi iluitl nikani kichiuaj ni nokomunidad pampa uajka tlen ni totiopa itoka, ya iilui eli San Antonio ipa dose uan trese de junio.	They hold a big celebration here in my community because the name of our church, its celebration is the one of San Antonio on the 12th and 13th of June.
195	Uan nika, seyaual itstoke nikani banda de viento uan nopa yauali kininotsaj ejeliuis komunidades tlen dansantes ualauij nikani.	And here, the whole night the [brass] band is here, and on that night they call on various communities, whose dancers come here.

Ualtlaixpiyaj, mijtotiyaj seyaual.

They come to celebrate, they dance the whole night.

Tetlamakaj, nochi kichiuaj ne fiskales.

They give them food, the *fiskales* do all this.

Ne fiskales inijuanti tlen mokuatotoniya tetlamakaj tlen kinisentiliaj, tlen kininotsaj sejkanok komunidades euaj ma ualaka.

The *fiskales* are the ones who are making an effort to give food to those who gather, to whom they have called to come from other communities.

Uan teipa uala tlen ne fiesta tlen ne elotl, ya ne elotlamana nika tikiluiaj.

And then comes the *fiesta* of the young corn, the *elotlamana* as we say here.

Ya mochiua asta ne septiembre.

This is held in September.

Nika san kema kiontaj ne padre ma uala uan san kemajkanti pampa axnochipaya tlen tojuanti tikijtose tlake fecha ma uala uan uajka uala.

Here [it is held] only when they go to see the priest so that he comes and only when he is able to come, since not always when we set a date for him does he come.

Axkana.

No.

Kema ya kiijtos ualasa uajkaí uala.

When he says he'll come then he comes.

Uajka tisenkauaj.

So then we arrange it [the celebration].

Nopa elotlamana..., tijsentiliaj elotl, sejkotsi kitlokomanaj, sejkotsi kichiuaj eloatoli, temajmakaj kema nochi mosentiliaj uan nopa elotl temajmakatinemij nochi.

The *elotlamana*..., we gather young corn, [the women] boil them at once, they make *atoli*[32] of young corn, they hand it out when all are gathered and they go distributing young corn to everybody.

Uan misa kiualchiua nopa totajtsi, uan sayasa nopaí mochiua, seyaualtsi nopaí.

And the priest comes to hold mass, and that's all that is done, just that during the night.

Uajka san nopa mijtotiyaj, san akiya kinekis mijtotis noponi ika ielo ma kimijtoti, moijtó, para pakij para kena elki inielo.

Then they dance, only the ones who want to dance there with their young corn that they dance it, that is, because they are happy that their young corn produced.

Inisi teipa eliti.

In a while, their corn will exist.

Teipa uala asta ne oktubre, komo ipa veintiseis, kemantsi veintisiete, tlen ualó tlen tlachijchiuaj, para kiniselise tlen ne touampoyoua tlen mijkeya.

Then comes, till October, about the 26th, at times the 27th, that what comes in order to adorn, to receive our friends that have died already.

Se semana nochi moseuiaj, axkana akiya tekiti kema ni Xantolo tikiluiaj.

During one week all rest, no one works during what we call Xantolo.

Tlen itstoke eliuis tlatsotsontinemij, seki iuintitinemij, mijtotijtinemij seki.

In various places they go playing music, some go around drunk, others dancing.

Motamalmakatinemij pampa uajka kichiuaj miyak tamali nochi, nochi.

They go exchanging tamales[33], as at that time all make many tamales, all do.

Initejteixmatkaua momakatinemij, seki san tlen mouikaj momakatinemij nopa tamali.

With their relatives they go exchanging, some only go exchanging these tamales with whom they get on well.

Uan onkisa asta ne dos de noviembre kampa yauij ne kamposanto, kampa kinitojtoktoke ne touampoyoua.

And [Xantolo] ends the second of November when they go to the cemetery, where our friends are buried.

	Kinitlatiliaj sera, kiniuikiliaj nochi tlamantli tlen kualistli tlen kikuayaya, tlen namantsi tijkuaj.	They light a candle for them, they bring them all the food they ate, that what we eat now.
	Nochi kiniuikiliaj para sikiera ma ixnesi noja tikiniuikiliaj, inikatomoyolojuiaj.	They all bring them [offerings] so that at least it shows that we still bring them [offerings], that we think of them.
	Teipa uala asta tlen ne dose de disiembre, tlen ne la Virgen tikiluiaj iilui.	Then comes the 12th of December, that's what we call the celebration of the Virgin.
	Uajka se semana achka kinemiltijtinemij techajcha.	So then for nearly a week they go carrying her to the homes.
	Achtó eltó kema se rosario onka.	Before that there was a rosary.
	Uajka kiniiluiaj akiya kineki kiselis uan teipa akiyojuanti kiijtouaj kiselise uan kada se maseuali kiseli.	So [the *fiskales*] ask them who wants to receive her and then each one of those who says to receive her does so.
	Chikueyitsitsi kinekiyaya, pero teipa momakake kuenta para mejor sasampa ma kiselika.	Only eight wanted to, but then they realized that they'd better all receive her.
	Uajka kichijke se ika *grupos*.	So they held it [the *posada*[34]] in groups.
	San mokuij se keski maseualme uan ya nopaí tlen kiseliaj.	But a few persons gather and those are the ones who receive her.
	Teipa ualpeua asta ika ne ajkopa ontlami asta ika ne katlani.	Then it begins from up there above and ends down below.
	Uajka ya sasampa totlayime tlen ni komunidad kiseliaj nopa ne Tonantsi pampa san mopaleuiaj tlen kikixtiaj noponi.	So all the men of this community receive Tonantsi [the Virgin of Guadalupe] because they help each other among those who take her out there [the church].
	Uan asta ne dose de disiembre kionkalakiya ne tiopankaltik.	And until the 12th of December they place her back in the church.
	Teipa kionkalakiya ijkí.	Then they place her back like that.
	Uajka teipa peua posadas, tlen ne kikixtiaj San José uan nopa nojayaya la Virgen María.	Then begin the *posadas*, in which they take out Saint Joseph and, again, the Virgin Mary.
	Peuaj kikixtiaj ipan 16 tlen ni disiembre kampa noja tlajtlantinemij *posada*.	They begin to take them out on the 16th of December where they, again, go asking for *posada*.
	Kiuikaj ne techajcha noja inijuanti nopa grupos uan nepa kiuikaj.	Again the same groups take them to the homes and there they take them.
	Teatolmakaj, tepamakaj, kemantsi temakaj tamali, uan sayá nopaí temakaj.	They give *atoli*, they give bread, at times they give tamales, and that's all they give.
	Teipa noja ualó asta año nuevo.	Then again comes New Year.
	Kema ne mero año nuevo san mosentiliaj sasampa, itstoke noja ne tiopa, kichiuaj rosario.	At the very New Year all just gather, they are in the church again, praying [lit. doing] a rosary.
	Kemantsi uala totajtsi kiualchiua misa, kemantsi axkana pues.	Sometimes the priest comes to hold mass, sometimes he doesn't *pues*.

	Komo kiera nepa itstoke.	Anyhow, they are there [in the church].
290	Uan uajka mopatla ne fiskal.	And then the *fiskal* is changed. 290
	Seyok kalaki uajkaí ya motekikui, uan kualí.	Another comes in and he obtains authority, and that's it.
295	Ipa ni tokomunidad, kema se maseuali miki, se miki, nika yeka tijpixtoke autoridades.	In our community, when a person dies, a deceased, that's why we have authorities here. 295
	Tlen nopa jues tikiluiaj, para yaí yauij kimatiltiti para mijkí se maseuali.	To whom we say *jues*[35], to him they go informing that a person has died.
	Uan ya nopa jues kintemó akiyojuanti ma kitokase nopa totlayi akiya mijki.	And the *jues* looks for who may bury the man who has died.
300	Ya tla para kiijtose tlaltitla kikalakise, tlaxauaj nopa... tlaxauaj kampa kikalakise nopa totlayi.	And when they[36] say that they are going to bury him, they excavate a... they excavate where they will put the man. 300
305	Inijuanti yauij kikuitij isiautl, inijuanti, tlan piyome kinimiktise, inijuanti kinimiktiaj, kiniuiuitlaj nopa piyome, yauij kinipajpakatij.	They go and bring *papatlas*[37], they, if they'll kill chickens, they [are the ones who] kill them, they pluck the chickens, and they go and wash them. 305
310	Uan tlan pitso kimiktiaj nochi inijuanti inikuenta tlen nopa kininauatijtoke, akiyojuanti ma tlapaleuika para nopa totlayi miktok.	And if they kill a pig it all concerns those who have been looked for, those who may help because of the man who has died. 310
	Kema yauij kitokatij kintlamakaj, kintlailtiaj.	When [the people] go to bury him they give them to eat and drink [*uino*[38]].
	Kuali, nopaí.	Well, that [is done].
	Teipa mojmostla kichiuaj rosario.	Then they pray a rosary every day.
315	Se kitlaneuij ma kinchiuili rosario para kitlachiknauitilia.	They search for one to pray a rosary for them in order to perform the Novenary. 315
	Kema ika chiknaui tonal elkí miktok nopa mijkatsi uajka kiuikiliaj ikrus, kiontlaliliaj itsontla.	On the ninth day of having died they take his cross to the deceased, they put it at the head [of the tomb].
320	Uajka noja nepa kionchiuiliaj se rosario kampa kitoktoke nopa totlayi.	So there they pray another rosary for him where they have buried the man. 320
	Uan kejní se akaya mokokó nikani sayayá moneltokaj nopa kiiluiaj brujerías[39]	And thus when one is ill, here there's still belief in what they call witchcraft.
325	Kiijtouaj se maseuali mokokó san kichiuiliaj.	They say that a person is ill because they make him. 325
	Uan kena, kemantsi momati para yon achiyok pajtli ika mopajtí, kineki mochikauas uan axueli mochikaua.	And yes, sometimes one learns that, no matter how many medicine is medicated, [the patient] wants to recover [lit. "to get strong"] but cannot recover.
330	Uan kemantsi ikayá nopaí kena mochikaua, uajka kena sayayá miyake kineltokaj.	And at times with that [traditional medicine] one indeed recovers, so still many believe in it [lit. "to call it true"]. 330
	Ya nopaí, maski nikani mijkeya noche	And that's it, though here all traditional

nopa tepajtiani[40].

doctors have already died.

Sa setsi itstok pero no ayok kineki tepajtis.

Only one is here, but he doesn't want to cure anymore either.

Uan se itstok tlen kiijtouaj axkuali Techiuilijketl[41], tlen kiixmatij ika brujo.

And there is one of whom they say he does evil, he is known as a *brujo* [witch].

Tlen mopajtiaj[42] kinotsakij, kiiluij se ma tlatemo[43]

Those who are ill come to call him [the traditional doctor], they tell him to search.

Teipa kiniiluiski kanika moneki ma mopajtika, tlake tepetl ma kiuikaka, itonal[44] ma kitempaleuitij.

Then [the traditional doctor] will tell them where it is necessary to be cured, to which hill they may take him [the patient], that they may help his *tonali* with pleas.

Teipa tlan kiijtose... ya nopa tepajtijketl tlaxoleuas[45].

Then when they say... the traditional doctor does the presentation.

Teipa motentlajtlanis, teipa kiuikaj asta tepeko[46].

They will ask [the hill its] permission, then they take him [the patient] to the *tepeko.*

Tlan para kipanouili mokokó san se itlake kiuikiliaj para yaí kikamouiti, yaí kikauatij nopa itlake.

If the patient is seriously ill, they only bring it one of his clothes in order to talk to it, that's what they leave there, one of his clothes.

Tlan axkana tlauel mokokó yaí no yaui, kionkamouia, kionpojpouaj[47], tlemach kichiuiliaj nopa akiya mokokó.

If he isn't very ill [the patient] goes as well, he [the traditional doctor] goes talking to him, they go clean him, many things they do to the one who is ill.

Uan kemantsi kena mochikaua uan kemantsi ipanima ayok tlajki eli, pampa kemantsi ipanima mikisneki nopa totlayi o toaui[48] aki mokokó.

And at times he indeed recovers and at times nothing happens anymore, for at times the man or woman who is ill wants to die.

Tlen ni tokomunidad tlen autoridades itstoke ni komisariado ejidal[49], tlen kimakuitalui ni tlali

In our communities the authorities that exist are the *ejido* commissar, who looks after the land

itstok jues tlen, tlake onka se problema, san katliyá problema

there is the judge who, when having a problem, whatever problem it is

inijuanti mokalakiaj noponi.

they get into it.

Kiijtose akiya tlateuijtok, akiya, tlen tlake problema kipí, pues, yaí ma kisenkaua.

They'll say who has punched, who, having the problem it is, well, he [the judge] solves it.

Itstoke fiskales tlen kimakuitlauiaj ne tiopa.

There are *fiskales* who take care of the church.

Itstoke eskolares tlen kimakuitlauiaj ne eskuela.

There are *eskolares* who take care of the school.

Itstoke komités, sekinok miyak tlamantli, komo tlen ne *asistente rural.*

There are committees, of many other things, such as the rural assistant.

Tlen akiya motsontekis uelis ya kitlajtlaniti pajtli, ya ma kipajtili.

Who has cut himself can go to ask for medicine, so that he may medicate him.

Itstoke komités tlen ken ne Progresa, gobierno kinpaleui tlen ne

There are committees such as the one of Progresa, in which the government helps

380	toauime.	the women.	380
	Itstoke komités tlen Procampo	There are committees of Procampo	
	miyak komités tlen programas dalasi nikani, nompaya itstoke.	many committees with programs that arrive here, there they are.	

Bonifacio's account is a sum of short characterizations on many topics through which his conceptualization of the home village is reconstructed. While following his story line, I shall give an interpretation about how he conceives the *komunidad* and how he wants to present it to others. The interpretation will be combined with a few explanations on concepts, customs and other elements of Nahua village life; my aim is to complement specific meaningful details relative to the topics Bonifacio deals with.

The origin of the komunidad

The first thing mentioned in this description of a *komunidad* is its foundation and geographical situation (lines 1-12). Though I had asked Bonifacio before about his village's origin, he always claimed to know nothing about this. He remarked that he vaguely remembered something his father had told him about the union of two villages, but said he ignored why or when this happened. When he started by saying that he would talk about his community's foundation, this came as quite a surprise. The reason why he chose this topic must be sought in the status conferred to the place as a community; the history of its foundation made it a legal, independent and full-grown entity. This way, listeners are assured the village is a genuine one and that the following description is that of a real *komunidad*.

According to the narrator, the community is the result of a union of two settlements. Though he does not say why the two settlements merged, he did comment later that this was due to an external factor: the introduction of electricity sometime in the 70s[50]. Electricity poles were installed in the upper settlement, nearer to the municipality head, and did not reach the houses further down, close to the river. People on the riverside were forced to move up if they wanted to have electricity. They began to build new dwellings next to those of the upper settlement until, after a while, the houses near the river were completely abandoned and demolished.

Division and union of settlements are two common features in today's Huasteca. People say that during the last forty years, in the municipality of Xochiatipan alone, two communities have disappeared and three new ones have emerged[51]. Next to communities that have been there for ages and are already mentioned in 18th century historical documents, or in earlier ones (cf. Gerhard 1972:244)[52], new *ranchos* pop up every once in a while because of inner conflicts and demographic pressures that cause them to separate.

Others disappear when their inhabitants go live in neighboring villages in search of better living conditions, usually in relation to land issues. On occasions, land shortage forces landless families of one community to go and find new arable land elsewhere. At first, these new population nuclei are small and the settlers keep cooperating in the original *rancho's* communal affairs, under the status of an *anexo* or annexation, until their settlement is large enough and has certain facilities to function as an independent community.

People recall these stages in the history of their *komunidad*. The reconstruction of these stages and the final establishment as an independent entity, as expressed by Nahuas, provides a unique valuation of the community concept; it is worthwhile to examine it further. A few years ago, someone in one of the neighboring *ranchos* gave the following account of the village's foundation; it provides several elements for the discussion of this concept:

	Uan teipa nopa ueuentsi ya nika san	And then this old man here only worked	
385	tekitiyaya mila uan moxankaltik.	the field and he built a hut.	385
	Uan kimachilik uajka para yaui nepa.	He felt it far to go there [to his house].	
	Teipa ualajki nika	Then he came here	
	nika mochantiko.	here he settled.	
	Nepa itsto mila	Over there was the cornfield	
390	uajka itstoya noponi uan teipa kimachilik	it was far away [from his home] and then	390
	para nika kiitak para tlakualka.	he felt that he saw that it was good here.	
	Teipa ualajki asta netlaniteko	Then he came from below	
	mochantiko nopa ueue tlakatl.	the old man settled here.	
	Uan teipa kipixto se ichpokatl.	And then he had a girl.	
395	Ya noponi no kinamijtik.	He let her marry.	395
	Sampa seyok se tlakatl, teipa noponi	So, once again a man, then there came to	
	mokauatoya ome	stay two [the husband of the girl]	
	ome elitoya.	then there were two.	
	Nojkí ya nopa uan seyok se ueue tlakatl no	Then so was it and another old man also	
400	ajkopa itsto	was above	400
	ya san ajkopa itsto.	he only was [worked] above.	
	Teipa kiitak, nika mochantijki ne se no	Then he saw [that it was good], here he	
	ualajki.	settled and also came.	
	Ya no nika mochantiko se lado	He settled here, at one side [of the other	
405	mochantik.	old man's house] he settled.	405
	Eltoya ome ma nopa ueuentsitsi itstoke.	Now there were two old men.	
	Uan moiluia inijuanti ininkoneua no	And it is said that their children also had	
	kipixtoke.	[children].	

	Inijuanti ualajke mochantike noponi.	They [the grandsons] also came to settle.
410	Eltoya se naui makuili kali eltoya.	There were some four or five houses. 410
	Teipa seyok no se ueue tlakatl ualajki no.	Then another [second] old man came, too.
	Noponi ualajki ya nika mochantijki.	He came and here he settled.
	Pero teipa, komo ya miyake kipixto koneichpokame teipa pejki ualaui montini	But then, because many had daughters already, then began to come sons-in-law
415	inikali mokalakijke makuiltin montini.	in their houses came five sons-in-law. 415
	Teipa nopa rancho ya moueyilijtiajki.	So the *rancho* got bigger.
	Teipa ya mokajke ya elito ikoneua.	They [the sons-in-law] stayed and became children.
	Para nama achi miyake elitoya.	Now there were already many [people].
420	Eltoya san apenas se dies o se kinse, pero sekinok ualtiualajke keuak tlenopa siuame monamiktijtiajke.	There were only some ten or fifteen [houses], but other [people] came since the women got married. 420
	Teipa ikoneua monechkauijke san sejko nika	Then their sons [of the women] joined here
	yeka para nama ni rancho ueyi elito.	that's why now this *rancho* has grown big.
425	Uan tojuanti no axtitekitiyaya nika	And we did not work here 425
	tojuanti titekitiyaya faena ne N.	we worked *faena* in [the rancho of] N.
	Nepa titekitiyaya pero komo malo tijmachilijke pampa ni koneme axkana ueli yaui eskuela.	There we worked but we felt bad because the children could not go to school.
430	Uan ya asta nepa eskuela kema tlatemi miyak atl mopano axueli yaui.	Over there [in N.] was a school, but when [the river] rises one passes much water and cannot go. 430
435	Teipa tijchijke nika no se eskuela ma motlali para ke koneme tlen seis años, siete años no uelisa yas eskuela, komo ya axuajka.	Then we built here also a school so that children of six or seven years old could go to school as well, while it was no longer far. 435
	Para apenas N. axueli momachtia.	But in N. they could not study.
	Teipa yeka asta nopa mochijke ni eskuela.	Therefore the school was built.
	Nama timosentilitiajkejya nama timiyake.	Now we joined and we are many.
440	Uan nopa ueuentsi ome	And the two old men 440
	ome keuak ualajke sajkiya nopa moijkini moxinachtiajkeya	as those two came, so they sowed
	komo ya mosansejkotilijkeya ni pilatlaltsi	because they'd already joined in the valley.
	Yeka para miyak elitoya	Therefore they became many
445	keuak tlen ikoneua atokoneua amotlajtlantiajkeya ipa mastlejko.	even though their children and our children were not asking to rise [in number]. 445
	De na no se nosistat itsto tlen na notata neka ualajki ika Veracruz.	My grandfather was here, my father came from Veracruz.
450	Nama mijki notata nama na nimokauako uan tojuantin tinaui tiiknime.	Now my father died, now I am left and we are four brothers. 450

Uan nama tlen na naí ome notelpokaua nijpixtok	And now I have two sons
yeka ipan ni ranchos ya mas motlejkotiti.	therefore [the number of people in] the *ranchos* is increasing.

The narrator, about sixty years old at the time of this recording, recalls a period in which his grandfather settled in an uninhabited place near his plot of farming land. Other settlers came, in-laws arrived and the population grew until it was sufficiently large to provide a separate socio-political entity; the village became independent, a process that lasted three generations. The tale renders an account of how population growth spurs change and how marriage and land constitute two main factors in the *komunidad's* foundation.

In the first phase of the settlement process the narrator's grandfather is forced to walk great distances to his *mila* or field (lines 384-386). Most probably, at the age of eighteen, when he is entitled to have land of his own in his community, the plots in the near surroundings had already been distributed and he is assigned an uncultivated piece of land far from his house. Evidently, population growth exceeds death rates, and the plots that become available do not keep pace with the number of young adults that have to be given theirs so they can make their own living. For a while, the grandfather walks to his field every day, then he decides to build a little hut to stay overnight, and finally he brings his family to reside in the place (lines 386-393). He is the first one to settle there; at the time he is characterized as an "old man". In a gerontocratic society such as the Nahua, his old age must be read as a symbolic reference to an authoritative factor. If the decision to settle was made by an old man, then this must have been a wise decision that will not be discussed. The village's foundation has sound roots.

After the grandfather has settled there, other farmers who also face a land shortage are welcomed to join, and when their daughters are ready to marry, no objection is made to the arrival of the sons-in-law (lines 394-424). The narrator alludes to this practice several times and is himself one of its products; he mentions that his grandfather is from "here" and his father from Veracruz (lines 447-448). In this second phase, the tiny settlement could allow a deviation in the current virilocal settlement pattern, for land was available and a bigger establishment represented a desired goal. With land distributions becoming increasingly scarce in the surrounding established villages, marrying girls from this settlement had the advantage of obtaining land in exchange. This second phase is conferred authority when a second old man settles in the area (lines 399-406, 411-412). The relevance of this settlement resides in the symbolic character attributed to the number two. Since pre-colonial times, two signifies union and duality in Nahua thought. The creator deities acted in pairs, who were both opposites and

complements of each other. Their work solely bore fruit when creating together. In the same way, the two men coming together will make the place prosper. Furthermore, one of the grandfathers is said to have come from below (line 392), whereas the other arrived from above (line 400). Their coming together provides a center, a nucleus around which the people will build their new home. As shall be seen throughout this study, duality is one of the key ordering principles in Nahua thought that is all-pervasive in almost every aspect of life.

In the following and last phase, the arrival of the sons-in-law led to a natural population growth that turned the establishment into a solid community, which sought its own facilities and internal organization (lines 413-437). Once they gained land titles and built their own school and church, there was no need anymore to keep on depending on another community, particularly since this implied rendering services such as communal work (in Spanish *faena*) for that entity (lines 425-427). People then sought an independent political status. The narrator expresses this desire by explaining the school children's past situation (lines 427-437). The one-hour-walk to the nearest community that has a primary school is said to be impossible during the rainy season. This reason, in addition to the fact that the parents felt bad because of the long stretch their children had to walk, clearly connotes the aim to establish an independent community.

When the community finally becomes a legally independent one, its main characteristics are the union and number of people living here: "Now we joined and we are many" (line 438). The reflexive verb *mosentilia* used in this context, indicates not just the concrete gathering of people at one place (to join together) but also "the becoming one" (see Karttunen 1992:31), which suggests the formation of a collective that shares a sense of belonging to the social unit in which they live. Only when the members have a joint feeling of being a collective and their number is high enough, can we speak of a real *komunidad*. Again, the two elderly men are given credit for its current status, which, in turn, confirms this status: through their union, the people became many and became a community (lines 440-444). The village's prosperity and right of existence is described by mentioning its ongoing growth (lines 444-454).

The history of the villages' origin is not very well documented for the Huasteca area. Like the narrator in the example above, villagers mostly draw upon oral tradition when depicting their community's history. These tales of origin are influenced by how Nahuas conceive their position within the municipality, such as a newly obtained status in the example above[53]. In Bonifacio's reconstruction, the union of the water (represented by the houses near the river) and the hill (represented by the houses situated upwards) metaphorically constitutes the founding of an *altepetl* (lit. water-hill)

or village, which is the main symbol of a settlement (see Chapter 4). It seems more important to stress this conceptual confirmation of the settlement's category as a *komunidad*, rather than the worldlier drive for modernization from those who wanted to be connected to the *luz*, the light, whose role in this process is not mentioned during the narration.

The two examples analyzed above, one of junction, as told by Bonifacio, and one of division as told by the elderly man in one of the communities, show that the patchwork of old and new settlements in the Huasteca is in constant movement. At the same time, however, the sense of belonging to a particular community is a crucial identity mark among people, as shall be seen further on. A new village creates new identities and stresses the flexibility and changing character of this concept in daily practice in the Huasteca.

Water and the household

When those who once lived next to the river decided to give up their proximity to the water, they knew they would have to cope with the same problem their former neighbors had: the scarcity of water in the higher parts. Bonifacio hardly mentions the topic of the local water economy (lines 56-58). The availability of water is, however, vital to a village's well being. Before looking at Bonifacio's next theme, and in order to understand the water's crucial role in Nahua narrative, a discernment of the local water supply and its impact on village life provides some initial insight.

In the municipality, water is obtained from the springs in the hills. In Bonifacio's community, four *piletas* or basins catch the spring-water (line 56), which is then distributed through the local waterworks. The main spring from which water is obtained is located in the village's center. Indeed, the *komunidad* seems to have been built around it. Each family has a faucet in the *patio*, and for one hour a day water is available and can be tapped freely. During this early morning hour, the women fill enough buckets, cans and other containers to last a whole day, knowing otherwise they would have to walk to the nearest *pileta*. The water is used to wash dishes, the *nixtamali* (corn soaked in lime water that will be ground into dough), and to bathe the small children. Once boiled, it serves as drinking water. Adults bathe at home, or rather go to one of the springs, some of which are believed to have permanent waters. The value attributed to the water is expressed by how modestly and rationally they use it. No drop is wasted, and by covering the buckets they prevent the stored water from getting filthy.

Just like the basins receive their water from the springs in the sacred hill called Chikauas, the river running through this southern part of the municipality, officially named San Miguel but simply called *arroyo* or stream

(lines 57-58), originates in the area's highest peak --some 700 meters above sea level (Del Ángel Bautista 1991:12;15). This stream is permanent only at its source; the communities further down benefit from the waters exclusively during the rainy season. As we shall see in the following chapters, the conception of the water as originating in the local sacred hill is one of the primary ideas in Nahua thought.

The local waterworks were recently introduced and have been operating for only a few years. Formerly, women had to go to the basins were water could be drawn. Then, as now, the water supply was precarious during periods of scarcity. With a lowered water level in the basins, this problem was more visible in the past. A man from a neighboring community once remarked: "Poor women, they have to bend over so far in order to fetch water, and with the short skirts they are wearing you can see their entire legs!" Except for the months before the rainy season, the village has a regular and sufficient water supply throughout the year to satisfy local needs.

Water is now being distributed to the house compounds that constitute the village. Grouped closely together, this cluster of compounds is divided into two main parts that have no visible demarcation lines and are simply called *uejkapa* (up) and *tlatsintla* (down). The subdivision was not established on account of the union of two settlements, but corresponds to a conceptual splitting of every inhabited nucleus of a Nahua community into two parts, which in this particular case corresponds to a real difference in height between the two portions, as the village is located on a slope (line 11)[54]. The church and a building are in the center, next to an elementary and nearly complete primary school (lines 59-67). Other subareas can be seen alongside this main division, the most important being the clearing of each household. Within the community, spaces are divided according to the living space of one or more families. Although Bonifacio does not say it, this internal spatial organization of the house compounds is meaningful and should be addressed briefly.

The house compound may consist of one or several living spaces in the form of separate buildings or houses[55]. Each house compound has a toponymn that situates a household within the community and describes a certain characteristic identifying the place: *auatempa* (next to the oak), *mangotsintla* (under the mango tree), *ojteno* (at the roadside), *teopankalteno* (in front of the church), *tlalpani* (the highest point on the ground). Within the community, villagers are known for the *kaltokayotl* or name of their house compound instead of their official last name, and are called Severino Auatempa, Rosendo Mangotsintla, Hilario Ojteno, Elpidio Teopankalteno, or María Tlalpani. This internal system of name giving places a person within the community and provides a local framework of meaningful identities[56].

Sandstrom lists the advantages of this system. He says that its practice is most likely explicatory of cultural continuity in these villages and thus reaffirms links with their past, which is congruent with their sacred geography, and creates a sense of community and belonging; he also says that its use provides a measure of control when dealing with outsiders (1991:107). Likewise, land parcels have their specific name by which they are identified.

The members of a house compound, which usually consists of a nuclear or extended family, share the same *kaltokayotl*. In an extended family, the parents live together with one or more married sons. The sons, each with their own wives and children (the latter being normally some four to six in number), may occupy separate buildings in the compound. The kitchen, an independent structure used only for cooking, may be shared or not among all. If shared, it becomes the compound's social heart. Its joint use entails a mutual involvement in social tasks and economic duties. Eating together implies a far-reaching internal organization, ranging from the socialization of children when they perform domestic tasks to the division of labor and the distribution of wealth. Issues concerning the residents are discussed here, during and after meals. The vital part of the kitchen hut is a section with a stone or mud elevation, which forms the cooking place. Here, the *tenamastli* (the three hearth stones upon which cooking pots are placed) holds the *komali*, the clay plate or griddle used for making tortillas. The *tenamastli* is the dwelling of the fire spirit, who guards the house and the household. Nahuas say this guardian takes care of the fire so the family may always have a warm home and a cooked meal (van 't Hooft and Cerda 2003:127-134).

Samyn has argued that the house is not one of the main references in Nahua daily life. She holds that the Nahua home "in its essence does not condense and fill, does not create a solid nucleus, but [is used] to realize from here actions of distribution (especially of food) and dispersion" (2000:405). However, the concept of *kaltokayotl*, binding a person to his house compound, as well as the cooking, storage and sleeping activities in a house may contradict this thesis. Furthermore, the house is a place of conception and birth, of sickness and death, of socialization and the passing on of cultural knowledge. Even though the house is not consciously conceived as a microcosm, some symbolic references clearly reflect this concept; the hearth being its heart and center, the four corners connoting the four directions of the world, *axuchpa* (lit. "in the gutter") and the doorstep being paralleled to the world outside (cf. Lok 1987). Important rituals take place within the house, such as healings or the new corn's celebration (see below). Being a center of distribution and dispersion are but two of its many functions. Its role as the material place of all types of activities and interaction, like those

mentioned above, combined with the house's conceptualization as a center of belonging, make it a nucleus of living.

Subsistence farming and the role of corn

As mentioned before, the Nahuas of the Xochiatipan municipality are mostly subsistence farmers, who work the fields that lie around the inhabited nucleus. Small productive units with a low scale production that is directed, in the first place, towards auto-consumption and local exchange characterize this type of production. Surplus production is sold in the marketplace in order to be sufficiently solvent and maintain a consumption level of goods and services that are not produced within the unit. The characteristics of this type of production and the socio-political and religious organization around it govern great part of Nahua life. Nahuas are often heard saying "if we don't work we don't eat". Work is directly linked to food production, which, in turn, implies a family's maintenance. Nahuas face a rather strict working ethos, as they know that nothing is gained without effort. Laziness is rejected and reprimanded in many tales; children are taught to do different tasks at an early age; a family member's illness is a threat to the production level. Subsistence farming in the Huasteca is not just a way of living; it is a condition that influences essential aspects of Nahua life. In Bonifacio's account, the importance attributed to this way of living becomes immediately clear after his short introduction on the village's foundation, for it is one of the first topics to be discussed.

At the outset, Bonifacio does not say explicitly that the people from his village are peasants. He starts by saying that they are *maseualme* (pl. of *maseuali*, a person or human being, line 13). The term *maseuali* is usually meant to be synonymous of a human being or person in general, yet in a more restricted sense refers to the peasant who lives in a rural community. The term contrasts with the pejorative Nahuatl label *koyotl* (coyote, which likens persons to an animal known to be a clever agressor) that represents the rich and well dressed person, who is either a member of the village or not. The two terms might be used in an ethnic sense to oppose indigenous peoples versus non-indigenous collectives, but this is not necessarily the case. In tales, the non-marked person is the insider and the category *koyotl* represents the outsider; in daily life the opposition is mostly made between the poor (peasant) and rich (landowner, merchant, teacher or otherwise)[57]. Nahuas within the community can become *koyome* to the rest of the villagers when they acquire material wealth or gain access to higher education[58]. By stating *timaseualme* ("we are *maseualme*", line 13), Bonifacio employs the restricted sense of the term and characterizes all members of his village as being poor peasants. This portrayal also shows that the minority of Nahuas who live on other than agricultural activities or who have enough land to live

in a higher economic level (the local *koyome*) are left out of his scheme. The village is articulated as a place where all inhabitants are poor subsistence farmers (*maseualme*), a representation that blots out internal class stratification and differentiation of economic activity, and is used to reconstruct a more egalitarian notion of village life[59].

The following precision: they "live the way we can, any way we go earning" (line 13-14), are but repetitions of the information that is implicit in the use of the term *maseuali*. The village people are *maseuali* and this signifies a way of life: "this is how we survive, how we live" (line 16). The reason for scarcity in this way of life must be sought in the means of production: there is no prospect to create a higher living standard (lines 17-18), because "those who work in the field don't earn much" (lines 19-20). Bonifacio then portrays the people from his village as subsistence farmers who barely earn a living when "helping" (line 22), that is, when working on someone else's land, and who grow corn and beans for their own consumption (lines 23-25). Poverty and the existing farming activities are equalled to the extent that they represent the Nahua peasants' way of living.

Despite this strategic simplification, Bonifacio is right in saying that the main occupation of most Nahuas in the villages is subsistence farming and that many are poor[60]. Either as a landless peasant, a small proprietor or a landowner, people earn their income in the first place from tilling the fields. Most of those who get their main wages through other kinds of professions --carpenters, bricklayers, or shop owners-- have a plot of land that is cultivated for domestic consumption and, as a consequence, are small proprietors. Only a very small portion of the economically active population --usually teachers from the outside who do not have land rights within the community-- is not engaged in agricultural activities. As in Bonifacio's description, the following notes on community life will focus on the first two segments of the population, landless peasants and peasants that are small proprietors, who together constitute the village's great majority.

In the Xochiatipan municipality, the terrain's inclination makes farming difficult (lines 11-12); no machines or irrigation equipment can be used there. As a result, despite the soil's good quality, farming depends heavily on climate conditions. In the Huasteca, this dependence is especially hazardous, since the area is known for its unstable environment in which every season is potentially dangerous. In winter, *nortes* (icy-cold winds coming from the North) may last for a long time and freeze the fruit trees. Occasional springtime droughts cause plants to wither and die. Possibly, hurricanes and floods may wipe out the corn harvest in summer and fall. Even climatological phenomena that are not usually harmful may disturb the desired agricultural development. If it rains when the cleared rubbish should

dry, this prevents it from burning and the earth must do without the ashes' fertile layer (lines 28-34). There are other reasons for the difficulties that arise: chili peppers are not farmed in large quantities anymore because their production dropped suddenly (lines 45-47), and every now and then, plagues and diseases attack the crops. Farmers are helpless against these drawbacks and can only hope that the following harvest will be better.

In line with Bonifacio's depiction (lines 13-22), one could say that farming life in this area is rather harsh. The work does not generate riches, and the intake is too moderate or too low-priced to provide enough income for a whole year. The extent of the community's territory and the individual plots, together with the labor intensive farming techniques and the need to let the field rest from time to time, make it impossible to farm larger land extensions. In addition, crop yields seem to have dropped considerably in the last century. Schryer (1990:110) estimates that corn production used to be at least three times greater than it is now. The land's overexploitation due to the population increase and the transformation of arable land into pasture for cattle could have contributed to the current low production.

In Mexico, corn is the crop most commonly cultivated; it is one of the main ingredients of the rural population's basic diet, together with beans and chili peppers. Nahua peasants in the Huasteca do not deviate from this general scheme; beans are the second most important product in their diet (lines 23-25). In the municipality of Xochiatipan, the predominance of corn is compelling. In 1998, Sámano and Jiménez estimate the portion of arable land sowed with corn makes up 84.9% in this entity (1998:346). Due to the climate, corn can be harvested twice a year, the principal harvest is around November and December. Bonifacio describes the main aspects of corn and bean growing (lines 26-44), which is based on the slash-and-burn technique. A variety of other crops is sown within or around the *mila*, the farmed field, yet these are mere by-products or complements of the corn or bean harvest and are intended for the family's internal consumption (lines 50-55).

Bonifacio limits his remarks on agricultural activities to a short list of existing labor techniques for preparing, sowing and harvesting the crops, yet a word could be said on the relevance of this way of farming in the Huasteca area. The corn crop represents the sole source of income from agriculture, since it is the only product whose surplus output is sold in the regional markets and which can provide revenue. The surplus output of the other crops, if there is one, is exchanged within the community or not exploited at all. The low prices paid in the local markets do not favor their trading; they do not always balance the input of labor to harvest, clean, pack and transport these products. So oranges may ripen and waste on the trees; for the owner, picking them might represent a cost instead of a benefit. A great majority of

peasants in the Huasteca does not own a vehicle to take their crops to places where better prices can be expected; neither do they have the equipment to process the raw material into products that have a better profit range. The few who do own a vehicle must travel long distances to transport their produce to the markets and, occasionally, the swollen rivers that cut off the municipality during the rainy season prevent them from doing so. Products with a better profit range usually present higher risks when being grown or imply costly investments in time and money, neither of which can be afforded. At times, even when fair prices are paid for a specific crop, the extent of the *mila* is not large enough to make its production worthwhile.

This means corn is the sole agricultural produce that represents a concrete monetary income for Nahua families (cf. Sandstrom 1991:207-216). Yet, the price of corn has also fallen; and it has suffered above all from the exploitation by *koyome* who buy the entire load the peasant carries on his back even before he reaches the municipality head to sell his product. The cost of not carrying the corn any further and of selling the whole merchandise at once is high: in a *rescate* (Sp. rescue) operation, the *koyome* pay even less than the average rate at the municipal market (see Hernández Beatriz 1989:57; Romualdo Hernández 1982:32).

Although the narrator only mentions crop farming as a way to earn a living, there are many non-farming activities that contribute to the Nahua peasants' economy. The reason for leaving these activities out of the description is perhaps due to the complementary and incidental character ascribed to them. Villagers identify themselves above all as peasants who cultivate the land and all their other activities are seen as additional and secondary. The collection of wild foodstuffs and the low-scale breeding of cattle and fowl are two of these activities. The collected products are not sold, yet they cover part of the family needs and are employed locally. When not directly used within the household, these products and part of the cultivated surplus are exchanged for other products in the village. Estimates are made based on prices established in the weekly municipal market; then people buy bread from the local baker with its equivalent worth in corn, beans or eggs; they swap oranges in return for other fruits, and a day laborer --if he agrees to it-- is paid with corn. During local celebrations or ritual healings, chickens and turkeys are killed to prepare the necessary food dishes. Thus, the ever-existing cash problem is avoided while, at the same time, a family's food base is diversified and the village's goods are balanced among all. None of these complementary activities contributes to a family's monetary income.

Due to the low crop prices, additional sources of income must be sought in order to obtain the necessary resources and buy food that is not produced in the area, such as onions, potatoes or tomatoes. Also, non-food products

such as medicines, salt, oil, school utensils, soft drinks, wax candles, clothes, personal hygiene products or kitchen gear must be purchased. One way to obtain this additional income is by working as a *peón* or day laborer in the fields. Earnings are not much, some thirty-five *pesos* a day (lines 21-22)[61], but a meal is included and one gets paid the same day in the afternoon. Work must be found somewhere else when the level of activities goes down in the fields; peasants go out to find construction jobs in the area or in local government projects. Another less-preferred option is leaving the municipality to get employment as a day laborer during the harvest in the Huasteca's bigger plantations (Gutiérrez 1991:144) or in the cities. In fact, the municipality is registered as a place of strong labor expulsion (*Diagnóstico...* 1991:86), a tendency that has been taking place for several decades. The land's low output and its insufficient dimensions, added to the lack of jobs within the municipality, force people to depend even more on city jobs as bricklayers, domestic servants or carrying loads of produce in the markets. Today, an average of 20% to 25% of the community's adult males works in cities like Pachuca, Mexico and Guadalajara, where existing networks of Nahua migrants take in a newcomer to give him shelter and introduce him to possible employers.

The fact that harvesting will always be the most crucial aspect of a farmer's life but does not meet all the family needs, and that better living conditions thus depend on the amount of paid work they can do outside the *mila*, Nahuas search complementary income elsewhere. The saying "we feed ourselves the way we can" (lines 13-14) emerges from this principle. Nahuas accept work wherever necessary if this benefits their household's economic situation. Nevertheless, these activities are almost always combined with the peasant's agricultural tasks. Carpenters will postpone making a door when their *mila* needs weeding, Nahuas working in the cities come back to sow their fields[62]. Their first obligation is to their *mila*, mostly sown with corn.

Corn does not have only an economic value, it represents a symbolically crucial element in Nahua life. In addition to being the diet's basic element, the crop stands for the farming way of life of a *maseuali*. Its valuation entails a set of cosmological principles: the plant and the grain are sacred and the corn spirits are the most essential of all entities that reign over life's different aspects. The importance of corn manifests itself in the villagers' daily lives, including those parts that do not involve field work or food preparation. Corn spirits are asked for help in all kinds of prayers. Corn kernels are used in divination rituals. Tamales made of corn dough are offered and exchanged during Xantolo, the celebrations in All Saints' and All Souls' Day. Nahua oral tradition cherishes its tales about corn's origin as some of the most precious (see Chapter 2 and 4) and reveals how human beings were made of corn. If

one dreams of the corn spirit, Chikomexochitl, this is meant to ensure a good harvest.

Most expressions of corn's symbolic importance can be found in ritual. In ritual acts before the clearing of a field, before sowing or when pleading for rain, the corn spirits are invoked to implore their beneficence. Rituals are performed at an individual level, within the household, between and among ritual kinsmen, and within the community as a whole. They have different purposes. In Nahuatl, rituals are given the name *kostumbre*, loaned from the Spanish for custom, which refers more broadly to all the concepts and practices of daily life (line 68). According to Nahuas, the guardian or corn spirit Chikomexochitl has taught them the *kostumbre*. Dance, music, writing and the cultivation of corn come directly from his inventiveness. In this manner, a direct link is made between the corn's existence and the origin of ritual in Huastecan Nahua society.

When going through the large list of rituals mentioned by the narrator, there is one that stands out for its direct connection to corn: the *elotlamana* (lit. "to place something to the young corn"), which celebrates the upcoming corn harvest, meant to acknowledge Chikomexochitl's generosity. The verb *tlamana* (to place something, to offer) expresses the ritual's aim: to give offerings to the corn spirit as a way of thanking him for another year of food, for another year of life. One villager put it in these words:

> Well, it's a sign that, to say so, well, it's the tradition. To say so, the young corn, when there is young corn, well, it's our life, it's our strength. So that's why they give a sign that there is young corn now [...] People are going to take care of it during the year. So that's why they think about it this way.

The celebration is held at the end of September, when green corn has grown in the *mila* (line 208). The presence of plenty healthy young corn in this month ensures a ripe harvest in December, for no hurricane, drought, animal, disease, or other phenomenon has damaged the plants and put the harvest at risk. People know their fields will produce this year. At this point they organize the celebration, usually a communal one in which the whole *rancho* participates.

Since Bonifacio deals with the local rituals according to the chronological order in which they take place during the calendar year, the *elotlamana* is dealt with at some point halfway through his list (lines 205-227). The celebration consists of a series of ritual acts, held from early morning till dawn of the next day. The enumeration of these ritual acts aims foremost to demonstrate the orderly functioning of the village's internal organization. In Bonifacio's

eyes, this involves solving the problem of hiring a priest, processing the abundant ritual intake of corn, and distributing the food evenly to all village members. A more spiritual approach to the celebration is to be found at the end of Bonifacio's account, when he tells about the dancing with the young corn and its purpose. Each of the celebration's activities has a ritual value that can be directly linked to the symbolic importance of this staple food.

Bonifacio first depicts the difficulty they face when they ask the priests of the municipality to come and hold mass (lines 209-214). The municipality has two priests, who have to take care of the whole area. Obviously, they are not always available on the date set by the village, as other villages may already have made their appointment with the priests for their *elotlamana*. However, the remark refers to another issue as well. After the town of Huejutla became a dioceses in 1923, and especially during the last thirty or forty years, priests of the Hidalgo part of the Huasteca have tried to eradicate Nahua religious expressions that apparently are not Catholic but have their roots in Mesoamerican religious traditions[63]. Ostentatious public rituals like the *elotlamana* were the first to be rejected by the priests, for it was obviously not God but the corn spirit who was worshipped during this celebration. Today, priests are reluctant to show up at a celebration of the young corn, and they only do so after repeated pleas. The mass for the young corn is, however, of great importance to Nahuas, and the communal celebration would not be the same without the assistance of a priest. Only after the date is set will the villagers start to prepare the celebration (line 215).

The gathering of the *elotl* (line 216) takes place early in the morning, when the men go to the communal property's *mila* to fetch a large basket full of young corn. When they return home, the baskets are placed outside the house, and the men are served breakfast. After this meal, they make an arch of leaves of the *pemuchkuauitl*, a *pemoch* tree (*Erythrina americana Miller*), which is placed at the house's entrance. Only then is the green corn placed inside the house. The men carry their basket on their backs once more, and set foot in the house through the decorated entrance. Their entry is accompanied by the ritual music of a violin and guitar, and the men enter while dancing to the sounds played by the musicians. After the corn has been deposited inside the house, the women go about preparing food for the evening, when the corn will be blessed. They make boiled *elotl*, *xamitl* (a green maize tamale) and *atoli* or corn gruel (line 217). These dishes are considered particularly delicious; the green corn is tender and somewhat sweet, with a very good taste. Besides, these dishes are seasonal and can only be eaten in September and October, which makes them even more special. In the meantime, the men dress up the corn. They pick an ear of corn that is particularly healthy, strong or beautiful, and dress it up with clothes as if it were a person. These clothed corn ears represent Chikomexochitl, the corn spirit, which is believed to be a

dual spirit, being both male and female. The stage of the young corn, which has not yet ripened fully, is paralleled to the life stages of a human being; this makes Chikomexochitl seem like a child or adolescent (see van ´t Hooft and Cerda 2003:32). Accordingly, the ear is clothed as if it were a young boy or girl. The boy-corn is clothed with a hat, the girl-corn is dressed with a tiny shawl. Other ears are adorned only with *xochikoskatl*, flower strings. During the day, the adorned corn is placed on the home altar, which has been cleaned and decorated with fresh flowers.

During the *elotlamana*, the anthropomorphic aspect of corn is evident. Along with the ritual intake of corn, the clothing of the ears as if they were human, and their prominent place on the home altar, this anthopomorphic quality expresses itself linguistically. The corn ears are called *elome,* which is the plural form of *elotl*, young corn. In Nahuatl, pluralization is only applied when dealing with animate beings and not with inanimate subjects. The pluralization of the dressed-up young corn suggests a conceptual personification of the corn spirit as a living entity. The following part of the celebration, which takes in the evening and night, will further show the corn's animate aspect.

Early in the evening, when the priest has arrived to hold a mass, food is distributed among the villagers (line 218-222). As the corn was fetched from the communal *mila*, all villagers have a share in the allotment of *elotl*, *atoli* and *xamitl*. People take their adorned corn to the church, a rectangular stone building dating from the 70s that was built by the male villagers during a few years of weekly *komuntekitl* (lit. work for the community, see below). After mass, a local *tlamatijketl* or wise man, usually a traditional healer, says a few words to the corn, "the way his intelligence brings them out". Whereas during the regular mass God is thanked for the upcoming harvest, the *tlamatijketl* directs his prayer personally to Chikomexochitl (cf. prayers in Reyes García and Christensen 1989:71-78 and Williams García 1997:115-119). During this part of the ritual, the corn is blessed with holy water. The earth and the fire, two elements necessary to make the crops grow, are thanked as well. There may be ritual cleansings and fireworks during the celebrations.

Then the people take up the adorned corn and the dancing begins. To the sound of the band's music with their violin and guitar, both men and women dance throughout the night with the corn in their arms (lines 223-225). At times, the *elotl* dressed as a boy is carried by a girl, and the *elotl* dressed as a girl is carried by a boy. When the two children start to dance, the other villagers accompany them with their adorned corn. The narrator says the people dance because they are happy that there are *elome* and that there will soon be mature corn (lines 225-226). Yet, their dancing is not just a way of

showing their happiness. The ritual dance is a way of communication with the corn spirit, who is adored and thanked, but the people also ask for further support in the future. This way, the alliance between man and corn is renewed and revitalized; and the foundation of a constructive relationship is consolidated and strengthened (cf. Carmagnani 1993:39-49). The physical effort and fatigue that comes while dancing is an offering to Chikomexochitl, just like the incense, flowers and prayers are items to be offered to the corn spirit. In this celebration, the dance is one of the crucial parts. The celebration is a success when the people dance "till dawn," this means they have really exerted themselves to thank Chikomexochitl[64].

The ritual cycle

After having briefly described the primary school[65] and the water works (lines 56-67), which remind us, again, of the community's legal status as an independent entity because of the existence of these services, all the rituals enacted by the *komunidad* as a whole throughout the year are characterized (lines 68-292), starting with the New Year's eve celebration (lines 71-76), when the new *fiskales* take over their positions. The *fiskales*, who are responsible in the community for "taking care of the church" (lines 370-371), will be present at every communal event that involves the church as a place of celebration. They make sure the church is clean, they open the building and ring the bells for mass or other events, and assist the priest on the few occasions that he visits the village. In short, the *fiskales* are the representatives of the village's internal religious organization (see below). Every year, four villagers are selected to fulfill this role during one ritual cycle. This occasion serves as a point of departure for Bonifacio to start his portrayal of the communal events in which ritual acts are involved.

As can be inferred from Bonifacio's narrative, the initiation of a new ritual cycle is important enough to mention, but not as interesting or rich in details as other ritual events that he discusses more elaborately later on. His summary states that, on the last day in December, the people gather in the village church to eat, drink and celebrate the coming of a fresh year or, more exactly, to show their gratefulness for the conclusion of another year of life (lines 71-76). Bonifacio omits the presence of the local male dance group and the *inditas*, the local girl's dance group, who both perform to the music of the violin and guitar. Furthermore, he could have referred to the local brass band that is playing inside the church. Thus, the main elements of almost any communal ritual would have been presented: the villagers, the food distribution (in this particular example: hot chocolate or *atoli* with bread or biscuits for everyone, sugarcane liquor and cigarettes for the men only) and/or food offering, music and dancing. One of the specific elements in the festivities around New Year's Eve is handing over one of the main

communal duties in the local civil-religious organization: the one of *fiskal*, a point Bonifacio refers to at the end of his description of the communal rituals (lines 283-292). From the first of January to the last day of December, the final task of the *fiskales* is to organize the New Year's Eve celebration, a ritual in which they have to buy fireworks, prepare and distribute food, and, most important, deliver the speech with which they welcome the new *fiskales* and advise them how to do their task appropriately. The new *fiskales*, in turn, accept their commitment to God in a speech to those present in which they promise to duly fulfill their task. The spoken word is one of this ritual's main features, and the ability to perform a smooth and joyful significant performance is highly appreciated among those present.

After having described New Year's Eve, the list of celebrations that the narrator mentions goes on and on. Carnival (lines 77-110), Holy Week (lines 133-176), Mother's Day (lines 177-189), festivities around the community's patron saint (lines 190-205), the already-mentioned *elotlamana* (lines 206-227), the Day of the Dead celebrations (lines 228-249), the 12th of December, the day of Mexico's patron saint the Lady of Guadalupe (lines 250-272), as well as the *posadas* held before Christmas (lines 273-282) pass by in a succession of short characterizations. I do not pretend to discuss each of the rituals that is represented in Bonifacio's account here. Rather, what can be gleaned from Bonifacio's words about the role of ritual in Nahua life is what draws my attention.

The enumeration of each communal ritual celebration reveals that these constitute a reference framework for the community; they are conceived as a central and fundamental aspect of village life. The rituals that are performed in the village place life in a year cycle of communal events, making up the most identifiable part of the village's activities and articulating the sense of community. They also provide a pattern of how people in a village experience the course of time. The aforementioned activities are almost all part of the Christian calendar of religious festivities, and only the celebration of the young corn and of Mother's Day stand out as exceptions to this principle. The celebration of the young corn was already discussed; the celebration of Mother's Day is a civil feast led by primary school teachers in each locality. Nahuas in the village are all Catholic; they express their religious adherence at a public level by collectively organizing the rituals which, besides being a channel to articulate this creed, are significant because they affirm their pertainance to the community.

Nearly all the celebrations that have been mentioned --except for Xantolo (see below) and Mother's Day-- have a communal character. The whole village organizes, prepares, and participates in the activities. Each public ritual is thus an event that articulates the villagers' communal spirit. It

stresses a sense of belonging to the *komunidad* as one of the main social entities to participate in. This characteristic is particularly evident during the festivities around the village's patron saint's day; the Catholic saint who is the village's protector is honored and thanked for the blessings towards the community and, at the same time, the existence of the locality is confirmed and celebrated. The celebration is seen as one of the most important events in the village's ritual cycle: "they hold a big celebration here in my community" (lines 191-192). It represents one of the few occasions when one of the the municipal priests attends the community to hold mass in the village church. The event's highlight takes place after mass, when the patron saint's statue is removed from its place in church and is taken along in a procession through the village. Afterwards, the people assemble anew in the church, where they stay the whole night while the *inditas* dance, the local male dancers perform, and the brass band plays. If the festivities turn out to be a success, the viability of the village as an independent entity consisting of a well-functioning social collectivity has been demonstrated; this affirms its right to exist[66].

The patron saint's celebration is the sole ritual occasion in which the locality's bounds are trespassed, as other villages are invited to participate. The invitation is at an interlocal level, which means that village's representatives visit other villages (lines 196-198). Each locality has ties with certain neighboring *ranchos*, and there are circuits of connected villages whose people visit each other during the respective patron saint's celebrations. These circuits exceed state boundaries, and villages from two or three different municipalities in both Veracruz and Hidalgo may be invited. Though the invitation is made to all members of the villages that have been asked, usually some twenty or thirty persons of each locality show up, carrying their village's banner and bringing with them local dance groups and music bands. It is during the patron saint's festivities that the most varied traditional dances can be observed, performing inside as well as outside the church, and filling the night with music and dances (line 199-200). The high number of participants implies a high cost for the *fiskales* who organize the celebration, for everybody must be compensated with food for their efforts (lines 201-206).

With ritual being the axis and catalyst of communal life in a Nahua village and, thereby, the guide to Bonifacio's performance, its practice is, of course, not static. The narrator tells of changes in the celebrations, such as the introduction of the *via crucis* during Holy Week (lines 141-157) and the activities' reorganization during the celebrations for the Lady of Guadalupe (lines 250-272). Mother's Day was first held when the building of the schools began in the municipality in the 60s, while other celebrations have disappeared or been taken on at a family's more private and intimate level.

This happened for example with the ceremony for the petition of rain (see Chapter 5), which is now performed only when there is a personal motivation. Many of these changes obey the demands of the church authorities in the dioceses, others are instigated by different kinds of aid programs or other federal services, others again are the result of internal dynamics that give rise to shifting valuations and alterations in ritual practice.

There is one celebration that stands out because of its magnitude in Huastecan Nahua villages: carnival. Villagers working in the cities organize themselves and hire special passenger busses to come home and participate in the festivity. Perhaps because of its significance, the narrator's description is accordingly long (lines 77-110). Carnival is called *mekojtistli* and is celebrated every year according to the Catholic calendar, that is, around February or March for four to eight days (line 77-81). The meaning of the name *mekojtistli* is not clear. Its root *meko* is the name of the male participants who dance outside the houses at this time, so a possible translation is the event of the *mekos*[67]. The narrator declares that some persons have been appointed to be their captains --they are in charge of organizing the carnival-- and he qualifies their activity as "a game" (lines 82-84).

Indeed, the actions of the *mekos* look more like a game than a ritual. Most *mekos* are young men --though also elderly men and young boys may participate (lines 87-89)-- who dress up "the way they want to", that is, in hilarious disguises (lines 90-94), mostly in women's clothes, at times in miniskirts and high heels. Others dress like elderly people, mestizos, or the devil. One of the costume's crucial items is a mask. Some are still made of *teokuauitl* (red cedar wood) by a local carpenter, other plastic ones are purchased in the market in Huejutla; the masks cover the faces of the *mekos* so that the audience cannot recognize them. The *mekos* dance to the music of a violin and a guitar playing *sones* (lines 85-86), a lively type of music which has made the Huasteca famous, and the band goes from house to house. Their shouting and disruptive behavior while they dance is quite a show. Scaring off the children, teasing women and making sexual allusions among themselves, the *mekos'* actions represent an occasion in which society norms are reversed (lines 95-98). The fact that they favor the disguises of rich people, priests and the president not only indicates these persons' allegedly perverse standards, but are also an act of ethnic self-esteem. Only when given some coins will the *mekos* move on to another house compound.

When the village can afford it, a regional music band is hired to come and play on the last day of the *mekojtistli*, the day before Ash Wednesday; this night becomes a dance festival for all the villagers (lines 99-105). This event is completely secular and closes the sessions of *meko* dances. The following Wednesday is an important day, as it provides the opportunity for the *mekos*

to become clean after having danced at carnival. The dance is considered dangerous; the *mekos* say it is a play with the devil (lines 114-119). The *mekos* are believed to be the servants of Tlakatekolotl, the spirit of the underworld (Sandstrom 1991:289), who lives either in a hole under the ground, in a cave, or in a beautiful house in the woods. The situation goes back to normal with Ash Wednesday's ritual, when the *mekos* go to church so that their cross will "take away our sin" (lines 111-132). By then, new captains have been appointed; the *mekojtistli* will be held the following year (lines 106-110)[68].

The *mekojtistli*'s crucial position within the ritual calendar calls for an explanation about the relevance of Tlakatekolotl or, in Bonifacio's translation, the devil, in Nahua society. In the Nahua view, every human being and every spirit or entity has good or benevolent and bad or harmful qualities; either one is expressed depending on the context. The spirits can be dangerous and injurious, but this attribute is not perceived as being evil. The events involved are never questioned in terms of their congruity in relation to good or bad behavior. It is just one of the qualities of the spirit, whose actions, though capable of harming, are aimless and neutral. It is the result of these actions that either brings fortune or distress upon man. Hence, in the Nahua worldview the devil and other demons are not looked upon as being exclusively destructive. Báez-Jorge and Gómez (1998) sum up Tlakatekolotl's qualities:

> [Tlakatekolotl] is imagined as being ambivalent, indistinctly as a man or a woman, an old man or a child, Lord of the Night or Lord of the Day. They [Nahuas] say that, at the same time, [Tlakatekolotl] may be good and bad; he cures and bewitches; gives life and favors death; grants and takes away riches; is very capricious, "he may be pleased or angry", reason why "he is cheered up" with dances, music, food and fire crackers (1998:45).

In a few Nahua communities in the neighboring state of Veracruz, Tlakatekolotl is honored with a ritual when carnival begins; food, prayers, music and dance are offered. When it ends Tlakatekolotl receives offerings again, this time to thank him for the carnival. At this point, the persons who have been *mekos* give him back his *tonali* or life strength that he lent them during the festival so that they could dance, after which the *mekos* purify themselves (Báez-Jorge and Gómez 1998:29;55).

Tlakatekolotl is one of the main spirits to receive offerings. In today's Catholic context, he has been identified more and more with the devil, attributing him mostly negative characteristics. In this context, he is often called *axkuali tlakatl* (the "evil" man)[69], and is thought of as a person who harms people. In this vision he is a man who always goes out around midnight, like other maleficent creatures, to perform his malicious deeds. In

tales about encounters with Tlakatekolotl, the protagonists are usually misled by the bestowal of money and food, which are no longer worth anything when they go back home. In other tales, the protagonist says he has no fear of Tlakatekolotl; but once he meets him, the event radically changes his disbelief. Catholic imaginary about Tlakatekolotl has been imposed on the precolonial one, and people say he is a tall, white, hairy man, with a long tail, a long, red or white beard, long eye-teeth and black or red hair. At times he is conceived with a cow's or bull's foot, or occasionally that of a dog's or rooster's. He is usually dressed perfectly and he rides a horse, so one can see he is a *koyotl*, a gentleman:

Uan tlen nopa kauayo kitlatlejkotok nesi koyotl.	And, riding on his horse, he looked like a *koyotl*.
Teipa kitlejkolti ipa ikauayo uan teipa pejki kiuika.	Then [Tlakatekolotl] mounted him on his horse and began to take him away.
Uajka yajke.	They went far away.
Peuató kimakasi pampa ya kema kitlatlejko nojki nopa kauayo nopa koyotl ya mokuapki.	He [the protagonist] began to fear him because when he mounted the horse the *koyotl* transformed.
Ayojkana ya nesi maseuali.	He was not a man anymore.
Mochijki panijuiyo, kuitlapile, tlakuakuajuí.	He became hairy, with a tail, with horns.

Tlakatekolotl is a man who can change himself into any entity he wants. It is said that everything harmful in this world is his doing. Yet, as a negative force he has not lost his importance in society. Nahuas pray to him to implore him to leave them alone, to keep his distance and not interfere negatively in an upcoming ritual (cf. Báez-Jorge and Gómez 1998:58-59)[70]. Harm is also a part of society; it is the dark side that gives meaning to its natural counterpart and allows it to be (Signorini and Lupo 1992). As such, it must be respected and honored.

Death and afterlife

Once the long listing of public rituals is over, Bonifacio goes on with his narrative. There are still some topics he wishes to talk about that do not fit into the village's ritual cycle. The first is the way his village deals with death (lines 293-321). Death was not a topic we had talked about lately, though we attended a funeral together a few months before. Bonifacio refrains from expressing ideas about death or afterlife, or about the emotional impact of a death in the household or village; he limits his description to a summary on the burial's arrangement. The first thing we should notice in this description is the local burial's communal character: each locality has a *kamposanto*, a graveyard, where the deceased may be buried, and all actions concerning the

funeral are taken care of within the community. The public local character of this event might have been the reason why Bonifacio chose to narrate this topic.

The narrator remarks how family members go and inform the local authorities about the death of one of their kinsmen. From that moment on, the authorities organize most of the burial's practical aspects, calling on the villagers for help (lines 293-299). Some men from the village are appointed to dig the grave (lines 300-302), kill some chickens or a pig (lines 304-310), and go for *papatla* leaves that will be used to wrap up the tamales to be prepared the next day for those attending (line 303). A family member or person in the village who knows how to lay out a corpse washes the *mijkatsi*, the dead person, and clothes him in his finest outfit. If the deceased has godparents who are still alive, they will be the ones to clothe him; afterward he is wrapped in a white blanket and put into a wooden coffin made by the local carpenter. If the carpenter has not finished the coffin yet, a straw mat or wooden plank will do as a base on this first day. The base with the deceased is placed on the ground, in front of the house altar, where candles burn and, occasionally, incense is lit. Thus, the wake takes place during the night; practically all the adults in the village visit the family of the deceased, and give the head of the family some ground coffee, corn dough, beans, a bit of sugar or salt, a few coins or another gift to contribute to the costs of the burial. Visitors come and go, bringing candles and lighting them on the altar or on the ground near the head of the deceased. Coffee is served to everyone, *uino* only to the men. The people stay a while, accompanying the family, and the local *katekista* ("catequist") prays the rosary.

The next day, the coffin is moved to the church, where another rosary is said. Then, six male members from the village, appointed by the authorities, carry the deceased to his grave. The whole village is present when the coffin is placed in the tomb and sealed with earth. The coffin is not closed completely, so as to give the *tonali* some space to get out and go to heaven. In some villages, the people throw kernels of black corn by sevens --a number associated with abundancy[71]-- into the grave, until the maize-ear is finished (Reyes Antonio 1982:84). In others, they place clothes, seven *bocoles* or small *tortillas*, seven river crayfish[72] and some coins in the coffin, since it is believed the person will need clothes, food, water and money in the afterworld (Hernández Cuéllar 1982:91-92). At the moment of burial, the tortillas and crayfish are removed from the coffin and placed under the *kamposanto's* major cross. The local guitarist and violinist play *sones*, candles are placed on the grave, and people return to the house of the deceased where they are served tamales and coffee prepared by female relatives (lines 311-313). For the next nine days, people pray the rosary at the deceased's house (line 314-316), and those who want to may attend. During this period,

the family members pray to help the dead man so he may be allowed to enter *iluikatl*, heaven. On the last day, a cross is placed on the grave (lines 317-321). Also, for fifteen days, four to six candles are lit every night at the place where the deceased used to sleep[73].

The deceased is said to linger around the house for a while in an ethereal form; this is noticeable when, for apparently no reason, a plate breaks, a chair topples over, or some other unexpected event occurs. Also, the dead person appears to family members in their dreams. These incidents are said to be signals that the deceased is still on earth (*tlali*), yet in the process of going to one of the places found in the afterlife. The places of afterlife lie in other realms: Iluikatl (heaven), Miktlan (place of the dead) and Apan (the water world). Today's conception of afterlife is not uniform among Nahuas. In precolonial times, most dead persons were believed to go to Miktlan, the place of the dead on earth. If a person had had what was considered a "natural" death, he would go here, where his life force would slowly extinguish. People dying from a disease related to water would go to Tlalocan, the place of eternal abundance. Warriors who died in battle and women who died during childbirth went to the sky, to Iluikatl, where they would help the sun and the stars to do their work. Tlalocan and Iluikatl were thus privileged places, where only a few persons would enter. Only in these two places did their life force not get lost and afterlife was eternal (cf. Sahagún 1989:219-223; 410-411).

Currently, some use the term Miktlan as a synonym for *infierno* (the Spanish word for hell), and say that sinners go there. The Catholic influence shifted Miktlan's location from a place on earth to a place beneath it, but it is still interpreted as a cold and dark place. Accordingly, Iluikatl, in line with more Catholic values, is a place of the dead for those who did not sin; it is a place of abundance where people never become old. In this view, afterlife is possible at two places, and one's conduct in life is the main factor which determines one's place in afterlife. Others do not define Miktlan as hell. They say it is the place of death --on earth, under the earth, or in the sky-- where everybody usually goes, and as such is not associated with the Catholic concept of sin. These persons see Iluikatl predominantly as a place filled with celestial bodies, saints and spirits, yet not as a place of afterlife. The idea of a third place of afterlife, Tlalocan, has vanished, though people know that persons who drown "do not go to heaven but stay in the river" or water place where they died (see Chapter 5)[74]. Of women who pass away in childbirth it is said they do not go to heaven either. They are punished for failing in their responsibility as life givers, and go to heaven where they are dragged along, causing thunder while cleaning the sky. They also protect communities from floods during the rainy season, as they are stretched out along the coastline and with their bodies prevent the sea from exceeding its

bounds (Hernández Cuéllar 1982:63-64). Maya calls these women the "girls of the sun" (Maya, pers. com.) and says they accompany the sun during a *kualotonati* (lit. the eating of the sun) or solar eclipse so people will "be freed" from it and the situation can go back to normal as soon as possible.

The communities' ideas on afterlife differ and are constantly changing. Remnants of precolonial thought on death are vaguely present; some categories like people who drown or women who die in childbirth are still believed to have a special destination, yet the valuation of these death situations has altered and the estimation of the place of afterlife has changed. The views on afterlife's different places vary, and one place may be valued in contrasting ways. Some hold afterlife to be eternal, others think that the life force slowly fades away or dissolves. Some issues remain unsolved. Unbaptized babies or children cannot enter heaven, but then, the question is asked, "where do they go, as they could not possibly go to hell either". God does not allow people who have been murdered into heaven, as the killer (a gunman, a witch, a drunken *vesino*) was instigated by the devil, and death thus occurred without God's will, so where do they go? The current heterogeneous ideas on afterlife might denote a phase of change; old and new views are clashing and new-sprung forms of understanding afterlife are being conceived.

It is the deceased's *tonali* that returns each year during the Xantolo celebrations (All Saints' and All Souls' Day)[75], to share some time with their living relatives (lines 228-249). Together with the carnival festivities and those of the village's patron saint, Xantolo is one of the year's most important celebrations. In one crucial aspect, this festivity deviates from the communal events listed by Bonifacio: Xantolo is celebrated in the individual household. It is probably considered part of the communal events because of its scope --it is a festivity that all villagers honor (line 232-233)-- but the activities take place within the family and among households, especially between ritual kinsmen.

Xantolo's celebration evolves around the home altar; ornaments and food offerings are laid out (lines 228-231). To make the adornments, an activity which lasts about one or two days, the head of the family goes out to search for *posomekatl* (a flexible kind of pole) and *kuachikiojtlatl* (Sp. *otatillo*); the first is bowed into an arch and the second is placed vertically along the sides of the table or shelf that holds the home altar. The adornment in the form of an arch is meant to represent the sacred hill, a place where Nahuas may come in contact with beings that live in the world's other three realms (see Chapter 4). The poles are covered with green leaves and marigolds, and occasionally a few flowers called *kuanelpaxochitl* (Sp. *mano de león*). The flowers are picked in the *mila* or bought from someone in the village or at the weekly market.

Specially-baked bread in the form of miniature human beings is suspended from the arch, as well as all kinds of seasonal fruits, such as bananas, oranges, mandarins, and limes. The fruits all have part of their stem with a leaf still adhered. Sweet potatoes and *chayotes* are cooked and hung in the arch as well.

The altar is adorned, furthermore, with a clean tablecloth, a paper or embroidered *servilleta* (a Spanish word that literally means "napkin" but usually has quite a large size), and food offerings are set out. From October 29th on, hot coffee, bread, *uino* and tamales can be seen on the altars. All kinds of food that the deceased is said to have enjoyed may be placed on the altar at noon, the time when they are believed to arrive. A *tlikomitl* or incense holder is filled with burning copal incense and placed on the floor in front of the altar, and candles are lit next to the food on the altar. It is said that the dead children's *tonali* come back on October 31st, whereas adults return on November 1st. A trail of marigold petals leads the way from the *kamposanto* to the home altar, so the deceased may find their way home, where the offerings are waiting for them. The deceased do not really eat the offerings, they simply smell them and absorb their essence. When the offerings become tasteless, this means that the family member's *tonali* has come home. Other signals of the deceased's return are if a fruit or another adornment from the altar falls and the banana skin darkens; Nahuas say it is a dead person's *tonali* who picked the item from the arch or transformed the banana's appearance by taking away its essence.

It is not clear to me who exactly comes back during Xantolo and who does not. Persons who have died in the weeks or month before the celebration are said not to reappear yet; it is too soon for them to return home. Some Nahuas say these persons are still wandering in order to purify themselves and thus have not reached heaven yet. On the other hand, persons who died a long time ago do not come either; there appears to be a time span in which they visit their relatives. Older persons do not make offerings to their dead parents, "for they have died long ago already" and are not believed to return anymore. This idea might be a remnant of precolonial days, in which the *tonali* was believed to loose its energy, until there is nothing left anymore[76].

During Xantolo, one of the main events is the exchange of tamales between ritual kinsmen and close friends (lines 236-240). Precautions are taken to prepare the tamales before the dead return so they will not spoil them by taking away their essence. Three days in the kitchen is a normal time span for making enough tamales, a task for the wife of the head of the family. She is the one who gives and receives tamales to and from the families that her household wants to share food with. Some women say eight persons have come to offer tamales, others say at least twenty have come; all of them

represent their respective social ties. The giving and receiving of tamales is one of the main activities at this time. It is a ritual exchange of four to six tamales, usually not enough to cover all the family members, but it affirms and strengthens existing ties of friendship and, above all, ritual kinship. The exchange of tamales between members of an extended family is also common, and yet it is not considered the most important part of the exchange.

November 2nd is the last day in which the dead are on earth. Again, they receive food offerings on the altar, and in the afternoon people go to the *kamposanto* to give their farewells for one more year (lines 241-243). In the morning of this same day, family members clean the grave, occasionally paint the cross anew, and adorn the grave with flowers. The most common decorations are a cross traced with marigold petals and a few candles. Local authorities adorn the main cross with flowers. In the afternoon, relatives go to the cemetery with food offerings, and lay them out on the grave of their relatives: tamales, fruits, candles and coffee are, again, the main goods offered (lines 244-246). The catequist prays a rosary for the dead, musicians play, children light fire crackers. Candles are lit, and the people stay a while next to the grave of their deceased to show "that we still bring them [offerings], that we think of them" (lines 247-249). Around six or seven o'clock people begin to go back home; they pick up the offerings and take them to put them on the home altar. Only a few offerings are left on the grave --some some candles and two or three open mandarins.

In at least one of the municipality's *ranchos,* the farewell at the cemetery is on November 3rd. Here, the villagers go and ask for alms on the night of November 2nd; this delays the farewell one more day. This nocturnal activity is called *kokolochiua* (the act of asking alms)[77] and is meant to be a communal collection for the *tonalme* (pl. of *tonali*) of deceased persons who have no living family anymore, or whose family members do not honor the Xantolo celebration and do not bring them any offerings. Around midnight, some ten to twenty male volunteers --followed by a chain of children who watch the spectacle-- start to go from door to door, battering on a turtle shell, making fun of the sleeping villagers and arousing them from their beds. The playing on the shell announces the reason for their visit; it is confirmed in the following humorous petitions they make at every doorstep:

Kokolotsi, kokolotsi, naw naw.	*Kokolotsi, kokolotsi, naw naw.*
Tijnekij tamali, axkana miyak, san se kuachikitsi.	We want tamales, not many, just a basket full.
Tijnekij pantsi, nojki ax miyak, se kuachikitsi.	We want bread, not much either, just a basket full.
Tijnekij koete, axkana miyak, san se	We want fire crackers, not many, just a

grueso.	big one.
Tijneki kuaxilotl, se tlapilotsi.	We want bananas, one bunch.
Tijnekij uino, axkana miyak, san 15 litros.	We want *uino*, not much, just 15 liters.

People give tamales, *uino*, fruits, sweet potatoes, candles to the petitioners, and anything else that may serve as an offering. All gifts are placed in a basket, which is taken to the cemetery, where the volunteers place it under the central cross as an offering to the lonely soul. At the end of the tour, around two or three o'clock in the morning, the volunteers offer the goods at the cemetery's main cross; they themselves eat from the gifts to the lonely souls and light the donated fireworks. The offering to the lonely souls is not just a considerate way of including them and giving them a share in the celebrations, it is also an effective means to ward off any harm they might cause. A neglected *tonali* may become dangerous, showing his anger for not being attended well. If this happens, it may inflict disease upon the household, mostly upon children (see Chapter 5). The celebration has to be held not only to honor the dead but also to keep a safe and constructive relationship with them. The offerings are given in exchange for the continuation of a healthy and propitious life.

The value of celebrating Xantolo is also expressed in oral tradition. Each year, anecdotes are told about people who did not celebrate Xantolo; the protagonist in the story did not want to waste time on the celebrations and instead went to work on his field. In these tales, the unwillingness to think of the dead relatives springs either from disbelief in the deceased's yearly return or from a love of work that favors duties to the living. In the *mila*, the man hears voices he recognizes as those of deceased family members, who tell each other how sad they are to see their relatives ignore them. His unwillingness to remember his dead vanishes on the spot. The man runs home, tells his wife to kill some chickens or a pig and make tamales. At times, he himself starts to adorn the altar. Unfortunately, his efforts come too late and the next day he "wakes up dead". His disbelief or mistaken priority proved fatal. Nahua narrative thus articulates the relevance of Xantolo as a way of getting together periodically with former relatives, standing still before death, and keeping a constructive relationship with both the dead and the living, the latter being particularly ritual kin[78].

Witchcraft

The valuations of constructive and harmonious relationships express themselves clearly in the ideas and practices on illness; these are often associated to a troubled relationship between the patient and his surroundings, which may include the people in his household, village, or any other living entity on earth, and also entities from other realms of the

universe which may harm him and make him ill. The origin of this troubled relationship says something about the contracted illness and how to treat it so the patient may be cured[79].

Bonifacio describes one of the origins of disease, namely witchcraft (lines 322-360). Witchcraft is one of Bonifacio's favorite topics and he had already told me many anecdotes and tales on witches and their deeds. Furthermore, when we were recording, the family was dealing with a probable case of witchcraft, so a depiction of its practice in the village could not be left out of the performance. This topic's inclusion right after the description of a burial seems rather logical, as witchcraft is seen as one of the main causes of death.

Bonifacio knows that witchcraft is delicate topic and that his imaginary interlocutor might not partake in the views he is about to tell. Therefore, he starts out quite cautiously, and says people from his village "still" believe in "what they call witchcraft" and that "they say" people become ill because of it (lines 322-325). During his performance, Bonifacio's personal standpoint regarding witchcraft is ambivalent. He dissociates himself from this belief, yet he also implicitly recognizes witchcraft's existence and asks for our understanding when he says people from his village do not always recover with medicines from the clinic whereas they do with traditional medicine (lines 326-332). He mitigates the custom's significance, alleging there are no traditional doctors practicing in his village anymore (lines 333-336); however, after he describes how a traditional doctor treats a bewitched person (lines 339-356), he admits that this treatment is effective; when a person does not recover after being treated by a traditional doctor, it is because he does not want to (lines 357-360). Bonifacio's presentation of witchcraft reflects the dilemma he faces while trying to reconcile his more secular outlook on life -- which requires his rejection of witchcraft-- with the undeniable presence and acceptance of witchcraft and counter-witchcraft in village life.

The belief in witchcraft is strong among Huastecan Nahuas (lines 322-325) and when a person cannot be cured with herbal or clinical medicine, the suspicion that this person is bewitched becomes stronger and stronger (lines 325-329). In many instances, only a traditional doctor, called *tlamatijketl* (lit. "he who is knowledgeable") or *tepajtijketl* (lit. "he who medicates")[80], may cure this person; a physician will not be able to (lines 330-332). The disease does not have a physiological origin, so medical science alone will not help to cure the patient. Nahuas know that ideas on witchcraft and other non-physiological origins of illness do not correspond with those of medical science nor of dominant, urban culture and they are careful about expressing their thoughts on these matters. A traditional healer works in the privacy of a home or in the early morning-hours on the *tepeko*, the sacred hill; an open manifestation of this practice is avoided. The introduction a couple of

decades ago of federal government health care in the municipalities through medical teams in rural clinics has clearly influenced the once-more open character of traditional healing and ideas on disease.

In a case of witchcraft, a *tetlachiuijketl* or *brujo,* witch, asks the help of entities living in other realms to inflict an illness on a person. He does this due to the request made by someone who is envious[81] of the person to be bewitched or who has any kind of unsolved problem with this person. The witch, usually a man though a few woman witches are known, is asked to harm this person in exchange for payment for his services[82]. Off and on, it is believed a witch acts on his own account, bewitching people he himself has a difficult time with. If de does not ask the entities in the other realms for help, he may go around transforming himself into a turkey, gopher, feline or other animal, or even a fireball, and do the harm himself. Witchcraft is a common topic in everyday talk and many anecdotes on witchcraft circulate in the communities. An elderly man of the *cabecera* said:

> I had an aunt there in a *rancho*, there I had an aunt. And she had her husband. They were already old then. She says that it was a hot day, but very hot, like it is now. "That's why we went to sit outside", she says. "My husband and I were sitting outside. And it was around ten o'clock, eleven o'clock at night", she says. "We were sitting", she says, when suddenly they see that a ball comes from the sky, she says. "And that ball came DIRECTLY to where we were. When I see it, it COMES and COMES and I GET away from there. I run to one side and I tell the man 'GET away because it will fall on you'. And it fell". What do you think it was? A gopher! A gopher! A gopher fell. And so she, since she had a stick in her hand, she says that at the moment it fell she BEATS it. And it appears they killed it, and they threw it into the fire. They burnt it. That fire ball that came was an animal, it was a gopher who, they say... They asked themselves who it could be, a male or female witch, who appears to have wanted to take possession of the *tonali*. That's the way the witches went transforming themselves formerly. They went from one place to another in the form of fire. Arriving up high, they fell and could change themselves into a female turkey, something like that. So they... she told me, my aunt: "No," she says, "that's what I saw with my own eyes when the FIRE came, a ball, but directly where we are", she says. "So I told your uncle, I tell him: 'GET away, get away, because it will fall on you'. She went to one side and he to the other. It fell between the two. And they killed it, they burnt it. *Sólo Dios*, that's the story.

In this example the witch tried to snatch the person's *tonali*, which would have caused weakness, illness and, if the patient were not treated in time,

even death. The aunt and uncle were able to ward off the danger and kill the intruder. When a case like this happens, it is thought that not only the animal in which the witch has transformed himself, but also the man dies. If the witch lived far away, his death might go unnoticed by the ones who killed his animal disguise. At times, a death in the community or in a neighboring one is related to the killing of an animal thought to be a witch:

> They had a sick person, very seriously, very, very seriously. They say that this sick person, no, no, he didn't die. He was just suffering, suffering. They were preparing water to bathe him, because it appears he needed a bath. They call them *plantilla* or seated baths. So they had put water in it, and the window was open. So that's how they were heating the water when suddenly a bird enters, identically like a turkey. And that, well, when it was inside they closed the doors and caught it. They put it in the hot water, they killed it. The following day a witch from here in the village woke up dead. A woman says that there was a man who woke up dead.
> -And the sick man?-
> He recovered, he recovered.

Some people are held to be witches. Bonifacio declares there is one in his community (lines 337-338). Most persons who have died recently in the village are known to have had problems with the assumed witch. When drunk, this person himself boasts about having killed them. It is said he prays for the death of a specific person while lighting a candle, "yet no one has been able to prove anything". The supposed witch poses a problem in the village, yet is also one of its active and productive members, who "greets well and speaks well". Witchcraft is an inherent part of society, and as such is an accepted constituent of life.

A patient may also fall ill without witchcraft. In these cases, when the disease has no direct physical cause, a troubled relationship within the family or village may be the cause of it. It is believed that a harmonious bond with the surroundings strengthens one's *tonali* and that, if this relationship is somehow damaged, the person may become weak and thus more exposed to attacks of guardians and spirits. On other occasions, the guardians and spirits willingly cause harm because the sick person did not respect their living space or did not thank them for their beneficence with offerings. The water spirits may have been angry about the liquid's pollution; the earth may be annoyed because of a forsaken offering. The *tlamatijketl* will have to repair the situation with offerings and prayers in an appeal to undo the harm.

The narrator describes how the *tlamatijketl* determines how he will cure his patients and whether he will take them to a *tepeko* or sacred hill (see Chapter

4) where offerings are brought to the entities of the other realms in an act called presentation (lines 339-356). A trip to a *tepeko* is only undertaken when the nature of the disease requires it. When the patient is too seriously ill, a family member may accompany the traditional doctor instead, bringing along the sick person's piece of clothing (lines 349-352). Once he arrives at the site, the *tlamatijketl* arranges the things he has brought: first, a white paper is laid out as blanket on which to place the offerings; then, ritual paper images that represent the entities from the other realms who will be prayed to, a few coins, candles, cigarettes, incense, food, *uino*. After laying out the altar, the *tlamatijketl* invokes the beings from the other realms, declaring the reason for his visit and asking for their help to cure the patient. In all his healing, the *tlamatijketl* uses a special, formal kind of language. After an hour or two of prayers, in which the patient is ritually cleaned or his clothes are left at the *tepeko*, the healing has finished.

The *tepeko's* sacredness must be respected; because of it, a trip to the hill is one of the most effective means to cure a patient. Anecdotes about people who have stolen the money left at these sites say these persons irrevocably "fell dead" after the incident. If the sick person dies after all, it is said that this is what he wanted (lines 357-360). The sacred hill's authority is not disputed.

Socio-political organization

After talking about the ideas on sickness and health, medical practices and the interdependence between the different realms of the cosmos, Bonifacio makes a rather abrupt change in his narrative. Towards the end of his performance, after a short pause in which he was obviously searching for more topics, he comes up with the subject of the village's socio-political organization. Though his narrative is laden with references to the authorities' roles in village life, only then does he take it up as an independent topic. Local authorities, public services and ongoing government programs are mentioned briefly; it is evident these do not interest him much as far as village matters are concerned (lines 361-383). Some of these points, however, throw light on how the village functions as a social unit; they deal with items such as citizenship rights and loyalties, consensus, and cooperation.

In the community, each member has a role to play, not only as a member of his household but also as a member of his village, and is expected to comply adequately with these two roles. In both cases, he is part of a labor chain that functions only when all parts cooperate; his solidarity with his family and village is of the utmost importance for a society to run smoothly. The community's male members who have land-titles are called *vesinos* (Spanish for inhabitants). Being a *vesino* implies a series of duties to the community.

All *vesinos* are obliged to work one day in the week in the aforementioned communal work or *faena* (in Nahuatl known as *komuntekitl,* work in common or work for the community). This task is not remunerated; it is considered a service to the community in exchange for the individual's rights as a village member: owning land and having a say in local political issues. During the *faena* work is done in the communal fields or in the cattle enclosure, the weeds are stripped from the footpaths to and from the community, the local school is painted, a new stone path through the village is laid, a fellow *vesino* is buried, and other kinds of communal work are carried out. If, for whatever reason, a person cannot perform this duty, he must contribute money for a day laborer's wages. Women are also organized into a *faena*; they are in charge of cleaning the community's public places --the paths and the wells.

The male inhabitants get together every evening to plan communal work and local celebrations, discuss local problems and developments, decide how to invest the communal earnings, or talk about other matters concerning the community. The meetings are considered an entertaining pastime, a means to see friends. They reinforce integration and social cohesion among the villagers, as all come to learn about local matters and have a say in the way these should be dealt with. At times, discussions about a certain topic may take hours and days, until a consensus is reached and everybody agrees on the course of action. Thus, decisions are made with the participation and acquiescence of all villagers.

Bonifacio does not mention the *vesinos'* collective organizational role, yet he gives a punctual description of the functions of each local authority (lines 161-173). Among the *vesinos*, some persons are entrusted with a communal duty and thus become *autoridades* (Spanish for authorities). The communal duties, also called *cargos*, are the expression of the community's civil-religious organization, since the persons holding a *cargo* are responsible for the smooth functioning of local public and religious affairs. Those chosen will have to fulfill their *cargo* during the time stipulated, usually a year. After this, they are entitled to a year's rest, which means they will not be given another *cargo* right away. Of course, during their year of rest they will still be *vesinos* who discuss and decide on village maters. All *cargos* are performed without any monetary compensation and are seen as a service to the community. Men over sixty are considered "past authorities." They do not have to cooperate anymore in the village's organization, yet because of their experience, their advice is frequently sought on local matters.

At the daily meetings the village's male members decide who will be an authority. Being an authority implies spending time and money, and the tasks have to be distributed more or less evenly among the village members. This does not mean that there is no kind of stratification in the fulfillment of the

cargos. A young adult man may begin with a task that does not involve a great amount of time or money; the *jues* is always a man who has nearly reached the age of retirement from public duties, and no one has ever been chosen *jues* without having fulfilled any other *cargo*. The duties of a *jues* imply too much responsibility and cannot be entrusted to a young man. All elderly males may be chosen to become *jues*, and there are no restrictions on their skills. People in the *cabecera* often complain about some *jueces* who are not able able to read or write, or speak Spanish. They feel the villages do not organize themselves well, and believe these conditions prevent them from being better represented. Yet, the system is equitable, and the *cargos* are distributed among all[83].

To function well, the *cargo* system depends on the villagers' considerable loyalty, a value that is put into practice through everyone's active cooperation in village affairs. In the municipality's Nahua communities, the system's operation demonstrates that these cooperative modi operandi are viable. Though perhaps not as ideal as Bonifacio has sketched them, for today's migration has put a strain on the *cargo* system and on the implementation of the communal work, there is still enough social cohesion to make this organizational structure work. This structure is complemented and reinforced through collective work. At times, when labor is needed in the *mila*, the villagers resort to a labor exchange system called *mano vuelta* (Sp. to turn hands), in which they mutually help each other in the field on a one-to-one basis, without pay. This system is not only practical in a society without much liquidity, it strengthens intracommunal relationships as well. When a person needs so much help that he knows he will not be able to "return the hand" to each of the individuals who work for him, then his field workers will get paid in cash. Both the civil-religious organization with its authorities and the local labor exchange circuits provide a network of intracommunal contacts, rights and responsibilities, which tie the member to his community and make him feel part of his village. The compliance with local requirements is considered a top virtue: "I don't rob, I don't kill, I don't offend the [local] authority, I don't offend the village" (Barón Larios 1994:64).

Within the local organization's structure, government programs are implemented in an attempt to alleviate the poverty and the poor health situation, which characterize the area. The *asistente rural* (rural assistant), a villager who has received first-aid instructions, is equipped with the basic necessities to attend small injuries and the most harmless diseases (lines 374-377). The Progresa and Procampo committees are local representations of federal aid programs, the first providing scholarships to school-going children[84] and the second giving economic support to agricultural activities (lines 378-383). The villagers' deplorable economic situation can be seen by

the fact that all families with school-going children receive Progresa, and almost all obtain money from the Procampo program to sow their fields. With every new government initiative, people from the community are bound to fit the beneficiary profile and obtain some kind of help to relieve their situation (lines 282-283). Unfortunately, most programs are temporary and do not offer structural solutions to the many problems Nahuas face. Bonifacio ends his narration with an unintentional reminder of the village's structurally poor and marginal economic situation.

Conclusion

Among Huastecan Nahuas, differences between collectivities are not drawn following ethnic lines (Nahua, *mexikano*), but according to the presence or absence of the values attached to the *maseuali* and *vesino* condition of each individual. Ethnic categories are not fixed and lack strength as a factor that provides identity in the Huasteca area; this can be viewed in the daily interaction among indigenous peoples. Nahuas from Xochiatipan, Hidalgo, have contact with those from neighboring municipalities in Veracruz, but hardly know of the existence of Nahua-speaking people from the state of San Luis Potosí that also belongs to the Huasteca area. This means they do not believe they belong to a sole people that I have called Huastecan Nahuas. The *maseuali* condition defines Huastecan Nahuas as persons opposite to spirits, saints or guardians, and as poor peasants living according to the *kostumbre* when confronting people who live in economically better and culturally different situations. The *vesino* condition confines the idea of *maseuali* to a local, communal sphere. This cultural reproduction of the collectivity on a local level parallels socio-cultural reality: To Nahuas, the most relevant activities, worries and, consequently, tales, concern the village. Bartolomé has called this type of identity a residential one (1997:124-141).

According to Bonifacio, life in his *komunidad* is, in the first place, about farming. The cultivation of corn is the main productive activity, which provides a meager income to the individual families. Corn is also one of the main things that confers identity in the villages; its cultivation involves a series of beliefs, rituals, values and activities that constitute the core of Nahua life. Corn generates material income and bestows life strength. Its cultivation under the *ejido's* present circumstances, in which only small plots of land on irregular terrains are given, requires a certain organizational structure where cooperation becomes a highly valued principle. Corn's symbolic significance is expressed in activities such as divination rituals, the *elotlamana*, and other ritual acts in which the grain is invoked in prayer. All these activities are very much alive, and their importance can be deduced from the sanctions imposed when the *kostumbre* is disregarded, as was illustrated during the description of the Xantolo celebration. Besides

expressing the offering's central place, the *kostumbre* characterizes a farming society in which corn is both the material and spiritual base. Corn is anthropomorphized into a living being with whom a solid alliance may be established. *Nochipa xijtoka uan nochipa titlakuas* (always sow and you'll always eat) is the motto that expresses the essence of corn growing in the community. Corn suggests subsistence, continuity, and stability. It produces and reproduces life.

Despite migration flows and the peasants' asymmetrical economic situation compared to people elsewhere, the villagers are proud of their *rancho*. They say it is well-organized, clean and full of good people: "We don't have pigs walking loose, we sweep the trails, we use latrines, and our children speak Spanish". The sense of belonging to the village is strongly related to the peasants' deplorable economic situation, to the extent that living in the village is equated to poverty:

> If I had a good job I wouldn't be here, how would I say, I'd be in the city. And of course, I'd earn a lot of money but I wouldn't know my father I wouldn't talk to my father or to the community.
> I wouldn't support anything here. I wouldn't know what for.
> I already have enough to live, why would I come here?
> But now that I'm here I feel happy.
> I want to suffer like my parents always have done.
> I want to live.
> Yes, I'm poor, but for me it's better this way.
> As long as I have my liberty or as long as I eat or dress that's enough for me and there's no need for anything else.

The same as Bonifacio did, the community is presented to outsiders as a unit of little internal economic differentiation, in which all *vesinos* are poor. Economic poverty as a shared cultural value creates social coherence; exceptions for individuals who gain riches are not tolerated, certainly not if they are outwardly displayed, for they set the individual apart from the collective (cf. Sandstrom 1991:332-333). The notion of the *komunidad* as a giver of identity is articulated through the villagers' many existing relationships. In the previous comment, the supportive bonds with the household (represented by the father) and the community are stressed; it is said that these relationships lead to happiness, to a personal feeling of satisfaction. A harmonious and loyal interaction among all is highly valued. In daily practice, participating in local affairs and obeying local duties are the most common ways to uphold this value.

Village life is also compared to suffering. In contrast to the city that is conceived as a place of material wealth, the community represents privations.

It is said that Nahuas who stay in the community were, are, and always will be poor. Their way of living does not promise material riches. Still, peasant life is preferred over any other. The choice to stay in the community is made on non-materialistic considerations: village life connotes liberty. Though providing only the most basic needs, life in the community is equated to freedom, to living life the way one wants to. Though some Nahuas have a very strong relationship with other entities, as is the case of seasonal migrants, the community is one of the main nuclei of interaction in this part of the Huasteca, and people share a common feeling of belonging to their *rancho,* which is stronger than other identities. The concept of what makes a *komunidad* does not comprise the locality alone, but also the farming way of life and the interpersonal relationships that take place within its boundaries.

A clear illustration of this principle is the arrangement made regarding the land that belongs to the *vesinos*. In the *ranchos*, corn and other crops are grown on little plots between 0.5 and 5 hectares that are *ejido* lands. According to the legal condition of today's *ejido*, the owner of a plot may freely dispose of it, rent it or sell it to a third person[85]. Yet, in an attempt to meet present-day needs to protect the village territory against outsiders, the *vesinos* of Bonifacio's community have agreed not to sell their land to outsiders. When land cannot be sold, it remains an inalienable part of the village; this means that it stays within the collective. This collective consists of the title-holders, all of whom are more or less permanent residents who, in return for their residency and for belonging to the collective, have obligations towards the community. After the title-holder of a plot dies, the land will be given to another member of the community, usually one of the sons of the deceased. If the deceased had no sons, the parcel returns to the community, who may appoint it to any other member with a need and right to obtain land. The effectiveness of this arrangement depends fully on the cooperation of all title-holders and their respect for the decisions taken by the local authorities, which suggests quite a strong social cohesion among the villagers.

Bonifacio's narration affirms this conception of the village as a social construct: the *komunidad* is, in the first place, a collective of people living together. The mode of reproducing this social construct, that is, of affirming its existence and viability, is through its ritual life. Bonifacio's account is, above all, a description of the public rituals celebrated at the local level. Village life flows in a rhythm of succeeding rituals in which intracommunal and extracommunal relationships are expressed. Since the public rituals involve the entire village, bonds within the entity are confirmed among all villagers as active members of their locality. It was stressed that this membership involves citizenship rights as well as communal duties and obligations, and that cooperation and loyalty are two key principles in this respect. Extracommunal relationships are shown when surrounding villages

are invited to participate in local rituals. In these events the community articulates itself as an independent entity which relates with other villages on equal terms.

By telling about the rituals, Bonifacio stresses the villagers' ability to organize. All members have their responsibilities and tasks, which are particularly articulated when a public ritual takes place. On these occasions, emphasis on cooperation and loyalty towards the community pictures the village as a socially homogeneous unit, in which class differences are not recognized culturally. The internal socio-political and religious organization is fairly equal and calls for the same commitment from all. The fact that all villagers participate in public ritual affirms the existence of a homogeneous culture in which the same religious notions are shared. All villagers are Catholic, so all share more or less the same valuation of these public rituals. The *komunidad* is united because of the outlook they share on life and on religious and cultural matters. Bonifacio's presentation does not take into account disruptive forces that constantly imperil this unity, such as land conflicts between villages, the pressure of migrants claiming their lost rights as *vesinos*, or an ever greater success of protestant and millenarian sects.

Bonifacio did, however, talk about witchcraft's disruptive force. Although acts of witchcraft are often attributed to witches from other communities, above all in Veracruz, some cases relate to conflicts within the *rancho*. Moreover, even when the witch is said to be from another community, his instructor might be a *vesino* from the village. Envy as the main reason for witchcraft implies a drive for an egalitarian society. Tensions and conflicts among the villagers are translated into terms of witchcraft, and curing a bewitched person is meant to entail the reestablishment of a more harmonious relationship with the surroundings. The fact that witchcraft leads to sickness or death --the bewitched person falls ill or dies-- causes an immediate disturbance of the social unit in which the bewitched person lives. This disturbance has economic repercussions, which, in a precarious economy like that of Nahua households, might have far reaching consequences. The existence of witchcraft is a good motivation for maintaining constructive and egalitarian relationships among all.

Bonifacio already pointed out that not all activities take place within the community as a whole. The nuclear family, the house compound, and the relationships with ritual kin are essential spheres of interaction and communication. Local production and consumption patterns, the reference to the *kaltokayotl* (name of the house compound), the exchange of tamales during Xantolo, and the washing of a deceased by his ritual kin are but a few occasions in which the existence and valuation of these spheres is articulated. The relevance of these more intimate relationships should not be neglected,

as they strongly confer identity as well. The secondary role Bonifacio attributes to them indicates his desire to present his thoughts on what constitutes a community, and not of every single aspect of Nahua life. The specific details of communal life in its organization, activities and values create a unique unit of interaction that is as vital to the people as their sense of belonging to more intimate units.

Bonifacio's performance discloses a series of activities that stand out because of their singularity. The offerings to the dead, to Tlakatekolotl, to corn, and to ritual kin give way to a proper framework of reference, which is not shared by other collectives. The organization and communal celebration of these rituals does not coincide with practices in other areas. Ideas on afterlife, heterogeneous as they are, reflect specific values that are not common among other peoples. Rituals in which people express their "happiness" about their permanence (they are happy because they have completed another year of life or because their corn has produced), must have a specific emotional bearing on a community that lives on subsistence farming in a climate as erratic as the one in the Huasteca. Some of the above-mentioned features seem to be unique in the *komunidad* or in a cluster of local villages, others in the Huasteca area in general, and others again are common to all Mesoamerican peoples.

Chapter 2
Huastecan Nahua tales

Ni kuentos mas timopouiliaj kema tiyauij titekititij mila. Titekitij, tikiluiaj ma axtikuesiuika uajka tipeuaj timopouiliaj yani kuentos. Kemantsi asta kipijpiuiyaj, uetskatinemij, kiilnamikij kema ne mila tekitij.

We most often tell each other tales when we go working in the *mila*. We are working, we say let's not be bored and then we start to tell each other tales. At times they even make up [parts of the tale], they go laughing, they comment them when working in the *mila*.

The problem of defining

The labeling of specific genres which comprise the oral narrative in a given society is contested by different scholars, who point to the multiple problems that arise when assigning fixed entities to dynamic material. Tale telling is an active process that includes the narrator's perspective as well as the audience's expectations. The conception and reception of a specific tale varies from person to person, through time, according to the setting and particular ideological backgrounds or social situations (cf. Finnegan 1992:137). Taxonomies of genres do not embrace the variations that occur when transmitting oral tales; therefore, these cannot fully describe their complex, changing, multiform, and sometimes ambiguous character. According to these critics, one should pay more attention to the performance's dynamics and the influence of tales on social practice, rather than trying to attach rigid labels that do no justice to the constantly developing activity and heterogeneous conception of tale telling.

If we agree that the ascribed values of specific tales in a given society are more relevant for the understanding of oral traditions than the categories to which the tales belong, listing and subsequently defining genres provides a general framework which shows the valuation of categories considered meaningful. These conceptual categories and their valuation provide a first means of understanding people´s view on a particular literary corpus, which may be of use when interpreting individual tales and arranging them in the production of oral tradition as a whole. Also, every scholar has to make choices while naming his research subject. Even when called verbal art, prose narrative, oral tradition(s), or any other broad term that covers more categories to denote one comprehensive genre, the selected term has to be explained and calls, at least, for a working definition.

Tales and tales

Classification of tales is always hazardous; it can be based on many different features according to the researcher's purpose. For example, one may base the distinction on the tale's thematic contents (flood tales, origin tales), its narrative form (a riddle), or the setting in which it is told (children's tales). However, not all of these characteristics are mutually exclusive. A flood tale is also an origin tale, and in some circumstances it can also be used as a children's tale. The question then arises: does the researcher have to make a special entry for flood tales or should he register them instead as origin tales? Also, should flood tales for infants be listed under "flood tales" or "children's tales"?

In addition, there is another point that must be decided when establishing criteria for the tales' classification: using either analytical concepts, which can be applied cross-culturally for certain analytic and comparative purposes but reflect the categories of western European narrative, or rather adopting "native" or "ethnic" categories, which refer to distinctions made by the members of a particular culture who transmit these tales. It has been shown that analytical concepts do not work when studying oral traditions. Categories such as myth, legend or folktale have numerous diverging definitions, making it difficult to have a clearcut understanding. As these categories are based on western European oral narrative, they are not compatible with the form and content found in the material of non-European societies, and may create confusion when trying to understand the oral tradition of a specific society. Yet, determining and defining the participants' genres and terminology to classify their oral tradition is a rather complicated enterprise as well. The existence of a variety of terms in the native language referring to a single analytical genre, and the lack of equivalents in some non-western societies for genres that are meaningful to academics studying oral tradition (as for instance "myth"), make

categorization an intricate but interesting work. The employment of "ethnic" taxonomy has an advantage over the analytical terminology; it enables the researcher to gain more insight into a particular society's conception of oral tradition. In his study, Gossen (1974) includes such a "native" classification, which is illustrative of the way in which members of a collective, in this case the Tzotzil of the Mexican state of Chiapas, conceive their literary production and attach distinct values to its constituent parts. The distinction between "true ancient narrative" and "true recent narrative" reveals a subdivision of Tzotzil oral tradition into two categories, according to the events' time depth and the veridical ("true") or non-veridical character attributed to the tales. As demonstrated by various authors (see, for example, Finnegan 1992:147; Ong 1996), this subdivision is very meaningful in indigenous classifications of oral traditions, and as such, exhibits the categories relevant to the collective while valuing its literary production.

The characteristics of Huastecan Nahua oral narrative do not correspond in every respect to "ethnic" classifications that have been made for other indigenous peoples of Mexico. Since native categories explain the way participants conceive their oral tradition and the role of its narrative in human life, it is useful to devote a few words to the classification of Nahua tales such as I have been able to reconstruct it in the Huasteca. This classification is not so much a division into genres, but rather into tale types, and must be understood as an approximation and loose characterization of Nahua tales, meant to create a reference framework for studying this dynamic material in terms of its valuation in Nahua society. One must bear in mind that the the categories are flexible in two ways. First, the types are not absolute, and dividing lines between them are often difficult if not impossible to trace. Second, as mentioned already, the same tale can be enlisted into different categories due to the performing circumstances, the listener's personal interpretation or a shift in categorization through time. Even if this dynamic provides more information on the valuing of tales than the categorization into types, categorization is needed when establishing and interpreting this flexibility in the Nahua oral tradition.

The kuentos of Huastecan Nahua narrative

Not many attempts have been made yet to describe and explain the Nahua tales' native categories. Van Zantwijk (1989:66) calls Nahua narrative *sasanili* (tale), a term he distinguishes from *xochikuikatl* (lit. "flowersong": poetry, hymn and songs) which, in his view, comprises the non-narrative part of Nahua oral tradition. *Sasanili,* a designation borrowed from the Classic Nahuatl that was spoken by the Aztecs at the time of the Conquest*,* is in this context a general designation applied to the narrative of all Nahua speaking peoples in Mesoamerica. Modern-day Nahuas do not often adopt *sasanili* to

address their narrative. It is known to be applied as *sanil* in the Sierra Norte de Puebla -an area adjacent to the Huasteca- where it has kept its meaning as a narrative (Taller... 1994; Segre 1990). In the state of Guerrero *sasanili* means riddle (Ramírez, Flores and Valiñas 1992). Huastecan Nahuas do not actively use the term, but they are acquainted with it and say it means tale.

Beller and Beller (1978) as well as Stiles (1980) mention *tlajtolkamanali* (lit. "a talk about/with words") to address the tales in the Huastecan municipality of Huautla, Hidalgo, and in all of the Huasteca in Hidalgo, respectively. Nevertheless, this term is not often used now. Taggart (1977:280; 1983:7) cites *iškwitil*, *iškwiltil* or the Spanish name *cuento* (tale), all of them employed in the Sierra de Puebla. For the same area, the French linguist Toumi (1984:25) enlists the expression *tanemililis* as a tale (Fr. *conte*), which stems from the verb *tanemilia*, to think, and can be translated also as "thought" (Fr. *pensée*) or "intellectual step" (Fr. *démarche intellectuelle*), for it contains the root *nemi*, to go around. Knab (1983:129-141) mentions five types of tales in the Sierra de Puebla, all of which contain the root *tajtol* (word) and refer to types of words that distinguish speech genres. In the nearby Huasteca, *iškwitil*, *iškwiltil* and *tanemilis* are not used, and the Spanish voice *cuento* is the idiom most often employed to denominate all oral narrative. It has become a common loanword which, in accordance with Nahuatl orthography, is written as *kuento*. Terms like *tlajpoualistli* ("something told"), *kamanaltlajtoli* ("words to converse", cf. the above mentioned *tlajtolkamanali*) and *tlatempoualistli* ("something the lips tell") are also known in the Huasteca, though they are not often used[86]. Nahuas seem to have a rather passive knowledge of these nouns and prefer to call each oral expression of oral narrative *kuento*.

Even though the designation *kuento* covers all the forms of Huastecan Nahua oral narrative and is the term most commonly used in the area, Nahuas recognize a subdivision in their tales' taxonomy. Certain *kuentos* dealing with past events fall under the category or type *tlen uajkajki panok* ("that which happened long ago"). When asked to translate this term into Spanish, people say it means *historia*, a story or history. Apparently, the difference between a Nahua (hi)story and an oral narrative that cannot be called (hi)story is based on the perception of its contents. In the Nahuas' view a history is a true non-fiction tale about the recent or ancient past which is told to inform the audience about incidents that did take place once. With respect to this type, they assert that the narrated events offer true accounts of past times. It differs from other tales, which can also be set in former days but are told merely for entertainment and are not believed to contain genuine elements. One villager explained the conception of two main categories of tales and their supposed truth-value in the following way:

Tojuanti tikiluiaj ne "*historia*" tlen ika kaxtiltekatlajtoli tlen ika nauatl tikijtouaj "tlamantli tlen uajkajki panok"[87].	In Spanish we say "*historia*" [history] to what we call in Nahuatl "tlamantli tlen uajkajki panok" [things that happened long ago].
Ni mopouiliaj kema kejné tekitij mila, kemantsi kejné mopaxialouaj[88].	These are told when working in the field, sometimes when visiting.
Peuaj mopouiliaj tlamantli tlen uajkajki panok, kenijki tiualtiualayaya [89], kenijki tlaeltó, uan miyak tlamantli mopouiliaj tlen melauak[90] panok.	They start to tell about things that happened in the past, how we were [then], how it was, and many things are told which actually have occurred.
Pampa seki tlen san kiyolijtiaj[91], axkana ya nopaí tlen nelí[92] panotok.	Because there are some who just make things up, and that is not what really happened.
Ya no seya itoka, ya ika kaxtiltekatlajtoli tikiluiaj "*cuento*".	These are called differently; in Spanish we call them "*cuento*" [tale].
Nompa yaí axkana melauak panotok, san kiyolijtijtoke.	These did not actually happen, they were just made up.
Seki san moyolojuiaj, seki kiniyolijtiaj tlapiyalme, inijuanti kamatij, inijuanti nentinemij tlemach kichiuaj.	Some only imagine them, some give life to the animals, [that is,] they talk, they go about doing a lot of things.
Ni se tlake tlen axkana melauak.	This is something that is not real.
Uan ya nopa tlen kiiluiaj "kuento".	And this we call a "*kuento*" [tale].
Uan tlen ne "*historia*", ika nahuatl "tlamantli tlen uajkajki panok", ya tlen melauak kena panotok.	And the "*historia*", in Nahuatl "tlamantli tlen uajkajki panok", these are things that really did happen.

The Nahuatl term *tlen uajkajki panok* (that which happened in the past) gives information on how the tale type called history is conceived. Tales of this category talk about events that occurred *uajkajki*, formerly or long ago. This term has to be understood broadly as having taken place "time ago"; true events situated in both a more recent and a more distant past fall under this category[93]. On various occasions the narrator adds that these things really (*melauak*) happened, stressing the tales' truth. I suggest we call them true tales (cf. Gossen 1974), as this name contains both the assumption of a narrative or description, as well as a factual happening in the past.

According to the above-given description, the singularity of true tales lies in their perception. The most important feature of the events that are described is not that they have happened somewhere in the past, but rather that they really did happen. They are a transmission of former events that are felt to represent genuine and unquestionable facts. More than just a reference to past events, the term true tale represents authenticity, which turns out to be the crux for understanding and interpreting the tale. For Nahuas, it is important to know whether the narrated events really did happen, or if the tale is merely fiction.

Despite the fact that the designation of true tale is only attributable to Nahua tales about the past whose contents are considered authentic, these accounts can also be called *kuentos*. In other words, all true tales are *kuentos*, but not all *kuentos* are true tales. Narrators do not always consider a tale's categorization as either a fictional or a non-fictional narrative, but every Nahua conceptually discerns the two types and is familiar with the Nahuatl terminology. When the tale type is mentioned before or during the performance, the term *kuento* prevails. Narrators seem to prefer to use this term, letting each listener decide whether a tale's content is real or not.

Herewith is a conversation in Spanish with a group of men in a village in the Xochiatipan municipality, which illustrates how Nahua denominations of tales in daily life work. One of the men told about his father's personal experience with, possibly, the water's guardian spirit, or, as he puts it, "some kind of white mass" existing in the water's depths. In the anecdote, the father, a fisherman, comes upon a strange being when fishing under water. To him, this being represents danger and the story line concerns his escape. The narrator concludes that had his father not been able to escape, he undoubtedly would have drowned. The conversation then continued:

> A[94]: I ask you because they told me a *cuento* (tale) here, a tale about a fisherman who went fishing and caught many fish, and then a woman came and she didn't let the man catch any more fish and she told him: "You have never brought me any offering".
> B: Ah, that's a tale, that's a tale.
> C: It's different, it's different. It's a violation [a disregard].
> A: How?
> C: That's a violation already.
> B: It's a tale.
> A: But this does not happen [in real life]?
> C: This happened to my father.
> B: It's a tale, it's a tale, this [what you, investigator, mention] stems from long ago. And that which our friend is telling is what happened to his father.

When the investigator (A) alludes to the fisherman's tale with the Spanish term *cuento*, one man (B) takes this as an indication of the investigator's non-belief in the events' veracity, for the word *cuento* in Spanish is often used to denominate a fictional tale. Contradicting the investigator, speaker B reacts in order to express the truth-value of this tale by employing the same term *kuento*, which here means true tale. Speaker C also counters the investigator's observation, but does so in response to the real-life anecdote told before. Whereas the investigator brings up a tale about a fisherman --whether it is fictional or not-- the incident about the father belongs to a different

category, which speaker C values as an anecdote about a violation, in disregard of a specific moral code. When the investigator asks about the issue of authenticity in an attempt to define the term *kuento*, speaker B clarifies the case, saying that both accounts (the real-life anecdote and the tale about the fisherman) are true, but that they belong to two separate situations because of their different protagonists (a fisherman ↔ C's father), time depth (it took place long ago ↔ not so long ago), and perhaps the events themselves (an encounter ↔ a possible encounter).

The conversation thus reveals a third category of Huastecan Nahua narrative. The real-life anecdote is not perceived as a narrative and cannot be called a *kuento*. It is just a comment on something that happened to someone lately. In the Nahuas' view, the relative freshness of the incident prevents it from belonging to a literary category. What to a student of oral traditions is an integral part of Huastecan Nahua discourse on the past --whether labeled informal narrative, recent narrative or any other denomination characterizing its anecdotal feature-- to a Nahua is only an ephemeral chat about a recent development. No labels are attached to this kind of conversations about former incidents. Yet, their subject matter is about past events and is believed to have a truth-value. In analytical terms they are part of true tales and will be called anecdotes --the same as Nahuas call them-- in order to distinguish them from the former category[95].

In sum, there are three types of Huastecan Nahua tales. Schematically, they can be represented in the following way:

Tale type	**Nahuatl term**	**Belief**	**Time depth**
true tale	*tlen uajkajki panok* or *kuento*	fact	ancient and recent past
anecdote	ø	fact	recent past
(fictional) tale	*kuento*	fiction	any time

A tale can be fictional (*kuento*) or non-fictional (*kuento, tlen uajkajki panok*) and not every non-fictional tale is seen as a narrative (rather, for example, as an anecdote). When dealing with the past, the tale is perceived as fictitious, as dealing with real past events or as an anecdote (which, in that case, does not fall under any literary category). Nahua terminology is not always helpful when trying to typify Huastecan Nahua tales about the past. Out of three categories, two have the same name (a re-semanticized term incorporated from the dominant society[96]); the third does not have a name. To an outsider, Nahuatl nomenclature seems unreliable when trying to understand the primary conception of a Nahua tale as veridical or not. Nahuas, however, employ this ambiguous labeling for their benefit. In the Nahua conception the distinction between a true and a fictional tale is not rigid, and the term *kuento* covers both options. For example, a certain tale can represent a true

tale for some, whereas for others it is a fictional. In the course of time, Nahuas may lose or recover their belief in the veracity of a certain narrated event. Depending on the discourse situation and the participants' (supposed) view on a specific tale's authenticity, one may claim belief or disbelief. In all these circumstances, the use of the term *kuento* leaves room for diverging or changing valuations, which makes the narratives pertinent in many discourse situations over a long period. Nahua categorization terms are flexible so they can adjust to individual conjunctures and changes through time.

The tales selected in this book refer to past events, both ancient and recent. It is known that all approaches to past events (written and oral, official and informal, the one built on scientific methods and the one that broaches them through literary expressions) are reconstructions of the past. They mix both a diachronic and synchronic discourse on past events, are expressed from a certain point of view and entail specific interests framed by social processes and other local circumstances. Amidst these ways of dealing with the past, oral transmission and representation have their very own characteristics.

Narrator's and performance's context

Performance has become an increasingly important analytical focus in research on oral traditions. Each performance is a unique happening that cannot be repeated, in which a tale is recreated in accordance with the circumstances of the moment. These circumstances mold the representation and its subsequent interpretation by the listeners in any given session. It is here, at the intersection between language and culture, that meaning is created. In order to comprehend this meaning, it is not only crucial to place the performance in its cultural and situational context, it is also necessary to consider the speaker's individual qualities as a person and a performer.

The cultural context of Huastecan Nahua oral tradition was addressed in the previous chapter and shall be the reference point during the discussion of the selected tales about water. One very important element of this context is the position of the Nahuatl language in which this oral tradition is transmitted. In the Xochiatipan municipality where the tales were collected, the use of Nahuatl prevails. It can be heard at the market place, town hall, formal public events, church, and almost every home in the area[97]. Different from other municipalities in the Hidalgo part of the Huasteca, the indigenous language in Xochiatipan does not seem to be losing its influence as the main vehicle of communication, at least not at the same pace as in other Nahuatl-speaking entities. It has not been influenced by Spanish as much as in other parts, where purists deplore the "mixed" character of spoken Nahuatl[98].

As is the case with all indigenous tongues in Mexico, Nahuatl is above all an oral language. However, Nahuatl's current oral condition breaks with an old tradition in which it was also written. Precolonial pictographic documents and the intermittent use of Nahuatl as *lingua franca* and official language through colonial times, account for the current existence of large collections of pictographic and written documents in classical Nahuatl, the language spoken by Aztecs and other Nahua-speaking peoples at the time of the Conquest. These documents not only allow us to compare current oral traditions and past Mesoamerican predecessors, but also to study cultural continuity in Nahua religion and worldviews (see Chapter 3). Their existence contrasts with the current scarcity of written documents in Nahuatl, a language which is spoken by over a million people, and brings to light the impoverishment and exclusion of indigenous peoples in Mexico today.

The study of Huastecan Nahua oral tradition is also relevant because of the use of the indigenous language when narrating. Though I will not address the effects of the current linguistic situation in which two languages are disputing status and predominance over most linguistic functions, the act of telling tales in the native tongue and not in Spanish, provides the opportunity to study the Nahuas' life's and community's more intimate sphere, through the concepts used by Nahuas themselves. Furthermore, as language is one of the foundations of social identity and the historical memory of a society's past experiences is stored within it (Bartolomé 1997:81-84), the very transmission of tales is an act that articulates identity.

Regarding the situational context in the case of Huastecan Nahua true tales and anecdotes, the narratives are transmitted without any restrictions at any time and on any public or private occasion. The audience's active participation during the performance stands out as the most peculiar contextual feature of non-fictional narrative. Whereas fictional tales are mostly told by experienced and publicly recognized narrators (also called story-tellers), without any interruptions from the audience, true tales and anecdotes are more often seen as episodes of past events on which everybody may comment freely. In practice, this means that most of the time the persons attending the session enrich and shape the tale with their comments. This procedure gives the impression that true tales, especially those situated in a recent past, and anecdotes are more informal types of narratives, that is, less bound by narrative structure.

True tales and anecdotes are transmitted when people are together in a group and some reason for telling arises. These group conditions are met, for example, when people are working together in the *mila,* performing rituals or resting at home with their family (cf. Taggart 1977:280). As said in the previous chapter, these social situations primarily consist of settings within

the locality; true tales and anecdotes circulate ordinarily within each separate *komunidad*. The interpersonal ties that exist with people outside the community lead to a diffusion of these tales at an intercommunitary level[99]. The reason or motive for telling a specific true tale or anecdote is often circumstantial. During September's celebration of the young corn, people recall periods of scarcity in which they were forced to leave their home and go to work elsewhere; a trip to the cave where the flooding *xili* (river shrimp) is said to have lived make people remember certain events that took place at the site.

On these occasions, one person, usually an older male member of the locality or family, starts telling an event after having been invited to do so, or because one of the persons present does not know what happened then[100]. The other persons present listen to the narrator's version, and, from time to time, add some details or comments, criticize the narrator, ask for a specific date or express their contentment and agreement, thereby stimulating him to proceed with his version (cf. Knab 1983:182-184). Since it is a rather informal transmission of information, the telling of a true tale is often sidetracked and people go into a discussion about the past event's exact geographical location, the identification of the eyewitnesses or protagonists, or any other circumstance that sets the tale's scene. The performance thus becomes a multivoiced rendering of a past event.

During the performance the narrator is able to express his personal valuation of the tale's contents. Argumentative and instructive segments blend with the tale's descriptive and expository core and, though not pertaining to the narrative's story, are an integral part of each performance. A subsequent indicator of valuation is style. A humorous tone when dealing with tales about witchcraft may indicate non-belief; a serious narrative manner that ends in a burst of laughter reads the same. During the performance, norms and values are confirmed or reinforced but can also be rejected by things such as the narrator's tone of voice, pauses and gestures or the text's poetic style (cf. Burns 1983; Tedlock 1972, 1983; Sherzer 1990). Up to a certain point, the narrator's personal views can be weaved into the tales and the performance bears his personal mark.

Since the individual narrator is the center of selection and production as well as the first one who assesses the oral tradition he reproduces, it is fitting to give a brief outline of the lives and characteristics of the principal narrators in this study. My main aim is not to discuss the relation between the individual and oral tradition, that is, how the narrator's personal characteristics (his worldview, status, attitude towards the tale, linguistic competence[101], etc.) and the versions he has heard have influenced his conception of a particular tale and, consequently, his tale telling. But the

recognition of a particular way of tale telling is important for the tale's analysis and its relation to the socio-cultural context. The following information should be taken as a contextualization of the performance's conditions, which opens the possibility of a deeper comprehension of the rendered accounts.

One of the most participative narrators who contributed to this study is Don Gregorio. Don Gregorio is a famous storyteller, and everybody in the surrounding villages knows he is able to produce an impressive number of *kuentos*. A monolingual elderly man of about sixty, Don Gregorio lives in a small village of almost three hundred people and is a respected member of his society. He has not yet reached the age of retirement, so he assumes the public duties or *cargos* the locality assigns him and participates in community-life as a *vesino*. Although he sows his *mila* (field), there are years in which he travels to Pachuca, the state capital, in order to complement his earnings working in the construction business as a day laborer. He does not stay in the city for long and he usually goes back when work has to be done in his *mila*. After many people told me I should go and see him if I wanted to hear some fine tales, I went to his village to meet him. He turned out to be a very open man, who was not shy to affirm that he, indeed, knew many tales.

Don Gregorio is proud of his skills as a performer and knows people appreciate his knowledge. It seems that his personal need for expression and creativity is channeled through tale telling, which provides him with opportunities of social intercourse and gives him a unique position in his village. He does not actively seek an opportunity to exhibit his competence, but loves to tell his tales to demonstrate his skills, and always claims to know only long ones. Especially keen on telling the *kuento* of Chikomexochitl, considered a complex tale about a most important theme, the corn's origin, it could be said that he is a very good performer indeed. Public recognition gives him the liberty to express his tales freely whenever and wherever he wishes. Yet, Don Gregorio is not easily persuaded to tell tales and would rather see his audience insist a great deal before he agrees to perform. After going through a lot of trouble to "win him over" and finally hear his *kuentos*, the listeners conceive Don Gregorio's performance as something rather special and exclusive. This way, Don Gregorio makes sure he has caught his audience's attention at the same time that it gives his version more status and weight.

During story-telling sessions, which usually take place at the house where he lives with his wife, Don Gregorio always tries to optimize the performance's conditions. He does not want children to disturb the recording by their presence, and alleges to not have sufficient time to tell a tale if he does not feel like narrating. At times, he is unwilling to tell a tale if he thinks he does

not remember it well. When narrating, Don Gregorio speaks in a loud, bright voice and usually in a slow pace to give him time to weigh every word before uttering it: because he knows he is being taped, he wants the recording to be as precise and clear as possible. Yet, his tone is lively and entertaining, and he often uses a narrative device, describing in the present tense when referring to past events; the continuous alternation of the two tenses breaks the tale's flow and refreshes the audience' attention once again. Don Gregorio captivates his public apparently without any effort and seems quite at ease in his role as an experienced storyteller. He does not make many body gestures to emphasize his tales, but rather focuses on his public's eyes to see if they are still following him. During the narration he is not easily diverted and becomes irritated if someone interrupts him; he sees his performance as a serious undertaking that needs all his concentration and attention if he is to be successful.

One peculiar feature of Don Gregorio's performance is his repeated use of words taken from Spanish, which contrasts greatly with his daily speech in non-narrative situations. Apart from the usual Spanish words that are already deeply integrated into Huastecan Nahuatl, from time to time Don Gregorio sprinkles a Spanish voice into his narratives. A study made by Hill (1985) might explain this seemingly strange property. In his analysis of a Nahua life-story from the state of Tlaxcala, Hill demonstrates how the use of a Spanish idiom in Nahua oral narratives has a symbolic significance in at least two ways. Viewed as the language of prestige, Spanish words highlight features that are considered important in a discourse situation. Also, their employment when voicing a third party creates a personal distance between the speaker and the person spoken of. In this case, the use of Spanish recreates the tale's social world and constitutes an indication of the Other in tales. Don Gregorio's poor knowledge of Spanish may prevent him from using Spanish in the second manner, but it seems plausible that the Spanish words he handles accentuate the tale's more important parts.

People are convinced of Don Gregorio's merits and nobody would ever comment negatively on his renderings. Yet, after every session, Don Gregorio wants to hear his taped interpretation to verify the recording's quality and its complete contents, after which he regularly approves of his own performance. Don Gregorio generously shared many *kuentos* with me, and he appeared quite pleased to have met someone who was interested in his knowledge. His regular complaint is that young people do not want to hear the tales anymore and he was quite enthusiastic about the idea of taping his *kuentos* so as to have a record. He says only people between forty and sixty years tell the tales skillfully. The younger people do not tell well because they are indifferent and do not know tales, while the elderly cannot perform satisfactorily anymore because their age makes them forget parts of the

episodes[102]. During the last few years Don Gregorio has become ever more reluctant to tell tales because he has "forgotten them and cannot tell them right anymore". Being a skillful narrator of both fictional and non-fictional *kuentos*, I asked Don Gregorio above all to tell me true tales. He gave a rendering of the events involving the water snake and the *xili* (see Chapter 4).

Besides Don Gregorio, a second account of the appearance of the water creatures mentioned above was given by Don Pedro (see Chapter 4). Don Pedro, a monolingual man of about the same age as Don Gregorio, is not a storyteller. He lives in a village of some five hundred people, and is also a *vesino* and well-known member of his community. Don Pedro works on his *mila* and lives with his wife, two married sons and their respective families. In one of the two houses on his land lives a third, unmarried son and Don Pedro's mother, a widow. As was the case with Don Gregorio, my relationship with Don Pedro dates back to my first stay in the Huasteca, when I began to work with his mother who wanted to learn to read and write and would visit their house on a daily basis.

Some two years after this first encounter, Don Pedro was appointed *jues* of his community. Being the village's leading authority at the time, Don Pedro offered me, and one of my students, the hospitality of his home during one of our visits to the Huasteca. Consequently, I was able to spend a lot of time with him and his family. One morning, when we were eating breakfast in the kitchen, a tiny room outside the main building, Don Pedro told his family about the *xili* and a second water creature that had wanted to make a sea in the surroundings. One of Don Pedro's sons had asked him to tell us about the incident, and Don Pedro began to talk freely about the facts he had heard from a man who had worked for him a long time ago. Several of the family's adult members repeatedly interrupted the narration and commented on Don Pedro's version. There were several reasons for their interference: either they wanted to complete an idea Don Pedro had uttered, ask about a particular detail, state their agreement on the version told or stimulate the narrator to proceed with his performance. The children present were listening too, yet they did not interrupt the adults. Although Don Pedro was the main narrator, he allowed everybody to comment freely on his version, and the telling turned into a lively discussion on the events that had occurred. Thus, the tale was reconstructed by all of the household's adult members. Even so, Don Pedro was seen as the main authority on the subject; he was the oldest male person present and had obtained primary information from one of his day laborers; thereby, he provided most of the data discussed.

The performance had taken place so spontaneously that I did not dare to risk breaking up the session's dynamics to ask permission to record it. Interestingly enough, when I asked Don Pedro to relate the happenings again some time and allow me to tape it, his reaction was rather strange. Whereas a few moments before he had been fully open and free, rendering his personal account of the events in front of his family and outsiders like me, he became very reserved when I suggested the recording. Although he assured me he was convinced he was telling the true tale "the right way" and had all the correct information[103], at the outset he did not want his rendering to be taped. The tape would give his fellow-villagers access to his version and Don Pedro did not want to be critized. It took quite a bit of persuasion to make him want to tell what he remembered of the events. Only after repetitious pleas was he willing to narrate the tale, most likely because of his political status as *jues* at that time, which forced him to attend "external affairs" --I was one of them!-- and be a good host. Still, he tried to prevent people from discovering he had told his interpretation of the true tale. He would not let anybody else be present at the recording[104] and asked me not to mention his real name in this study.

When Don Pedro finally began his performance, his voice took on a more dramatic tone than it had had in the previous spontaneous session. It was obvious that he was not at ease with the situation. The fact that he was not a skillful narrator made him uncertain about his newly acquired role as an informant and expert on oral tradition. Only after a while did he loose his initial reserve and began to talk more openly. However, throughout the session it was clear that he felt he "should not be doing this". Don Pedro narrated in a repetitive, unstylish manner, which immediately marked him as a reluctant and inexperienced narrator. He was very careful to get all the details of the content right and, because of this, neglected the performance. He had difficulty bringing the tale to a good end and kept repeating the last part. Though in oral tales repetitions of sentences or passages are quite common and provide a means of making the tale more fluent and keeping the listeners on track of the events (Ong 1996:46-47), the way Don Pedro proceeded made it clear that he did not use this style element as a mnemonic device but rather because he could not find the proper way to end his performance elegantly[105].

Don Pedro's attitude reveals that people are aware of the fact that opinions vary a great deal regarding past experiences, and that no "official true tales" exist in the communities which are recognized as such by all members of Nahua society. There seems to be no official storyteller when past events are concerned, as Nahuas do not refer to anybody in particular to obtain the "correct" information about these events, something that is immediately done when asking for fictional *kuentos*. Yet, even if there is no official story-

teller about past incidents and, therefore, nobody can "own" a true tale, Don Pedro was afraid of being reprimanded by villagers who might correct his rendering or blame him for not telling it "the right way". This is more evident in tales concerning the recent past, for true tales like those about the universal flood or about the corn spirit Chikomexochitl, set in a more remote time, are not submitted to this strict social control regarding their form and content.

Don Pedro is not the only person who does not want his version of the true tales recorded. His attitude is common among many people in Nahua communities. Most persons are willing to tell about past events but do not want to give permission to tape their version. Even Don Gregorio, the well-known storyteller who had rendered his version quite openly and appeared to be quite satisfied with his own knowledge, raised objections and came to see me when he heard that I was transcribing his text in the presence of some children of the village. He requested that I do not play his tape in public so as not to get negative comments from other villagers, something he had never asked before in relation to his fictional *kuentos*. Even for a well-known narrator like him, the rendering of true tales is slightly precarious and subject to criticism. Don Gregorio did not want to risk his image as a faithful storyteller. This means, in my view, that in Huastecan Nahua society everybody who wants to can freely comment on texts that are considered true tales, but, at the same time, it is felt that nobody can have the privilege to make his interpretation the official one. A recording could lead to an official version of the past, and both Don Pedro and Don Gregorio tried to prevent this from happening by assuring the privacy of the recording act and its subsequent diffusion within the village.

Both Don Gregorio and Don Pedro can be characterized as conventional, elderly Nahuas who have retained a lot of Nahua oral tradition. Yet, not only are the elderly males guardians of traditional knowledge. In the third chapter, the narrator talking about the flood was a forty-year-old a man at the date of the recording. Don Pancho lives in a small village of some five hundred people, together with his wife and six male children. He is a primary school teacher, and is one of two heads of family in the village who raises his children in Spanish; the second person is also a schoolteacher. His wife also speaks *castellano* fluently, and both address their children and each other in Spanish. Don Pancho considers it very important for his children to learn the dominant language because he knows they shall need it when they want to study or work in the city. He says that his children pick up the Nahuatl from their friends anyway, so he does not feel it is necessary to teach it to them[106].

Don Pancho is a *vesino* of his village, yet his income allows him to pay off his duty as a *faenero* or communal worker and he never participates in the *komuntekitl* with his fellow villagers. Nevertheless, he does attend the *vesinos'* daily reunion and accepts the *cargos* imposed on him by his community. He is entitled to a plot of land assigned by the community, but does not grow much and cannot be considered a peasant. At home, he sells soft drinks, beer and ice-lollies, since he is one of the few fortunate people in the community to own a refrigerator.

Wishing to be polite and, probably, due to the instructional role he considers to have on a level broader than that of his labor circumstances, Don Pancho and I had some informative conversations in which he kindly offered many details about local life. When the talk touched on tales, Don Pancho usually declared he was not a storyteller and said he did not know any tales. He did, however, remember one tale his widowed mother had told him when he was a boy and voluntarily suggested performing it. The tale turned out to be a version of the flood tale.

As always, we sat outside his house. Don Pancho had placed the seats a bit further from the kitchen than usual. Maybe he preferred not to hear any comments from his wife during the session, or wanted to have some space so that his children would not disturb us when entering the kitchen[107]. Except for the habitual short greeting from an occasional passer-by, the performance was not interrupted and only drew the attention of a few children; among them were some of his sons who came and sat down to listen. Since there were only minors present, there were no questions or remarks from the audience during the session.

Don Pancho started narrating in such a relaxed way that it looked as if he were an experienced storyteller. Probably due to his professional background, he did not seem to have any trouble at all with his new role as a narrator and spoke in a calm but vivid tone an, apparently, without making a great effort to remember the tale. His narrative was very well constructed, rich with details, and had a well-defined beginning and ending. Like Don Gregorio, Don Pancho does not make many gestures and tries to make eye contact with his audience to maintain their attention. Although he is not considered a person who knows tales, his rendering was definitely as rich and good as any of Don Gregorio's *kuentos*.

Don Pancho, who has gone to a lot of trouble to obtain the position he currently has and can be seen as an early example of a successful villager in his *komunidad*, is not an overtly western-minded person. On the one hand he seems to want to form part of Mexico´s dominant society and displays a more individualistic outlook on life; he socializes with his children in Spanish

and does not participate in the weekly *faena*. He claims not to feel attracted to the indigenous, peasant life style and is not a person who seems proud of his indigenous cultural heritage. On the other hand, he is one of the keepers of traditional knowledge; he knows tales many people do not recall anymore, and he plays the violin and performs songs which are not played in the village any longer. Even though he does not appear to be as "traditional" as Don Pedro or Don Gregorio, who are both monolingual peasants that do not often go outside the municipality, Don Pancho has been able to preserve a lot of Nahua knowledge[108].

The narrators in the fifth chapter are the youngest contributors to this study. Feliciano and Bonifacio were both seventeen years old when they told me the tale about the Lord of the Water and "the fisherman and his son the warlock", respectively. At that time, the two were studying *secundaria*, the equivalent of junior high school. Both live with their families, Feliciano in the municipality head and Bonifacio in a small village nearby. Feliciano always wanted to leave the municipality and seek his fortune in the city, but is now a political figure at home and works in a municipality program providing aid for women and children. Bonifacio wanted to stay in his village and do something for his people. He now works in a federal literacy program for adults as the municipal coordinator and is the only person in his community who studies during the summer in the port of Tampico. Both men converse at home in Nahuatl but they speak Spanish fluently and use it in their daily jobs; Feliciano in the town hall where mostly mestizos work, Bonifacio when attending his weekly meetings in the town of Huejutla, the regional center.

Feliciano tries hard to achieve recognition in the municipality as a member of the political elite. To him, this includes becoming a mestizo. Though never denying his ethnic background --he was born of Nahua parents who taught him in the Nahuatl language-- he feels ethnicity implies a socio-cultural adherence to a collective and does not see himself as a Nahua. He loves to buy expensive clothes or luxury articles like audiovisual equipment in order to outwardly resemble a mestizo and he likes to show off his new economic position. When conveying information, Feliciano explains how the topics can be interpreted *indígicamente hablando* (lit. "indigenously speaking"), a term he invented to dissociate himself from the beliefs he knows so well but does not share. Another creation is the opposition he makes between a *mentalidad indígena* (lit. "indigenous mentality") and a *mentalidad actual* (lit. "current mentality") or *mentalidad teológica* (lit. "theological mentality"), which establishes a separation between two different worldviews. Feliciano says he partakes in the second "mentality" and stresses the distinction more than necessary to attest his position. In an effort to be politically correct in a country where paternalistic discrimination has made room for a supposed

multiculturalism and respectful integration of indigenous cultures, Feliciano overreacts and pictures Nahua culture in glorifying terms, admiring its "astonishing and beautiful" burial ceremonies, "very well told" tales, or "spiritual" concepts about the devil's malignancy. His uncritical attitude and at times exalted admiration for indigenous culture is not convincing; it is evident that indigenous culture, in his eyes, has had its day and is now but an exotic and lovely relic, without a right to exist. Feliciano is a clear exponent of Nahuas who think that assimilation is the sole option for indigenous peoples when trying to survive in present-day Mexican society. A radical change of cultural identity is, in this perspective, the only way to be accepted in the dominant group and to benefit from the privileges this entails.

Feliciano's friend Bonifacio is also modern minded: he is attracted to Mexico´s dominant culture based on the industrialized, capitalist and urban part of society. Bonifacio questions his culture and says he discards the belief in Tlakatekolotl, in witchcraft, or in the supernatural component of traditional medicine (see Chapter 1). He is very eager to study and prepare himself as best he can, even if school fees, transport and maintenance costs during the six-week summer course are a heavy burden on the family economy and the six-year program implies a huge personal investment in terms of dedication and perseverance. Yet, Bonifacio does not plan to leave for the city and wants to study in order to help the people of his village and municipality. Attracted to Mexico´s dominant culture because of its material wealth, he prefers to stay in his community and critically selects the parts of the dominant culture he feels are advantageous to fulfill his objective. As said in the previous chapter, he identifies with his village; Bonifacio calls himself a Nahua and values his culture positively. He readily participates in communal life as a communal worker or *faenero*, engages in processions and other religious rituals, and was a dancer of the local male ritual dance group until it disappeared after the death of its captain. Bonifacio says he feels sorry that these traditions are slowly losing importance in his village, especially since, he says, people do not realize the importance of these cultural expressions. At the same time, he does not identify completely with traditional Nahua culture. Trying to integrate a partly modern and a partly Nahua outlook on life, Bonifacio is constructing his personal identity as a modern Nahua from both traditions.

The tales narrated by Bonifacio and Feliciano were recorded in different situational contexts. Feliciano had told me about the belief in the existence of someone who lived in the deep waters of a well in one of the *ranchos* in the municipality. He could identify the man who had encountered the person in the water when he had gone swimming there. According to Feliciano, the swimmer moved to the city and has most probably died already, but the people in the village never stop telling about this event, which is now

narrated as one of the local true tales. I asked Feliciano to give me the details in Nahuatl, and after some hesitation he summarized the event for me in a short tale. The request might have made him feel uncomfortable, firstly because of having to switch language --we always conversed in Spanish [109]-- and secondly because he does not like to tell tales. Feliciano alleges he does not remember any tales, does not know how to tell them, and is not interested in the subject. His reluctance was based on a personal disinterest and was not dictated by his surroundings, as was Don Pedro's case when narrating a true tale. During the narration it was obvious that telling a tale that he considered fictional, was not problematical for him because of its type but because the act of narrating was not appealing to the performer. Feliciano followed the teacher-like style of his explanations on Nahua culture, interrupting himself various times to make sure I understood the tale's constituent parts. The blunt enumeration of actions, especially during the first few sentences, revealed both his inexperience and desire to be done with it.

The setting of Bonifacio's contribution was more spontaneous. Bonifacio and I met during one Easter week when we were invited by Feliciano to spend some time together in Don Gregorio's village. I told him about my interest in Nahua tales; he volunteered to tell me a few. In the summer of that year, Feliciano and Bonifacio visited the capital of San Luis Potosí where I live, and Bonifacio once more proposed to tell me tales. This time, he told the fictional tale about the fisherman and his son the warlock. Bonifacio claims not to know many tales, but over the years has turned into a most contributive narrator. Though he is not a recognized storyteller in the village, his tales are entertaining and keep getting better with each performance. He became more and more involved in the topic and now listens carefully during a spontaneous performance so as to remember all the details. Also, he sometimes asks people to narrate tales so he can add them to his corpus. Even though he gathers the information and narrates the tales to his family and friends, his first objective is not to perform in public. Nor does he want to tell a tale when he believes he does not know it properly, something that happens often when dealing with true tales. Bonifacio loves to tell tales and anecdotes about Tlakatekolotl, affirms he knows the Chikomexochitl tale's long version, and always offers to relate the latest "colored" tale he has learned. But he does not accept narrating about the appearance of corn by Chikomexochitl, the flooding water creatures, the universal flood or any other true tale. He says he does not know all the details to tell the tale correctly; and he follows Don Pedro's and Don Gregorio's attitude in relation to true tales.

The five male narrators introduced above are the ones whose tales constitute the main material to be studied here. Their contributions comprise those of two elderly, monolingual peasants --one, a recognized storyteller--, an adult

man who is among those better off in his village, and two young males. The five differ in age, economic position, occupation, language skills, outlook on life, their appreciation of oral tradition, and, most probably, have different opinions on many varied topics and their valuation within Nahua society. Obviously, a sample of five persons with such different characteristics is too small to be representative of a particular segment or category of persons within the village, not to mention the whole of Huastecan Nahua society. Besides, all of them are male, no female narrators are present[110]. Yet, this study does not aim to provide this kind of representativeness. Its focus is on the presentation of oral tales and their analysis in terms of their interrelation with socio-cultural reality. In this context, the narrator's personal background (his interests, views, goals, attitude, life experience and personality) and the way he influences the understanding of the oral tradition he transmits is more relevant than the question of whether he represents a certain segment or category of persons. If we want to know what is expressed through tales and anecdotes and the significance of these narratives in society, the narrator as an individual must be taken into account.

If we acknowledge that the presentation of tales by different narrators manages to give an impression of different narration styles in Nahua oral narrative, the tales analyzed in this study were not selected according to the narrators' specific individual qualities or skills; restricting the tales presented to the few persons recognized as authorities in tale telling would have produced fewer tale versions. Furthermore, as was mentioned before, in the Nahua communities most tale telling is not restricted to the narrator's skills; everyone is at liberty to transmit them. All narrators relate tales in their homes; oral tradition is mainly passed on within the family unit[111]. The recording of versions from both authoritative and non-authoritative narrators gives a more truthful view on who transmits the tales and how they are told.

Collecting Huastecan Nahua tales about water

Since the selection criteria for the analysis of Nahua tales has undoubtedly influenced the shape and course of this study, this section will show how I did the fieldwork and made the decision to study Nahua tales about water. To account for the selection of both the subject and the specific tales that are analyzed, I must refer to my first experience in the Huasteca area, when I did research for my masters' thesis and spent almost a year in the Huasteca of Hidalgo. This long period of fieldwork was intended to be an explorative one, in which I would strive to become familiar with Nahua daily life and the basics of the spoken Nahuatl variant. The themes to be studied were the customary ones that typify descriptive ethnographic studies of indigenous communities, such as social organization, ritual cycles, family life and labor

division, world views, material culture, and so on. I was fortunate enough to be accepted in one Nahua village to do my research.

Through time, I achieved a working knowledge of Nahuatl and spent my days chatting, asking, participating and observing many different social situations. In this daily interaction, people told me about their village, their *mila*, and many other topics that would pop up. One of these topics was the telling of tales. Occasionally, the tales were transmitted spontaneously, when I happened to be present and unwittingly became a part of the audience. At other moments, the tales were narrated when I inquired about the village's past; elderly persons would then inform me about ancient times, for example, when a couple came to settle here and founded the village, about a nearby spring where the first humans of this world are said to have been created, or about the prices of products from the *mila* in former days.

I became more and more interested in the tales and, towards the end of this first period of fieldwork, I started to seek them more explicitly. In this phase of the research on Nahua oral tradition, the aim was to record a series of tales that would give a first indication about the characteristics of Nahua narrative in the Huasteca. I visited Don Gregorio regularly and each time he would offer to perform one or two tales. The tales he told were mostly ones he suggested; I tried not to ask for specific themes so as to get a notion of what his personal interests were. In the following years, during periodical short visits to the Huasteca, our encounters were less frequent; yet, slowly I was able to construct part of the corpus of tales he possessed. Other tales were retrieved from miscellaneous narrators, in which there were no restrictions regarding the subject matter, the narrator's performing qualities or the conditions of the performance context. Everybody who wanted to tell *kuentos* was welcome to do so, about whatever subject they preferred and whenever they wanted to. Some of these narrators became performers because I asked them to tell me a tale, others affirmed to know a few and passed them on to me.

When possible, I tried to tape the performances in a home setting, as I thought this was one of the most common spatial contexts for the transmission of tales. The narrators would be in the surroundings where they usually perform and those present would be their habitual audience. At the end of my initial phase, there, I had collected a set of tales from different narrators, which partly reflected the multiple themes that are present in Nahua society, as well as the different styles of narrating them. Together with the data I had gathered about many themes on village life that was presented as a monograph of the *komunidad*, a first approach to Huastecan Nahua oral tradition was included in my thesis (van ´t Hooft 1994).

During the research for the present study, I continued to ask for tales in a more or less casual way, registering those that I was allowed to record and making notes about the ones that were told when there was no opportunity of taping. My approach was thematic. If a person said he did not know any tales, I tried to refresh his memory by telling tales I had registered before to see if these were common knowledge. Or I inquired about tales that I had read were narrated in other indigenous communities in Mexico; I wanted to check whether these or some of their motifs were present in the Huasteca's Nahua villages. In the same manner, I asked for anecdotes. At times, a conversation included anecdotes that gave insight on how and when this tale type is performed, and what kind of information is transmitted.

In the next phase of my research, the corpus of recorded tales had to be screened in order to find a suitable set of tales to analyze. Since my main concern was to study Nahua identities, the ideal situation would be to take into account the whole array of tales and analyze how Nahua narrative in general interacts with identity issues on different scales in Nahua villages today. Nonetheless, this would imply a major effort far beyond the scope of the time span programmed for this study. Also, the recorded material proved to be too expansive and disperse to make such a study profitable. I wanted to study the differentiation in Nahua society, thereby the tales had to concern, preferably, only one subject matter, but from a great number of narrators so that different versions, diverging valuations and varying ways of telling could be analyzed. After having talked to a lot of people about *kuentos* and anecdotes, and having listened to quite a lot of performances from distinct narrators, in order to have a view on what themes are addressed and get a first-hand grip on oral production in the villages, one theme stood out for its recurrence and preference among Nahua narrators: many tales dealt with different aspects of water.

The lively presence and abundance of tales in Huastecan Nahua oral tradition about what I decided to call "the water creatures" was the persuasive factor to delimit the study to the role of tales about water in identity issues. In every village and in many discourse situations, I was told about different creatures that live in pools, wells, rivers and other waters in and around communities. People say these creatures look after the water and grant goods like the liquid itself, fish and crustaceans. The creatures have the form of snakes, crawfish, mermaids, saints and humans. The water creatures are not purely beneficial; sometimes they endanger the Nahuas' living space. I was told about snakes that are capable of inundating the land. People recall how they escaped a local flooding after a crawfish appeared in their village and began to produce huge amounts of water. A very popular anecdote tells about a creature who pulls people into the water; those who managed to escape the attack now relate their underwater experiences. When a person

drowns, people attribute this incident to this creature, which succeeded in snatching another victim.

By placing the events in a familiar setting and, occasionally, referring to acclaimed eyewitnesses, recollections about decisive encounters with the water creatures are a current theme in Nahua narrative. The creatures all have some kind of relationship to the water, and the passing on of these confrontations demonstrates that the element plays a significant role in society. As the subject matter is one of the most favorite ones, its content is likely to be one of the most meaningful. These tales' obvious importance is a second factor in the decision to analyze them, in addition to the fact that they can be associated to one of the most precarious issues in daily life: water provision. I thought these tales would somehow represent and articulate local attitudes towards water and thus value the relation between man and a crucial substance in peasant society, which depends fully on the water for its sustenance and permanence. I started to complement the tales about water creatures with others I had recorded, in which the protagonist does not actually live in the water, but has a strong relationship to it. Tales about Saint John conceive him as the giver of rain who lives in the sacred hill. In the tale about the universal flood, it is God in heaven who unleashes an amount of water that leads to destruction. The tales somehow express values towards water in its different manifestations. Of course, not all the performances are equally explicit about the relationship between man and the water. To analyze this relation in all its details, one must draw upon a larger amount of oral narratives, as they all only partially express how Nahuas should deal with this element to which they owe their permanence. Taken separately, each tale represents a part of the intricate relationship and valuation of the water in Huastecan Nahua society. Taken together, these tales and their versions make up a mosaic of multiple accounts, sometimes contradictory, through which one can track this role in its manifold expressions. This way, every version contributes something to the full understanding of water in Nahua life as asserted in oral tradition, and only an analysis of all versions reveals the interaction between text and context on a subject that is considered one of the most substantial in tale telling by the participants themselves.

A third consideration for choosing this subject involved the tales' varying perception. Narratives about the water creatures are viewed as either fictional tales, anecdotes, or true tales about a recent past. By complementing these narratives with one about the universal flood waters, which is usually considered a true tale about the remote past, all three tale types and all possible time depths are represented and the assessment issue can be studied. The view on the water creatures' tales was especially favorable when these were considered as anecdotes, that is, as true events about a recent past that do not fit into any literary category. Because of the more informal character

of this tale type, people did not feel the restraint they have at times when asked to tell *kuentos*, and everybody gave their events' version freely. Though at times the recording presented certain difficulties, this circumstance enabled me to collect various narratives transmitted by both men and women of different age categories; these depict the heterogeneous existing ideas about water in Nahua society. As was said before, this set of tales is not supposed to be representative, but rather, it reveals typical expressions of truth, shows concepts and valuations of water's different manifestations and accounts for differentiation in society.

Even though in several conversations, the subject of tales, water creatures and their acts, or other related topics came up spontaneously, most recordings used in this analysis part from set situations, in which I explicitly asked the performer to narrate his version. The more casual circumstances did indeed produce more "natural" sessions, but these were not always taped and did not always contain as much information as the formal ones. When I asked permission to record the session, the narrator would think of the narrating act as something more didactic or more formal than usual, and would dwell on its contents for a while during his performance. These more elaborate texts produced many details that permitted a more profound study. The more detailed versions were selected to constitute the main field data studied here; the complementary material that is used to explain or demonstrate a certain detail of the argument is often made up of conversations recorded during more informal settings.

The presence of family members listening to the narrator produced the most natural situational context of telling. This happened in some of the short tales included in this book, that are parts of conversations on different topics. Under these circumstances, my presence with the tape recorder did not seem to obstruct the conversation when the topic suddenly came to tale telling. This more spontaneous complementary material, however, is not always so unaffected either. Although this material contains narratives about events most commonly told by all members of the communities in the Huasteca, strictly speaking, I have not been able to record truly spontaneous renderings. As I remarked earlier, a narrator does not commence a tale on his own, but rather, due to some external stimulus. In my case, I have only been able to record versions in which I myself somehow triggered the outset or continuation of an act of narrating. As is normal in any communicative situation, the dialogue between the narrator and his audience was often easily diverted, so I posed questions to keep the focus on the subject and this influenced the course of the conversation. Being an outsider, my plea and the narrator's compliance is conceived as something special or atypical, set apart from ordinary daily activities and ordinary sessions of tale telling; my request produced tales that were told outside the usual social context. Even

when not deliberately asking for tales, people knew I was looking for *kuentos*, and, accordingly, offered me to tell some. These friendly propositions were always gratefully accepted, but its results on tape can hardly be called representations of a common story telling situation. Furthermore, I mentioned that the narrator's goals or intentions (stimulated by both personal motives and the situation's demand) such as entertaining, teaching, warning, criticizing the listeners or satisfying their wishes) affect both the choice of narrative and the mode of performance. Indeed, even when the tales seemed to pop up fortuitously, my attendance and the mere presence of a tape recorder could have made the rendition more formal, serious and rigid. Telling a tale in the presence of an outsider always creates a situation in which the narrator is aware that his interlocutor does not have the same background information about its contents and will not respond in the same way as a Nahua villager would do.

Almost all tales presented here were thus collected in a rather framed setting in which the narrators were explicitly asked to tell about these remarkable happenings; this might have restricted the narrator's goal or intention to an informative one. Also, my presence could have influenced the performance mode. As far as I have been able to observe, none of these framed conditions decisively influenced or changed the tales' contents. In Nahua society, mnemonic devices and the presence of an audience that will correct the narrator if he does not tell the tale "the right way" prevents the narrative from getting diverted or distorted (Taggart 1983:9). The narrative structure remains untouched; some episodes logically follow others and cannot be changed. Besides, the narrator can only perform within the framework of the literary canon (Jason 1977). Though handling motifs and themes during the performance might have been influenced by the recording, and the narrator might have had other motives for telling the tale than in more customary situations, this handling can change alterable with every performance, and as such shall be taken into account. After a few years in which I periodically visited the municipality and recorded tales and anecdotes, I was able to make a selection for this study, which included the most elaborate accounts from narrators with very different personal backgrounds on a manageable number of tales dealing with diverse aspects of water.

An interpretation of Huastecan Nahua oral tradition

Through oral tradition, relationships between people and the water are manifested. Tales and anecdotes about destructive water creatures, the universal flood, and other aspects of water, apart from being told as a mere element of diversion like all *kuentos* and anecdotes, serve to hand down information that helps understand and face today's world through past events related to water. As mentioned earlier, I want to analyze what the tales

and anecdotes express about these relationships. My approach in this is primarily semantic.

Every narrative contains several semantic dimensions or layers that range from more psychological or philosophical ones to more cultural or social ones. It is the meaning's cultural dimension that shall be discussed here. By narrating tales and anecdotes, people convey cultural knowledge in both conscious and unconscious ways. During a performance, meaning can be deduced from four elements: the wording or language material which is of interest to linguistics, the wording's texture or organization (like a genre's or narrator's style), the narration or organization of the narrative's story line, and dramatization, that is, the performance's organization, where acoustic, visual and kinetic aspects become relevant (Jason 1977:99). In the tales, meaning is expressed through the actors' characterization and their deeds, the handling of time and space categories, the use of symbols and metaphors, or the theme and motifs which the tale addresses, among others. The audience creates meaning through the valuation of these and other elements in both cognizant and incognizant ways according to the narrator's approach. The dynamics of attaching cultural meaning to the tales and anecdotes, both by the narrator and his audience, is the study's subject. Since meaning is based on the cultural context, the relationship between text (the recorded tale or anecdote) and context (the performance's circumstances and the cultural background of the people involved) must be explained.

The analysis of the tales and anecdotes presented in this study was made along the following lines. Information about the valuation of the tales was first obtained from the narrators themselves. During the tales' transcription and translation --preferably with the performer himself-- ambiguities were solved and special features of the wording explained. The use of specific voices and the linguistic material's arrangement during verbalization give the tale its variations and influence the listener's valuation of the tale. During the tales' analysis, the narrator's decisions concerning some of the most incisive phrasings or word choices are explained and the influence of these choices on the possible interpretations is described. Ensuing talks conveyed information about how each narrator valued the narrative in terms of its cultural meaning. The narrator clarified the tale's type and theme, gave his opinion about the protagonists' conduct --which disclosed his socio-cultural norms and values-- and treated other aspects of the version he considered relevant. The aim of these talks was not to discuss all significant elements of Huastecan Nahua oral tradition about water, as the participants themselves see it, but to discuss, above all, the semantic elements in the text that are of concern to the narrator. This approach resulted in a broad, general comprehension of the narrative's different meaningful elements and their

significance. These elements and their meaning, as understood and intended by the narrator, were confronted with the opinion of other Nahuas in order to register complementary valuations and thus obtain an overview of the multiple outlooks on tales that exist within Nahua society.

A valuation of each tale was also brought about through a more systematic analysis of its categories. This second part of the analysis is based on the tale as a literary work (partly following Bal 1999 and Jason 1977) in which the wording, texture, dramatization and especially the narration of each tale are examined. After presenting the tale or anecdote, discussing its tale type, and sketching some of the most notable and meaningful circumstances of the performance context, a preliminary description is given on the actors and their roles within the tale. The narrator's typifycation of the agents transforms them into actors; characteristics such as their appearance in other narratives, specific features denoting a certain character trait, or other qualities that somehow place them in a general framework of reference are dealt with here. In the succeeding discussion, this portrayal is completed with current and past ideas about the characters in real life. Secondly, the spatiotemporal circumstances in which the events occur are addressed. Story time is an important element in tales as it reconstructs the Nahua concept of history as the understanding of a series of former events and the way this understanding is shaped through narrative. Discourse time gives insight into events held to be either more or less meaningful while narrating. The set of temporal relations between story and discourse provides a means to discern the narrator's valuation of the tale's different elements. Space is relevant; it grants a notion of the collective as opposed to other entities that reside in the same living space. The way in which spatiotemporal circumstances are handled in narratives provides information about assessment during performance --and, consequently, about tale types--, Nahua cosmology as expressed through tales, and how the narrated events are conceived within this reference framework.

Whenever necessary, the analyzed tales are completed with already published material from Huastecan Nahua narrative that throws light on certain details of the tales discussed. To illustrate the dissemination of a specific theme or event, tales from other Nahua peoples, especially those living in the adjacent Sierra Norte, other indigenous peoples living in the Huasteca area, as well as other indigenous peoples of Mexico are used. This material will situate the Huastecan Nahua tales within the current and past Mexican indigenous context of tale telling and will accentuate its particular handling of these events and themes.

The analysis of each tale's different aspects is mixed with a discussion on discourse (as a system of statements through which participants come to an

understanding about themselves, their relationship to each other and their place in the world), in which a general interpretation is given about the specific tale's meaning to Nahuas and how this meaning is expressed while narrating. Here, the motifs and events and the narrator's way of presentation are interpreted against their setting's cultural background: contemporary life. Also, they are compared to valuations about the literary production, specifically about the events addressed in the tales and their assessment. This contextualization permits a demonstration of parallels and divergences between the oral presentations of the norms and values and the ones present in socio-cultural reality, which will show their interaction.

Huastecan Nahua oral tradition and identity issues

Telling tales is a means of dealing with contemporary issues in a society. This can be observed in the fact that all members know the tales through socialization processes and language acquisition. The tales confer meaning to current ways of living and thinking. The oral tradition's dynamics provide the chance to adapt the tales to new realities, to divergent views on the treated subject, and to manifold representations --each in its own variant. However, the study of the oral tradition's position in culture is too broad a subject to be studied and must be limited. This study aims to analyze the interrelation between the socio-cultural reality and oral tradition on identity issues.

Identity comprises active and complex processes of identification (naming and classifying) in which ideas about who we are and whom we live with are reconstructed to establish and value what characterizes us and others. A collective's ideas about the proper characterization should not be interpreted as a fixed quality but as an internal process in which the values and norms that constitute this identity are constantly adapted. This means that identity is variable. The adjustments are made along two lines. In time the ideas about the proper characteristics shift; studies about identity should take this dynamic into account and not attribute fixed characterizations to a changing entity. Also, a collective defines identity in relation to others, which makes the concept an interpersonal one: biological, social, economic, religious, territorial or other types of characteristics can only be valued when compared to those of the Other (Barth 1998; Schipper 1999). On identity issues one has to acknowledge first, then, that the concept is relative and depends on the context in which it is studied to fully grasp its contents, expressions and significance as attributed by the entity itself.

Identity is, furthermore, a subjective concept, for it is created around a shared consciousness about a person's or a collective's supposed characteristics. To the members, these characteristics are real, but to an external observer, they may seem to be attributed (Devereux 1975).

Huastecan Nahuas ascribe themselves characteristics that differ from those mestizos associate with them (see, for example, Sandstrom 1991). Depending on the nature and recurrence of interaction between the parties, one's characterization of the Other has a more realistic or more biased base. In the worst scenario, mestizos see indigenous people as lazy-bones and drunks who obstruct Mexico's economic progress (as observed by Bonfil Batalla 1990, among others), while indigenous peoples confer more favorable characteristics to themselves, as was seen in the previous chapter.

In society there is divergence about the contents of its identity, which makes the concept have a vital heterogeneous aspect in which multiple manifestations exist. Voluntary self-definition does not imply that every member agrees on the elements that characterize the collective, or that all have the same idea about how it is articulated in daily practice. Even though there must be a common base among all individuals that constitute a society, identity can be understood as all the characteristics which people use according to their needs and preferences at a given moment to express their adherence to a certain society (cf. Baud et.al. 1994).

Identity has an emotional load as well. What characterizes us as a person or member of society is not just something that places us in a particular social context, but rather, gives certain values to a person or collective, which, in turn, strengthens one's attachment. This way, identity is intricately related to a society's norms and values. People are proud of their society and, consequently, of their belonging to it. They treasure the characteristics attributed to it with an appreciation based on their society's cultural structure and the values generated within. The Other is represented as one with norms and values that deviate from one's own. These norms and values are expressed in fields as diverse as language, economic position or social organization (cf. Bartolomé 1997:75-98).

Thus, identity is a complex concept because of its dynamic qualities like relativity, interpersonality, emotional load, heterogeneousness, and adaptability. Its contents have to do with an individual's or a collective's qualities that are of multiple kind, such as personal, juridical, socio-cultural or historical ones. These qualities' conservation and articulation can be defined as identity's reconstruction. Reconstruction mechanisms of Nahua identities through its oral tradition are our subject of research here. I examine the process' development, dynamics and representations during tale telling --not its product.

In the Mexican context, the anthropological study of identity is well developed. Because of the country's multi-ethnic character, this study is highly beneficial; how to understand people with differing cultures is an issue

confronted daily. Many contributions have been made to the discussion of identity questions that range from theoretical frameworks regarding indigenous identities (Bartolomé 1997) to the study of identities of a specific indigenous people (Ariel de Vidas 1997, Boege 1988, Sandstrom 1991), Mexico in general (Bartra 1996) or a geographical area like the Huasteca (Lomnitz Adler 1992), to identities as expressed in oral traditions (Gossen 1999), to name just a few. All these studies try to grasp this concept against the background of the ideological, political and economical contingencies of contemporary Mexican society. In a country where neither language nor cultural expressions may be trusted as expressions of identity --for cultural continuums run across ethnic and linguistic borders--, where people who speak the same indigenous tongue live in distinct areas without coming into contact and on occasions deny speaking this language for strategic reasons, and in which the dominant culture, despite its official discourse on multiculturalism, negates indigenous rights in political and social practice, the subject of identity is a complex matter.

Despite current trends of cultural and linguistic unification in Mexico, it must be taken into account that modification and loss of cultural expressions is part of a natural process within a given society. Rituals tend to modify in form and adapt their meaning according to new circumstances. These new circumstances are not necessarily imposed from the outside; they can emerge within the group and correspond to changing necessities and viewpoints. Like in every other society, the dynamics of indigenous societies allow constant development and change. The question should not be whether change in indigenous societies is desired or needed, since change is inherent to every society. It is necessary to see whether the modifications and developments in indigenous societies enrich or strengthen the indigenous population, whether or not they run along the lines the participants want, and, most importantly, whether or not the changes are led by the indigenous peoples. Official pressure to abandon certain cultural expressions can be an important factor to accelerate change in indigenous societies. It is necessary to study whether these ideological pressures interfere with the autonomous process of the indigenous people's self determination.

On the other hand, ideological and other concerns can also cause a reinforcement of ethnic affiliation and expression. Strategic use of ethnic affiliation may benefit the group. Nahuas who stood together as a unified ethnic force under the name of the Consejo de Pueblos Nahuas del Alto Balsas (CPNAB) managed to stop a federal project to construct a hydroelectric dam that would inundate their communities and some Mesoamerican archeological sites (Flores Farfán, pers. com.). Huicholes from Nayarit and Nahuas from Guerrero have found a willing consumer market that buys their indigenous handicrafts at a fair price. Governmental

aid programs for indigenous peoples make it necessary for communities to profile themselves as indigenous if they want to be considered as a beneficiary group. International laws on indigenous autonomy have paved the way to claim long-lost rights and denounce discriminatory actions, even if the legal struggle to safeguard these rights is a long one in a nation where federal authorities have invariably diregarded them. In this process of ethnic reaffirmation, cultural or linguistic traits are used to distinguish ethnic affiliation. Distinctive traits are bestowed with symbolic meaning; they are now emblems of ethnic expression. Bartolomé (1997:79) calls this struggle in favor of all cultural referents that a society assumes as fundamental to its identitary configuration at a given moment in history: a "culture of resistance".

So identity is relative, changing and otherwise dynamic, the indigenous peoples' situation in Mexico is one of margination and exclusion, and the meaning of oral tradition is heterogeneous and depends on situational and other contexts. Consequently, the study of Huastecan Nahua tales and their relation to contemporary identity issues in this society implies a careful examination of all the factors that contribute to each performance's meaning. Yet, these factors are manifold: the narrator and his background, the situational context, the theme and events of the narrative text itself, time and space concepts, language use, and the public's appreciation are but a few elements that contribute to the creation of meaning when telling a tale. For this study, I was forced to set limits in order to discuss only a number of these elements and not get lost in the abundance of interrelations that narrating oral tales entails. However, the elements I deal with are still substantial enough in number and in expressiveness to demonstrate the interrelations' complexity between text and context in Nahua oral tradition today, and show how this tradition expresses and reconstructs Nahua identities and interrelates with its socio-cultural background. Thus, this study is meant to be an exercise to draw attention to oral tradition as a means of constructing identities in present-day society. To do so, an interdisciplinary study has been undertaken which, despite its limitations, wishes to contribute to the understanding of Huastecan Nahua oral tradition, Huastecan Nahua culture, and the reconstruction of Huastecan Nahua identities today.

Chapter 3
Mesoamerican cultural continuity and the deluge tale

Look, a man who was a cousin of ours told us this.
He says that, who knows how long ago,
how many thousands of years ago already,
the hare talked.
And one day a man went to work in his field to cut down trees.
And he went home in the afternoon and returned to his field the following day, right?
And he found the trees standing up.
Have they told you this one already?

Mesoamerican cultural continuity

Mexican indigenous peoples today have developed what has been called "syncretistic cultures". A syncretistic culture can be described as a culture which, starting from a historical fact --in this case the Conquest-- has developed expressions and beliefs that are influenced by two or more sources. Today, the result of this process is a series of cultures that have acquired completely new and original forms of expression in which elements have been transformed and cannot always be identified in a direct or obvious way with its origins. In the Mexican context, the term is more often than not limited to the composing elements, concepts and expressions of Mexican indigenous cultures, religions and worldviews.

The definition of a syncretistic culture fits the Mexican case, but it is not a process exclusively limited to Mexican indigenous peoples. All cultures, religions and worldviews are to a lesser or greater extent syncretistic. It suffices here to say that the religion the Spaniards brought to the American continent was a mixture of Catholic, popular medieval and Arabic influences and may thus be called syncretistic. The term connotes a tradition's specific

starting point, in which the culture, religion or worldview was still unmarked by external influences. Identifying this starting point implies, of course, many practical problems. As a theoretical classification, the concept of syncretism lacks value.

The firm precolonial roots of present-day indigenous cultures call for a different concept, one of cultural continuity. Cultural continuity suggests a development or process in which new elements and concepts are incorporated into an existing structure --Mesoamerican precolonial traditions, in the case of Huastecan Nahuas. Ichon (1990) mentions how new elements have substituted or been added to existing ones, and how these have been reinterpreted in accordance with Mesoamerican lines of thinking. Whether they emerge from within or are imposed by outsiders, these new elements and concepts transform, complement or superpose existing ones as they change or adjust their existing meaning. It is precisely through this process that indigenous people in Mexico have developed their present cultures, as they are expressed now.

I think there are two advantages in using the term cultural continuity; both deal with the dynamic nature of every culture and its expressions. Firstly, the noun allows for a continuous course of adaptations and does not suggest the process' completion, as does the term syncretism. Right after the Conquest, the pressures to assimilate Christian views were, undoubtedly, strong and compelling, but one cannot say the process took place during a certain phase of the colonial period and then came to an end. Continuous change is inherent to every culture and the term cultural continuity stresses this characteristic, allowing all kinds of influences to be incorporated into indigenous cultures at different points in history and at present. The second related advantage is that this viewpoint takes into account the indigenous cultures' internal dynamics. Despite the imposition of Christian views, indigenous peoples were, and still are the ones who decide whether to incorporate new elements and concepts, and how. Precolonial Mesoamerican thought was inclusive, and it is not strange to find a concentration of different influences in present-day Nahua cultures. This practice's permanence after the Conquest should be seen in light of fairly autonomous processes meeting indigenous cultures' past and present needs.

Another advantage of the study of cultural continuity is ideological in nature; it acknowledges the precolonial past as the heritage of present-day indigenous peoples, who have been deprived of their legacy over continuous attempts to exploit it ideologically so as to glorify the nation as a whole (van der Loo 1987:18). Despite official recognition of the country's pluriethnic and pluricultural composition, indigenous peoples are still seen as backward, poor, even filthy persons who refuse to become integrated into Mexican society and

therefore obstruct Mexico's "progress". Under no circumstances are they recognized as the living heritage of the great Olmecs, Aztecs, Mayas and other precolonial peoples. Without trying to vindicate the pre-Columbian past for Nahuas alone, the present tale demonstrates the integration of contemporary Nahuas as a living part of the process that led to the forging of the nation in the centuries following the Conquest, and that led to the Mexico of today.

After Mexico's Conquest by Hernán Cortés' soldiers at the beginning of the sixteenth century, Mexican indigenous communities developed new orders regarding everything in their lives. When describing the current practice of these orders, one becomes entangled in a discussion on whether this mixture of structures and concepts has become more Westernly oriented and adapted to today's dominant society, or whether it has a more precolonial pattern. There has been much discussion on the issue of acculturation and integration of indigenous cultures into Mexican dominant society, an issue that does not only concern an ideological separation between Western versus non-Western outlooks on life, but also a dichotomy between the views of Mexico's industrialized, urban society on the one hand and those of rural, agrarian communities on the other. By employing the term cultural continuity, one might expect the scholar to be inclined towards a more precolonial orientation of present-day indigenous cultures. Yet, this is not necessarily true. The term enables an understanding of current indigenous cultures parting from precolonial notions in a way that enriches the study, and it certainly does not connote a sense of romanticism towards ancient societies, a glorification of the precolonial past, or a way to demonstrate the "pureness" of contemporary indigenous societies. In fact, the issue of whether indigenous peoples feel inclined towards one or the other orientation is not answered here. Rather, it is the understanding of the present dynamic social practice in indigenous societies that concerns us here.

It has to be acknowledged, however, that current indigenous culture parts from ancient indigenous sources through which all kinds of colonial and post-colonial elements have been woven. As mentioned before, cultural continuity can be found in every aspect of present-day indigenous life, but analysis of this phenomenon centers mostly on the religious sphere. In indigenous societies, Christian symbols and values have been combined with aspects of precolonial Mesoamerican religions and have, together with other religious influences, created a new religious belief. In Nahua religion and spirituality, Klor de Alva speaks about a "nahuatized Christianity" (1997). Though his aim was to label the religious experience of Nahuas who are baptized Catholics, for several reasons it would be more adequate to invert the term, and address this process and its current product as a "Christianized Nahua religion". First of all, one must bear in mind that Christianity changed the Nahua religion and not vice versa. Klor de Alva recognizes this. His

essay deals with sixteenth century Nahua perceptions regarding the acceptance of Christianity into their religion, the marginality of the Christian message to Nahua religiosity and the incompatibility of some of the core concepts of both religions. Nevertheless, his term nahuatized Christianity might create confusion about the course of this process of incorporating external influences. Secondly, the term suggests a strong foundation on Christianity and a lesser influence of precolonial religions, whereas reality shows a different pattern. Christensen and Reyes García (1990:13) speak of an inseparable mixture of old indigenous beliefs with Christian ones in contemporary customs; in the same volume (1990:31-36) Mönnig elaborates on this, showing several close correspondences between contemporary and precolonial indigenous worldviews.

To Nahuas themselves, academic issues of whether Nahua religious creed is a mixture of old and new influences and, consequently, how this creed can be addressed most adequately, are completely superfluous. In the Huasteca area, most Nahuas are Catholics and observe the Catholic calendar of public religious celebrations. As seen in the first chapter, these celebrations are very important and define, to a great extent, the cycle of public activities within the village[112] Nahua religious devotion pervades people's worldviews to such an extent that the Spanish loaned word *cristiano* (Christian) has become a synonym for any human being, except for those that are associated with evil, like witches or sorcerers[113]. Christianity and being Catholic are analogies that refer to a sole religious category applied to the proper way of living in moral terms, which is, in turn, connected with life's norms and values. In this scheme, Protestants are viewed with a mixture of distrust and fear; in several communitites in Xochiatipan they are forbidden to enter.

I return to the academic issue of cultural continuity: The flood tale is an excellent example of how Nahua oral tradition reflects cultural continuity in this society, illustrating the shaping of a new representation from distinct traditions, in which Mesoamerican concepts and Hispanic narrative structure have been molded into one account, dealing with Nahuas' contemporary concerns on this matter. The Nahua version of the flood is a form in which at least two narrative traditions (Aztec[114] and medieval Spanish) have merged, as Stiles, Maya and Castillo already indicated (1985:15). Its descent from Aztec variants is hard to neglect in view of the notable sum of almost identical motifs and their fairly complicated combination (Horcasitas 1988:184). As a current version of one of the four precolonial Meso-American accounts about a former cataclysm that destroyed a previous world, the flood theme is most probably preserved in Nahua narrative and thought because of its parallels with the biblical account. Tales concerning the other three cataclysms seem to have succumbed when Nahuas reduced their cyclical worldview to that of a sole former world, to fit Catholic

standards. Likewise, influence from the biblical flood version --in itself a combination of two sources (see, for example, Frazer 1916)-- is visibly present in the contemporary tale. It looks as if some of the universal flood's motifs, as described in the Bible, were borrowed and put in a larger, more encompassing account, depicting the earth's destruction and its subsequent renewal.

Furthermore, the Huastecan Nahua flood tale has been influenced by other sources, such as other Mesoamerican indigenous tales about a universal inundation or African oral traditions that the slaves brought to the area in colonial times [115]. Thus, the tale has become a heterogeneous mosaic in which several operating processes gave the tale new coherence. Aztec parallels with the medieval Spanish tradition were superposed or replaced by the dominant Christian ones; new European motifs, and others, have been integrated from a Nahua perspective, and old Mesoamerican ones were preserved or adapted, according to the new circumstances. This way, the tale has been transformed over the years to meet and direct different social and cultural changes in current Nahua society. As will be seen here, the Nahua flood tale reproduces contemporary beliefs about the existing cosmological order and man's role in it. These beliefs are transmitted through a series of conceptions, whose valuation by the narrator and his audience is heterogeneous, yet reveals main issues of current Nahua thought and how it is handled through narrative. The current version gives an impression of Nahua tale telling's dynamics; it shows how tales change following the influence of other narrative traditions. The knowledge that this and other contemporary tales have firm roots in precolonial predecessors, not only characterizes this narrative tradition, but also places Nahua culture in a tradition of continuity.

Don Pancho told the following version of the flood tale, which he titled *kamanaltlajtoli tlen se tlakatl uan se kuatochi,* a tale about a man and a hare[116].

1	Kiijtouaj	It is said	1
	uajkauaya	that long ago	
	nama kipixkiya miyak uan miyak xiuitl	now its already many and many years ago	
	uan axmomati asta kema	and it is not known when [exactly]	
5	kiijtouaj	it is said	5
	itstó se tlakatl ika ikoneua.	that there was a man with his sons.	
	Nopa tlakatl uan ikoneua tekitiyaya ipa mila	This man and his sons worked in the *mila*	
	kitokayaya sintli, etl, chili, kakauatl,	they sowed corn, beans, chili peppers,	
10	kamojtli, kuaxilotl	peanuts, sweet potatoes, bananas	10
	uan sekinok tlamantli tlen	and other things that were necessary for	

	intechmonekiyaya para tlakuase	them so they could eat
	uajkino uelis para yoltose.	and thus maybe live.
	Uan yajuantin pakiyaya kema kiitaj	And they were happy when they saw
15	eli kuali mili[117]	that the *mila* produces well 15
	uan kipejpenayaya miyak sintli	and that they gathered much corn
	miyak chili	many chili peppers
	miyak etl	many beans
	miyak kamojtli	many sweet potatoes
20	miyak kuaxilotl	many bananas 20
	uan sekinok tlamantli tlen yajuantin intechmonekiyaya.	and other things that they needed.
	Pero ajsik se tonati	But there came a day
	kema nopa tlakatl ika ikoneua noja	when this man with his sons wanted to
25	kinejke kichiuase mili	make [another] *mila* 25
	uan yajke ipan se ueyi kuatitlamitl para tlaise[118].	and they went to a big forest in order to clear.
	Nopa tetat kinuikak ome ikoneua uan sekinok itlanejua[119].	This father took two of his sons and some of his day laborers with him.
30	Kema ajsitoj ipan nopa kuatitla	When they arrive at the forest 30
	kiuikaj inmachete	they bring their machete
	inateko para atlise	their gallon in order to drink
	machete para tekitise.	machete in order to work.
	Pues nopa tonal ijnaltsi kipeualtijke	So that day early they began
35	kikonanke tekitij.	they started to work. 35
	Nopa tekitl kichiuiyaya tlailistli	The work was to make a clearing
	kikonanke tlaij, tlaij, tlaij, se tonal.	they started to clear, clear, clear, one day.
	Uan uajka, este, ueliyaya se maseuali ueyi tekiti uan mopaleuijke.	And in those days, well, one man was able to do a big job and they worked together.
40	Kichijke ueyi tlatlailistli para kampa sintokas[120] nopa tetat ika ikoneua.	They made a large clearing where to sow corn, this father with his sons. 40
	Bueno, nopa se tonal tekitike	Well, that day they worked
	uan tiotlak elito kimachilijke tlaxikojkeya	and when it became afternoon they felt they had become tired
45	yajuantin pues kinseuijke[121] intlanejua.	so they got their day laborers to rest. 45
	Uan yajuantin nojkí mokuitejke iniateko	And they took their gallon
	inimachete	their machete
	uan ualajke kampa incha.	and returned to their homes.
	Ajsikoj inincha	Arriving home
50	yajuanti pakiyaya pampa kipeualtijkeya nopa tekitl para sampayano kitokase nopa	they were happy because they had already begun that work in order to sow corn 50

	sintli.	once again.
	Nopa tiotlak noja tetlanejke	That afternoon they still borrowed people [they hired day laborers]
55	para toniliski noja yase tlaitij	in order to go clearing at dawn
	para mas ueyi ma eli nopa mili.	so that the field would be bigger.
	Tonilito nopa tetat uan nopa ikoneua kikuitejke inimachete	The next day this father and his sons took their machetes
	iniateko	their gallons
60	inisombrero[122]	their *sombreros*
	uan yajkeya	and went off
	mouikaj	they went together
	uan noja ajsitoj kampa tlaxtoke para tokase sintli.	and arrived at where they had cleared in order to sow corn.
65	Pero mokuesojke kema ajsitoj, teipa ipa nopa kampa nopa tlaxtoya	But they saddened when they arrived at where they had cleared
	pampa ajsito, kiitatoj nopa kuatini[123]	because arriving they saw these trees
	yonse axmotsontektok	not one is cut
	yonse axuetstok.	not one is down.
70	Nopa kuatini	These trees
	kuamekatini	bushes
	nopa xiuime	grass
	nochi mantoke[124]	all is there
	yonse kuauitl axkana uetstok.	not one stick is down.
75	Uajkino moiluiaj nopa tetat ika ikoneua:	So this father and his sons say to themselves:
	"Para kenke nama ne kuatitlamitl noja mejki[125]	"Why now is the forest still standing
	para kenke ne xiuitini noja mejke?	why is the grass up?
80	Uan tojuanti yalo kuali titlaxke	When yesterday we cleared well
	ueyi titlaxke	we cleared a large stretch
	uan tikonanke tikuamaxima	and we started to cut wood
	kuali tikuamaxinke.	well we cut it.
	Nochi ni kuatini tlen tepejtoya.	All the trees were scattered.
85	Uan nama, para kenke axnesi tla tikintsonteki ni kuatini?	And now, why does it not show that we cut the trees?
	Nama nochi kuatitlamitl saya eltok komo yalo ijnalok elto tikitatoj.	Now the whole forest is again how we saw it early yesterday.
	Pero nama sampa titsontekise".	But now we shall cut it again".
90	Uajka nopa tetat uan nopa ikoneua ika sekinok itlanejme[126]	So this father and his sons with others of his day laborers

	pues noja kikonankeya tekiti.	well, they again set to work.
	Nopa ya eli ika ome tonal.	That was already the second day.
	Kikonanke tekiti tekiti	They began to work, to work
95	noja nijki ueyi tekitike.	and they again worked a lot. 95
	Uan tiotlak elito, moiluiaj:	And in the afternoon they said:
	"Nama sampayano timaximase ne kuatini tlen tepejtokeya	"Now once again we shall cut the trees that are scattered
	mas kuali tiuejuelose	[even] better we shall cut them to pieces
100	mas kuali titsontekise	we shall cut them better 100
	uan tikitase mostla tla noja meuas".	and we'll see if they have risen again by tomorrow".
	Uajkino nopa tonati ika ome tonal eli	So this day made two days
	tiotlak noja ualajkeya inincha	in the afternoon they came home again
105	moiluike para ayi meuas nopa kuatini kampa kitsontejkeya	they thought that those trees wouldn´t stand up anymore where they´d cut them 105
	uan mas kiuejuelo pejke.	as they had cut them more into pieces.
	Nopa tiotlak elitoya no noja tetlanejke	That afternoon they asked for more help
	uan kema tonilito	and the next day
110	nopa tetat uan nopa ikoneua kinkuitejke	the father and his sons took off 110
	tlayekanke.	they went ahead.
	Noja yajuantin ajsitoj inimila	They arrived at their field
	uan tlanejme achi teipa ajsitoj.	and the day laborers had not yet arrived.
115	Pero kiitatoj nopa kuatitlamitl san yaya, axkana motsontektok	But they saw that the forest was like before, uncut 115
	nopa kuatini, kuamekatini, nochi mejtoke.	those trees, bushes, everything had risen
	Axkana nesi tla tlaxtoya kentsi	You could not see that it had been cleared [not even] a little
120	kualtsi[127] kuatitlamitl eltok noja.	the forest was unharmed. 120
	Uajkino moiluijke nopa tetat uan ikoneua:	Then the father and his sons said:
	"Nama mejor ayojkana titlaise"	"No we'd better not clear anymore"
	uan moiluiyaya:	and said:
125	"Pues ayi titekitise".	"So we shall not work anymore". 125
	Pero kinitake intlanejua nopa yauij noja	But they saw their day laborers go
	ajsitoj yano	they had arrived again
	ajkino moiluijke:	so they thought:
	"Bueno, itstojkeya noja ne totlanejua	"Well, our day laborers are here again
130	nama ke eyi tonal eliti timakilise[128] ni tekitl.	now that makes three days that we shall do this work. 130

	Pero, pues, ualtokeya ni totlanejua	But, well, our day laborers have come already
	pues kipí para tekitise noponi".	so we have [the man-power] to work".
135	Noja kipixke inyolo para kichiuase nopa tekitl.	They still had the heart to do the work. 135
	Sampayano momankejya noja tetat uan ika ikoneua uan ika initlanejua.	Once again the father and his sons and their day laborers were there.
140	Kikonanke noja tekiti tekiti tekiti se tonal.	They began to work, work and work, one [whole] day. 140
	Axkana moseuijke	They did not rest
	uan mas motlaxikoltijke pampa kinejke kitsontekise mas asta tlalixko	and they got more tired because they wanted to cut it [even] further down
	asta tlaltitla	to the ground
145	para ayojkana ma meua nopa kuauitl	so that those trees 145
	nopa kuamekatl	those bushes
	nopa xiuitini.	and the grass would not rise anymore.
	Teipa ijkini kichijke.	Thus they did.
	Nopa ika eyi tonal tekitike.	Thus they worked [already] three days.
150	Teipa tiotlak noja kikajtejke kuatitlamitl.	Then, in the afternoon, they left the forest. 150
	Moiluiaj:	They say to each other:
	"Ma tiyajsejya".	"Let us go".
155	Ualajke tlanejme uan nopa, este, tlen tetat ya mokajki	The day laborers returned and, well, the father he stayed 155
	tlen ikoneua no ualajke inincha.	his sons also returned home.
	San apenas nopa tetat ya mokajki kuatitla	Only the father, he stayed in the forest
	para kinejki kiitas tlachketl kinieua nopa kuatini	for he wanted to see what it was that raised those trees up again
160	nopa kuamekame	those bushes 160
	uan sekinok nopa xiuitini	and the grass
	kenke para meuaj.	why they rise.
	Mokajki nopa tetat.	The father stayed.
165	Uan kema ya tlajkoyaual eli noponi tlachixto nopa tlakatl	And when it had become midnight the man waited 165
	kema kikajki ya tlajkoyaual	when he listened at midnight
	uan kikajki para ne kuamekame tsajtsij	and he heard the bushes scream
	uan kema kikaktejki nopa tlakatl	and as the man listened
	nopa kuatini	the trees
170	nopa kuamekatl	the bushes 170
	san tlatlatsiktsi.	only made noise.

	San tlatlatsiktsi	They only made noise	
	mejtikate nopa kuatini	the trees rose	
	nopa kuamekatini	the bushes	
175	xiuime	grass	175
	nochi san sauaka mejtikate.	everything only made noise and rose.	
	Uan teipa noponi nopa tlakatl moyolojui:	And then the man thought:	
	"Para kenke noja meua uan niitstok nikani	"Why does it rise again while I am here	
180	uan ne tikintsontejke yalo asta tlaltitla	when we cut it yesterday down to the ground	180
	uan nama	and now	
	para kenke noja meuaya?"	why does it rise again?"	
	Yajki eskina tlatlachiltinemi	He went to look in the corner	
	naui tlaeskina yajki tle imila.	he went to the four corners of his field.	
185	Axtleno kiita pero kuatini ya mejtikate achiyok.	He saw nothing but the trees had already risen further.	185
	Uajka noponi ualajki kampa tlatlajko mili.	So then he came to the middle of the field.	
	Noponi ya kiitako se kuatochi lokotsijtok	There he saw a hare sitting	
190	noponi yetok mero kampa tlajko tlatlaxpa.	there it sat right in the middle of the clearing.	190
	Kiiluiyaya uan kinilui:	It [the hare] spoke to them and said:	
	"Kuatini, kuamekame, xiuitini	"Trees, bushes, grass	
	ximeuakaya!	rise!	
	ximeuakaya!	rise!	
195	axkana intepejtose, inteikneltsitsi	Don't be thrown, you poor	195
	ximeuakaya!	rise!	
	ximoketsakaya noja!"	get up!"	
	Uajka kiitak nopa tlakatl uajka nopa kuatochi ya kinineua nopa kuatini.	So the man saw it was the hare who raised those trees.	
200	Nopa tlakatl kualanki uan moilui:	The man got angry and thought:	200
	"Uajka ne kuatochi kieua ni notlatlax.	"So this hare raises my clearing.	
	Ya ijkinok kichiua para kuatitlamitl".	It is he who does this to the forest".	
	Kualanki nopa tlakatl.	The man was angry.	
	Kikixti imachete	He took his machete	
205	kinekiyaya kitsontekis nopa kuatochi.	he wanted to strike that hare.	205
	Pero nopa kuatochi momanauik.	But the hare defended itself.	
	Kikamoui nopa tlakatl uan kiiluijki:	It talked to the man and said to him:	
	"Amo xinechmijti!	"Don't kill me!	
210	Na, axtikijtos axkuali noyolo o fiero[129] nonemilis yeka nikineua nopa	I, you cannot say that I don't have a good heart or that my step is bad, because I	210

	kuatitlamitl.	raise the forest.	
	Na nijneki nimitsyolmelauas, tlakatl	I want to warn you, man	
	ayimo ximoilui ta noja titekitis!	don't you think of continuing your work!	
	Uan ne mokoneua uan sekinok tlakame	And these sons of yours and other men	
215	ayojkana ximoiluika tla noja intlaise inkichiuase se ueyi tekitl!	don't you think that you shall clear again and do a great work!	215
	Pampa nama eliki san tlapik intekitise.	Because now it is useless to work.	
	Ayojkana inkiitase imoelo, inmosi o imoe, imokakaua, chili.	You shall not see your *elotl*, your corn or your beans, your peanuts, chili anymore.	
220	Ayojkana inkielitise uan yeka na nikilui nopa kuatitlamitl ma meua	You shall not produce anymore and therefore I tell the forest to rise	220
	axkana ma tepejtoka".	that it may not be thrown".	
	Teipa nopa tlakatl tla kiilui nopa kuatochi:	Then the man said to the hare:	
	"Uan para kenke kuatochi	"And why, hare	
225	para kenke tikijto ayojkana ma titekitika pampa ayi elis	why do you say that we must not work anymore as it shall not produce	225
	ayi tijkuajteuase?"	that we shall not eat from it anymore?"	
	Uajka nopa kuatochi tlanankilik	So the hare answered	
	kinankilik nopa tlakatl uan kiilui:	it answered the man and said:	
230	"Bueno, ta tlakatl	"Well, you man	230
	ayimo ximilchiuaka taí uan ne sekinok mochaneua.	you and the others from your home, don't make a *mila* anymore.	
	Ayojkana ximilchiuaka pampa san tlapik.	Don't make a *mila* anymore because it is useless.	
235	Ayojkana inkikuajteuase	You shall not eat from it anymore	235
	ayojkana tlaelis".	it shall not produce anymore".	
	"Uan para kenke, ta kuatochi"	"And why, you hare"	
	kiijtoki nopa tlakatl	said the man	
	kitlatsintokili	did he ask	
240	"kuatochi, para kenke ayojkana tlaelis?"	"hare, why shall it not produce anymore?"	240
	"Ah, bueno, uajka na nimitsiluis kenke para nikijtoua axtlaelis.	"Oh, well, I shall tell you why I say it shall not produce.	
	Nama ayojkana tlaelis pampa nama tipoliuiseya.	Now it shall not produce anymore because now we shall perish.	
245	Peuas uetsis uetsis uetsis uan uetsis atl	It shall begin to rain, rain, rain, and rain	245
	uan tipoliuise.	and we shall perish.	
	San nenka intekitise	You shall work for nothing	
	uan ayojkana intlakuase.	and you shall not eat anymore.	
	Uajka nama, ta tlakatl	So now, you man	
250	nimitsyolmelaua	I warn you	250

	tlen nama moneki tijchiuas	that now it is necessary that you make	
	xijchiua se kuaakanoa.	make a wooden canoe.	
	Xijchiua se ueyi kuaakanoa tlen inmiyak inmechaxilis.	Make a big wooden canoe in which many of you fit.	
255	Ta axtijpí uapali?	You don't have planks?	255
	Pues, xijkonana xikuateki	Well, begin to cut wood	
	uan xijchiua uapali	and make planks	
	uan teipa tijchiuas nopa ueyi akanoa	and then you shall make that big canoe	
	kampa ta tikalakis	which you shall get into	
260	mokoneua kalakise	your children shall go in	260
	uan sekinok mochaneua tla no kinaxilis.	and other people from your home if they also fit in.	
	Pero moneki ya xikonane nama nopa tekitl.	But it is necessary to begin the work now.	
265	Xijchiua nopa kuaakanoa	Make that wooden canoe	265
	uan ayojkana mili	and no *mila* anymore	
	pampa ya ayi uajka peua uetsi atl.	because it´s not long before it begins to rain.	
	Ta ximoixiuiltis	Hurry	
	uajka nopa atl miyak elis uan	because there will be much water and we	
270	tipoliuise.	shall be lost.	270
	Immechpolos san sampa.	You shall get lost, too.	
	Uajka nama xijchiua nopa tekitl	So now do the task	
	xijkonana nopa akanoa	make that canoe	
	pampa uetsis atl ompouali tonal	because it shall rain for forty days	
275	ompouali tonal	forty days	275
	uan nopa atl peuas momiyakilis.	and the water shall begin to augment.	
	Peuas tlejkos, tlejkos, tlejkos asta...	It shall begin to rise, rise, rise, till...	
	uelis ajsiti asta ne iluikak[130].	maybe it reaches heaven.	
	Uan ta tijchiuas nopa kuaakanoa	And you shall make that wooden canoe	
280	noponi inkalakise mokoneua	in which shall go your children	280
	taí ika sekinok mochaneua.	you and others from your home.	
	Uan na, komo nikuatochi	And I, for I am a hare	
	na nimoseuis nopa akanoa ikuitlapa.	I shall sit on the back of the canoe.	
	Uan kejnopa, nopa atl mas	And so the water shall augment further	
285	miyakilis	and further	285
	pero tojuanti titlejkose ipa nopa akanoa.	but we shall rise with the canoe.	
	Uan na san ikuitlapa nimoseuis"	And I shall only sit in its back"	
	kiijtojki nopa kuatochi.	the hare said.	
	Uan nelia, nopa tlakatl kikonanki kichiua	And really, the man began to make that	

290	nopa akanoa.	canoe.	290
	Pejki tekiti tekiti	He set to work and work	
	uan kichijki ueyi kuaakanoa.	and made a big wooden canoe.	
	Uan nelí	And indeed	
295	san kiontlamiltik nopa kiiluiaj, nopa akanoa	he had only just finished that what is called a canoe	295
	uan nelí pejki uetsi, uetsi, uetsi, uetsi atl.	when it really started to rain, rain, rain, rain.	
	Panok sempouali tonal	Twenty days passed	
	sempouali uan majtlaktli	thirty	
	atl miyak elkiya.	the water had become much.	
300	Uajkino noponi kalajkeya	So then they got in	300
	nopa tetat ika ikoneua ika sekinok tle inchaneua kalajke ipa akanoa.	the father with his children and other people from their home went in the canoe.	
	Uan nelí pejki miyakili atl mas	And the water really began to augment more	
305	uan pejki kintlanana, kintlanana, kintlanana.	and began to raise them, raise them, and raise them.	305
	Kintlejkouiltijti kintlejkouilti.	It bore them up and up.	
	Uajkapa elitoya nopa atl	High was the water	
	miyak elki	there was a lot of it	
310	pero nopa akanoa ya axkana ueli atsintlauetsi.	but the canoe could not go under.	310
	Kintlejkouilti kintlejkouilti	It lifted them and lifted them	
	uan nopa kuatochi nopa akanoa ikuitlapa yetok.	and the hare sits in the back of the canoe.	
315	Uajka nopa elki asta ajsito achka iluikak.	Thus it was until it [the canoe] arrived near to heaven.	315
	Nopa kuatochi kiitato seyok tlali eltok ipan ne iluikak uan momajkajki[131].	The hare saw that there was another land in heaven and jumped.	
	Pero nopa kuatochi mokauato ipa ne uajkapa.	But the hare stayed there above.	
320	Tlen nama tojuanti tikitaj ipa ne uajkapa	So now we see up these heights	320
	ne metstli ipa tlaskitok se kuatochi.	that on the moon sticks a hare.	
	Nopa uajkajki	Long ago	
	kema polijke ipan ne tlali	when they perished on earth	
	kintlejkolti atl ipa akanoa.	the water had lifted them in a canoe.	
325	Nopa kuatochi momajkajki tlaskitok ne metstli ipa.	That hare jumped and got stuck on the moon.	325
	Uan yeka nama tikitaj ne metstli kipixtok se kuatochi.	And therefore we now see that the moon has a hare.	
	Ya mokauato nepa metstli ipa	It stayed there on the moon	

330	nopa kuatochi.	this hare.	330
	Uan nopa maseualme, no...	And the people, also...	
	atl noja pejki kaxani, kaxani, uan kaxani[132]	the water began to subside, subside, and subside	
	asta kampa ajsiko noja tlaltepaktipa.	till it reached the ground again.	
335	Ajsikoj ipan ne tlalchi	They [the people] arrived on earth	335
	uan ya tlachiyakoj miyake tlatepejtoke	and saw many things scattered	
	este... pitsome	that is, pigs	
	seki kauame	some horses	
	seki ne torome.	some bulls.	
340	Miyake tlamimiktoke.	Many were dead.	340
	Uan yajuantin kikonankeya motlakualtiya nikani	And they began to eat here	
	motlakualtiya.	they ate.	
	Ajuiyak kimachiliya tlakuaj.	They considered to eat delicious.	
345	Uajka nopa Toteko, tle iluikak itstok	So God, who is in heaven	345
	tlen kinekiyaya kinpolos	who had wanted to eradicate them	
	moyolouijki:	thought:	
	"Para kenke noja nikijnekui poktli?	"Why do I still smell smoke?	
350	Nikijnekui para axtlakualka[133] nepa ipan tlali.	I smell that it is unclean there on earth.	350
	Uan na nikijto para nikinpolo.	And I had said [decided] to eradicate them.	
	Uan para kenke nama noja nikitak para itstoke?	And why do I still see [right] now that they live?	
355	Axnochi poliuijtoke, yeka techpoktiaj.	Not everyone perished, that is why they smoke us.	355
	Titlanekuij axajuiyak".	We smell awful".	
	Uajkino, komo ya nopa Toteko kinpiya angeles	So, since God has angels	
	teipa se angel kiualtitlanki ma tlachiyaki	He then sent one angel to have a look	
360	uan ualpatlanki asta ne iluikak tlachiyaki ipan tlalchi.	and he [the angel] came flying from heaven to look at the earth.	360
	Ajsiko pantlaltipakti	He arrived on earth	
	ya no kipakti tle tlakua ipa ne tlalchi.	and also liked the food on the earth.	
	Mokajki	He stayed	
365	uan ayojkana tlejkok.	and did not go up anymore.	365
	No mokauato nikani	He also stayed here	
	kikonanki tlakua.	and began to eat.	
	Teipa nopa Toteko kichixki	Then God waited for him	
	para axtlejko nopa angel tlen kiualtitlanki	but the angel He had sent to earth did not	

370	ipan tlaltipakti.	go up.	370
	Moilui:	He thought:	
	"Para kenke axualajki noja?	"Why has he not returned yet?	
	Para kenke axuala?	Why doesn't he come back?	
	Uan nikilui san ma onnemiki	And I told him only to go	
375	san ma ontlachiyati	only to see	375
	uan ma ajsiki para ma nechiluis tlake onka	and arrive in order to tell me what there is	
	uan axuala".	but he doesn't come back".	
	Teipa seyok kiualtitlanki	Then He sent another	
	ni eli ika ome ualtitlanki.	the second He sent.	
380	Sampaya no mokauako	Once more he stayed, too	380
	no mokauako kikonanki tlakua.	he stayed too and began to eat.	
	No mokauako tlakua nikani ipan tlalchi.	He, too, stayed to eat here on earth.	
	Noja kualanki nopa Toteko uan moyoloui:	God became angry and thought:	
	"Para kenke ayojkana ualauij tlen	"Why do those I sent, my angels, not	
385	nikintitlanki noangeles?	return?	385
	Tlake san onka para tlaltipaktli?	What is there on earth?	
	Para kenke ayi ualauij?	Why haven't they come back yet?	
	Tlake san koonitaj onka?"	What do they see that there is?"	
	Teipa moilui:	Then He thought:	
390	"Nama nijtitlanis seyok angel".	"Now I shall send yet another angel".	390
	Ika eyi angeles kinualtitlanki asta tlaltipa.	This was the third angel he sent to earth.	
	Uan nopa eyi ya kena san ontlachiyako.	And this third one did indeed only go to look.	
	Kiijnejki para tlen tla onka axajuiyak	He smelled that what there is is not delicious	
	poteua.	that it stinks.	
395	Tlamiktoke nochi tlapiyalme	All the animals had died	395
	uan ya nopa tlakuatikati tlen nopa itstoya ipan tlaltipaktli.	and that was what those who were on earth were eating.	
	Uan tlen kiualtitlanki ome no noponi iniuaya itstoke.	And those two who were sent were with them as well.	
400	Uan teipa ya tlen ika eyi eliyaya ajsiko ipan tlalchi nimantsi patlantejki noja.	And then the third arrived on earth he immediately flew away.	400
	Tlejkok asta Toteko imako ajsito.	He rose until he arrived in Gods hands.	
	Uan noponi ya kipouilito	And there he told Him	
	kiilui para axkuali tle onka ipan ne	he said that it was not good what there	
405	tlaltipaktli.	was on earth.	405
	Ya tle nepa itstoke maseualme uan ni ome angeles tlen temoke.	Over there were people and the two angels that had descended.	
	Yajuantin tlapejpenaj tlen ne pitsome miktokeya	They gather the pigs that had died	

410	torome miktoke	the bulls that are dead	410
	uan sekinok miyak tlamantli tle axajuiyak	and many other things that are not delicious	
	tlen ipoteuia.	which stink.	
	Ya nopaí kikuaj	That is what they eat	
	yeka para seki temoke no ayojkana ualajke.	and therefore those that had descended did not return.	
415	Uan kiijto Toteko:	And God said:	415
	"Bueno, ma mokauaka tla kinekij itstose nepa tlakuase tlen axajuiyak.	"Well, they may stay if they want to be there and eat which is not delicious.	
	Nopa eliti iikaya ininemilis kejnopa elis	Their life may be so for ever	
420	kejnopa elise", kiijto Toteko.	it shall be so", said God.	420
	Uan nelí, tlen nopa san nemiko nima tlejkok uan kipouilito tlake onka nika tlaltipaktli	And indeed, the one who only went and soon rose to tell what there is here on earth	
	ya tlen ne nama tikiluiaj uitsitsili.	him we now call hummingbird.	
425	Tlen nopa ajsito ualajki mokauako kikua tlen nopa poteua nakatl	He who arrived, who came to stay and eat the stinking meat	425
	nama ya ne tikiluiaj tsajpilotl[134].	we now call him buzzard.	
	Tlen ika ome kiualtitlanki nojki mokauako	And the second that was sent and also stayed	
	ya ne kikuapijki elki chajma.	he was turned into a redheaded vulture.	
430	Tlen ika eyi kiualtitlanki	The third who was sent	430
	komo ya axkinejki mokauas tlakuas tlen axajuiyak	since he did not want to stay and eat that which is not delicious	
	ya kichijki uitsitsili	he was made into hummingbird	
	tlen ika eyi eli.	the one who was third.	
435	Nama yeka ne uitsitsili ya axkana kikua tla axajuiyak.	Therefore the hummingbird does not eat that which is not delicious.	435
	Ya ipa nemi ipa ne xochitl	It always goes on flowers	
	san xochiatl kionitinemi.	it only goes about drinking nectar.	
	Uan ne tsajpilotl uan chajma nochipaya	And the buzzard and redheaded vulture still	
440	asta nama	till today	440
	kikuaj tlen poteuia	eat that which stinks	
	tlen axajuiyak.	that which is not delicious.	

A peasant is working in the woods (lines 1-22). He wants to make a clearing and is cutting down the forest (lines 23-56). When he returns the next day, he sees that the trees he has chopped are standing up again, as if they had not been already cut down. The man is surprised, but starts to work and chops the trees anew in the hope the trees will not rise again (lines 57-108). On the third day he discovers that the trees have been raised once more during the night. He

continues working that day, yet wants to know why this is happening to the forest and hides himself at night at the site (lines 109-163). At midnight, he sees a hare makes the trees stand up. In his anger, the peasant wants to kill the hare, but the animal defends itself by telling the man his work shall be useless; a flood is going to exterminate all life on earth. The hare says that is why it is making the trees and bushes rise again. It recommends the peasant build a canoe to escape the disaster with his family, since the canoe shall float on the waters (lines 164-288). Convinced by the hare's arguments, the man starts to build a wooden craft (lines 289-292).

It indeed starts to rain, and when the peasant with his family seeks refuge in the canoe, the hare accompanies them. The water rises, and so does the canoe, till they reach heaven (lines 293-315). The hare sees another land up in the sky, jumps on the moon and stays on it forever (lines 316-330). When the waters recede, the canoe accordingly descends until it touches ground once again (line 331-334). Back on earth, the survivors make a fire and begin to eat the meat of the drowned animals that lie scattered about (lines 335-344). The fire's smoke reaches heaven, and this is how God finds out that not all persons have perished. He sends one of his angels to see what is happening, but the angel has his mind on the meat and stays on earth (lines 345-367). When the angel does not return, God decides to send another angel, but the same happens to the second one (lines 368-382). The third angel sent by God returns to heaven, and tells him there are survivors on earth who are eating the stinking meat of the drowned animals; the other two angels are keeping them company (lines 383-415). Upon hearing this, God becomes angry and transforms the first two angels into a buzzard and a *chajma*, that is a redheaded vulture, condemned to eat the stinking meat they liked so much for the rest of their existence. The third angel is rewarded and becomes a hummingbird (lines 416-442).

Cultural continuity and change in Huastecan Nahua narrative

The "tale about a man and a hare"[135] renders a Huastecan Nahua variant of the universal flood story and seems to be a modern version of a very old tale that circulated in Meso-America in precolonial times; it shows a remarkable resemblance to one of the episodes described in the *Leyenda de los Soles* or Legend of the Suns. This document, stemming from ancient Aztec oral and written traditions in which the world's existence is explained as a succession of five creations, represents one of the fullest and most expressive legacies of Aztec origin tales. Although the contents of this text are not completely precolonial, as it was written in 1558 --almost forty years after the Conquest-- it suggests at least that the flood motif was already present in Mesoamerican belief before Christianity's arrival.

The *Leyenda de los Soles* constitutes a frame of reference for precolonial Mesoamerican thought on the world and its structuring principles[136]. The origin tales interpreted in this document recapitulate the cyclical world view of the Aztecs, who were living in the Fifth "Sun" or Era of Creation. Four preceding Suns had already been overturned by different kind of disasters sent by the deities, and mankind had been brought into being by these same deities, after each catastrophe. The Fifth Sun was ruled and named by the sign *ollin* (movement) and was to be destroyed in time, by a series of crushing earthquakes. The successive destructions of the former worlds had been brought about by raging felines that devoured mankind, devastating hurricanes sweeping away everything on earth, ferocious rains of fire burning all, and an omnipresent flood drowning the universe, in this order[137]. It is this last destruction that catches our attention.

The world's fourth and last destruction --at least until today-- is reconstructed in the *Leyenda de los Soles* in the flood episode, in which a man and a woman are warned about an upcoming worldly inundation by a deity, and are able to survive the disaster inside a hollow *ahuehuete* tree or cypress. When they come back to earth and start cooking the dead fish that lay scattered around, the deities smell the smoke of their fire. One deity is sent to punish the survivors, who are turned into dogs. Herewith is a full account of the episode[138]:

> This sun is named 4 Water. And for fifty-two years there was water.
> These people lived in the fourth one, in the time of the sun 4 Water. And it was 676 years that they lived. And they died by drowning. They turned into fish.
> The skies came falling down. There were destroyed in only one day.
> And what they ate was 4 Flower. That was their food.
> And their year was 1 House. And it was on a day sign 4 Water that they were destroyed. All the mountains disappeared.
> And the water lay for fifty-two years.
> And when their years were complete, then Titlacahuan gave a command to the one called Tata, and to his wife, who was called Nene. He said to them, "Put aside your cares. Hollow out a big cypress, and when it's Tozoztli [April] and the skies come falling down, get inside".
> And so they got inside. Then he sealed them in and said, "You must eat only one of these corn kernels. Also your wife must only eat one". Well, when they had eaten it all up, they went aground.
> It can be heard that the water is drying. The log has stopped moving. Then it opens. They see a fish. Then they drill a fire and cook fish for themselves.

> Then the gods Citlalinicue and Citlalatonac looked down and said, "Gods, who's doing the burning? Who's smoking the skies?"
> Then Titlacahuan, Tezcatlipoca, came down and scolded them. He said, "What are you doing, Tata? What are you people doing?"
> Then he cut off their heads and stuck them on their rumps, and that way they were turned into dogs.
> Now, it was in the year 2 Reed that the skies were [again] smoked. This is how we ourselves exist, how the fire drill ignited. When the sky was established was in a year 1 Hare. [Yes,] this is how the fire drill ignited, when fire appeared [for the new-fire ceremony].
> Now, it was dark for twenty-five years.
> Well, it was in the year 1 Hare that the sky was established. And when it had been established, the dogs sent up smoke, as mentioned above. And after the fire drill had ignited -after Tezcatlipoca had drilled fire- he smoked the sky once more, and this was in a year 2 Reed. (Bierhorst 1992b:143-145, brackets in the original.)

Considering the obvious relations that exist between the Legend of the Suns' episode and the contemporary Huasteca Nahua flood tale, I shall discuss the present-day tale in light of the prior one. Occasionally, other precolonial and early-Colonial sources such as the *Codex Borgia* and the *Codex Vaticano A* shall be used as a reference framework to understand specific aspects of the current Nahua tale. Yet, this does not assume an exclusively comparative analysis, since the contemporary product is by no means the result of a simple reproduction of the Aztec tradition. The Nahua tale represents a tale which, even if it draws on former accounts and reveals similar motifs, has acquired new symbolic meanings with its own messages and purposes. The stability or permanence of both the structure and significance of motifs in narrative offers key factors for understanding both ancient and contemporary indigenous thought, if they are studied in light of historical and contemporary changes in present-day indigenous societies (López Austin 1998:395;454).

The debate on the subjects of syncretism and cultural continuity in indigenous societies is not new, and part of it deals with the issue of whether precolonial traits, especially in Mesoamerican religion(s), may be associated to current time, and how. In this connection, López Austin (1994:10-17) sees the Mesoamerican religious complex as a unity that comprises a structured whole of social processes, beliefs, practices, values and representations of indigenous peoples. Many parts of this religious complex have changed and been transformed throughout the centuries because of society's dynamic character. However, it also has a "hard nucleus" that has been preserved

through time and that contains its most essential aspects. According to López Austin, it is the existence of this hard nucleus which makes it feasible to establish a comparison between precolonial and contemporary indigenous societies.

Diachronical research is also done by Anders and Jansen (1994, 1996a). Based on the idea that precolonial indigenous peoples held fundamental concepts in common, it is also known that they demonstrated a great variety of practices in time and space, which permitted them to adapt themselves to new circumstances without losing their identity. This adaptability has made the process of continuity possible. Christianity has had to accept the reinterpretation of its symbols and values in the Mesoamerican context, whose expression is very much present in ancestral sacred geography, as, for example, in ideas about the sacred hill (1994:99-123). In order to research processes of continuity one should study both contemporary as well as precolonial and colonial cultural expressions.

Gossen emphasizes the processes of both cultural continuity and change that were and are operative in Mexican Maya cultures, which have retained practices and beliefs dating back several centuries, but are also highly adaptive to current fast-changing times (1999:161, 243). Concerning oral tradition, Williams García (1972:136-137), a scholar of indigenous tales from the Huasteca area, thinks that cosmological tales, which he calls myths, have molded themselves into new beliefs and practices without losing their informative and sanctioning purpose, reinterpreting names and concepts without altering themes. From quite another perspective, Taggart states that the tales that have originated from the same historical source and that have spread to different storytelling communities, may be compared whenever the social and cultural context of both communities is taken into account (1997:10-22). In his study, Taggart compares Nahua tales with Spanish tales from Cácares --the region that contributed the first colonialists to settle in the Sierra de Puebla area that he studies-- to show how oral tradition reveals diverging ways of valuing masculinity in both societies, in accordance with the cultural values attributed to this aspect of everyday life. Comparative research shows cross-cultural adaptableness of oral traditions, as well as specific processes of reshaping tales according to the new cultural context.

The study of cultural continuity in the Huastecan Nahua deluge tale is based on a description and discussion of its motifs. The motifs are constituted by a set of elements and concepts characterizing and defining the motif, also called a thematic unit (van der Loo 1987:21-26). When the same thematic unit is found in narratives from different periods, these narratives might permit a historical projection that can help understand the motif[139]. To be effective, the analysis must be based on motifs found in roughly similar

contexts as their sixteenth-century counterpart (Taggart 1983:112), and the motifs' arrangement within the texts must follow a more or less analogous sequence (Horcasitas 1988:184). The identification of certain motifs with one of its antecedents then serves to examine and explain the motifs' transformation into their new symbolic context. The fact that we can count on a written, fixed Aztec version of the flood tale is unique, and allows us to make the analysis comparing these motifs and their contexts.

Furthermore, Don Pancho's flood tale shall be associated to additional sources, like present-day Nahua versions of the tale --both within the Huasteca area and outside of it--, to other contemporary indigenous flood tales from Mexico, and, of course, to the Biblical flood tale. These sources are not only used as comparative material to understand the Nahua tale's particular details, which seem ambiguous, and give examples of the heterogeneity existing in Mesoamercan flood tales. All these sources somehow influenced and shaped the tale presented here and thus provide a means to understand the Huastecan Nahua flood tale more thoroughly.

Type of tale

As explained before, the designation of the type of tale depends on its reception as a genuine or fictional account. In the flood tale's case, authenticity is claimed by many people, including the narrator himself. The tale is commonly seen as a true tale about a remote past and involves an almost literal understanding of its contents. This tale type labelling is due mainly to two reasons: the actual belief in the existence of the hare on the moon, and the credence in the certainty of a past universal flood.

A first factor for claiming authenticity is the episode of the hare jumping on the moon. Almost all Nahuas affirm the existence of the hare on the celestial body, which can be discerned as a dark silhouette during full moon. To them, the tale's crucial part is the passage explaining why the animal is now living in the moon. Some narrators finish their performance when the hare jumps off the craft to stay above; they will only go on telling the tale if the audience asks what happened next to the other survivors (for example, van 't Hooft and Cerda 2003:95-99). It seems that the flood story is conceived as an etiological one which explains why the hare is now stuck to the moon, more than a cosmogonic tale about the world's recreation. In fact, the complete tale as represented above does not seem to be one that is usually transmitted; at first, many people did not recognize it. Some persons recalled the first part about the forest rising over and over again, but did not connect it with a universal deluge. Others said they knew about a flood that had wiped out the world in former days, but could not recollect the story as told. The episode of the hare jumping on the moon, however, is well known.

When asked to narrate how the hare came to live on the moon, all the answers were directly linked with cataclysmic waters overtaking mankind. The prevailing conception of the rodent as the moon's *naual* (see below), related to *pulque* (the fermented licor of the agave plant), drunkenness, menstruation and pregnancy, could explain the strength of the episode in Nahua narrative. All in all, the set of current beliefs about the hare makes the flood tale's contents form a part of a true tale.

Most Nahuas believe in the flood tale's genuineness but do not always recognize every episode of the tale as described above. As far as the flooding part is concerned, they claim authenticity. Nahuas bring up the biblical account as proof when asked about the events' truthfulness as reported in the tale. In daily practice, except from the local *catequistas* ("catechists"), very few people have a Bible at home and even fewer have read some of its passages. Nahuas refer to the tale as "the one told in the Bible" but, apart from the readings heard in church[140], they are not very well acquainted with the biblical story. Nevertheless, the Bible's contents are seen as a chronicle of real happenings, and the fact that the flood tale is written down in the Bible makes it a true tale.

During the performance, the narrator claims he is saying the truth through a series of verbal expessions. Starting from the first sentence (lines 1-6) he uses the expressions *kiijtouaj* ("they say", "it is said"[141]) and *uajkauaya* (long ago), two assertions of truth in Nahua narrative, which are strengthened by the descriptions *nama kipixkiya miyak uan miyak xiuitl* (now it is already many and many years ago) and *uan axmomati asta kema* (and it is not known when). Thus, the tale is labeled from the very start as a true tale about a remote past. During the rest of the performance, no further references are made to the authenticity issue. Don Pancho's self-confidence as a performer, and the knowledge that the tale is regularly seen as a true tale prevent him from recurring to these verbal expressions. To all listeners, it is clear that the events deal with authentic events set in a remote past.

Actors in the tale

The main character of the Huastecan Nahua tale is an ordinary, nameless, hardworking peasant. The storyteller calls him *tlakatl*, a man. This unspecified characterization means that he can easily be identified as an average adult. The audience automatically fills in the gaps about his personality and social situation, according to its own reference framework. At the beginning of the narration, the peasant is busy clearing a wood to make a *mila*; this will enable him to feed his family. The fact that he works with his children, who are probably married, is common in the communities, as well as hiring day-laborers that help out during the hardest parts of the

agricultural activities. This information further specifies the protagonist as being a responsible and industrious person, that is, as an ideal family father who provides for his kin.

The peasant is confronted with a problem which consists of the destruction of his work. Interestingly, he does not resolve the problem, but diverts his attention according to a helper's instructions. The helper takes the form of an animal, a hare in this case. Although at first the hare seems to be an adversary, he turns out to be an ally and offers a solution to escape the fate God has planned. At this point, the initial problem of the rising forest turns out to have been but a mere foreboding of the coming disaster. Accepting the hare's admonition, the peasant survives the calamity in a wooden canoe he himself made. Because of the role he played, notifying people of the impending disaster, the hare is now referred to reverentially as *kuatochitsi*, the honored hare. The hare plays an important role throughout the tale; it joins the people in the canoe and for that reason is able to jump on the moon. Its attributes are articulated, foremost, in relation to the moon and shall be dealt with in the section on Nahua time concepts.

A third actor is *Toteko* (lit. Our Lord), the Nahuatl designation for God, who aims to destroy the world (lines 345-346). He appears rather late in the tale, and it is only at this point that the initiator of the deluge is revealed. The reasons why He wants to destroy the earth are not mentioned expressly, and therefore God's role seems somewhat ambiguous. Somehow, the admonishing hare may be related to God, but, on the other hand, it appears that if his aim was to exterminate all life on earth, He would not have sent a messenger to spare a few persons. When God detects that some people have survived the flood and are making a fire, He sends angels to examine the situation, after which He only transforms the angels who have or not returned to heaven. He does not take steps to kill or transform the survivors who escaped the fate He had planned. The presentation and valuation of His character have quite a few peculiar traits and shall be analyzed in detail.

Other actors are the angels who obey or disregard God during their mission to find out who is polluting the sky. These intermediaries between God and the survivors constitute etiological elements in the tale, as their conduct during the mission leads to a permanent change in their physical appearance and food habits. It is said they once were angels that have now been transformed into birds (lines 357-359). The result of their mission on earth accounts for the present existence of these animals. The tale telling is also a reminder of today's valuation of these animals; their obedience or disobedience towards God marked their future as either joyful or harsh.

Time aspects in the tale: temporal setting and story time

Concerning the tale's time aspects, the period of time in which the events occur is not mentioned explicitly. The story begins "early one day" when a man goes to work with his sons and some day laborers to clear a field in the forest (lines 23-39). The adverb "one day" alludes to any day. The adjective "early" settles a more precise moment of that unspecified day, but confirms, moreover, that the protagonist is the typical exemplary man, who goes out to work at an early hour, as honorable and industrious peasants do. The man cannot be accused of laziness, which is one of the most negative qualities that may be ascribed to a Nahua, both in narrative and in real life. The storyteller wants to make sure that his main character is not to be blamed for the negative things that will happen to him later in the tale, as would be the case if he were lazy. The man's dedication is enhanced when it is stated that he "cleared, cleared, and cleared" (line 37). Reduplication of verbs is the chief compositional principle used to indicate the event's long duration in oral tradition (Gray 1971). In Nahua oral tradition, the verb's threefold repetition also denotes the accomplishment of a task that took a while (Toumi 1984:35). The peasant's working spirit is further expressed through the fact that he was happy about having begun the work that day (line 50-52); soon afterward, this is contrasted with the sadness he felt when the forest had risen (lines 65-74). Observations about his love of work are made throughout the tale's first part.

As all Nahua peasants do, the protagonist comes home that first afternoon and looks for day laborers to help him the following day (lines 53-56). That next day he discovers that during his absence the trees have grown again. Being an exemplary Nahua, he is saddened --not angry or disconcerted--, and wonders how this could have happened (line 65-89). He not only starts doing the work over again, but he cuts down the trees into even smaller pieces than the previous day. The second day passes as the first (lines 90-108). The third morning, the trees are upright again. The man almost wants to give up the job, but he convinces himself to cut the forest for the third time (lines 109-136). Three is the number that in Nahua thought connotes an act's completion, the reaching of a limit, and the course within a space in its totality (Toumi 1984:35). Having worked in vain for two days, the man does not want to see his third day's work undone. That night, he stays in the forest to find out who is raising the clearing (lines 157-163).

It is the crucial moment at midnight, the potential end of a period, when the man hears the noise of the forest rising bit by bit (line 164-176). Extraordinary acts occur at nighttime, when dark and harmful forces become effective and try to disrupt the established order. The devil works at these hours, and acts of sorcery and witchcraft are especially potent then. Encounters between Nahuas and beings from other spaces often take place

during the night. Midnight is thus an adequate time for the raising of the clearing and for the dialogue between the hare and the peasant. The raising of the clearing signifies an inversion of the existing order, an exceptional event that must have been provoked at a particularly significant time of day. Similarly, a conversation between an animal (the hare) and a person (the peasant) calls for a specific temporal framework. It is during the disruptive, nocturnal part of the day that an obviously anomalous course of action (a hare warning mankind) can be expected. Only at this point of time may the hare inform the peasant about a pending disaster, that is, about a coming disruption.

The conversation also constitutes one of the elements that, by contrast, separates today's world from the previous one(s). In former days it seemed to be altogether normal for a person to communicate with animals. Nahuas give credence to the idea that people had the faculty to understand animals and freely interact with them whenever they wanted to do so. Currently -- some say immediately after the flood-- man has lost this highly appreciated faculty. By talking to the peasant, the hare is associated with this ancient temporal setting.

After the nightly conversation, the peasant decides to build the canoe following the hare's indications. The hare had told him not much time was left before it would start to rain, but did not give a specific time limit (line 267). The exact number of days or months that pass before the canoe is finished is not mentioned and does not seem relevant to the narrator. Yet, Don Pancho attests the man had only just concluded the work when the rain started (line 294-296).

The hare had told the peasant the rains would last long: "It shall begin to rain, rain, rain, rain" (line 245). And, indeed, "it began to rain, rain, rain and rain" (line 296). With reduplication of the verb marking an action's continuance, the more than threefold repetition hints at the rains' extremely lengthy interval. The hare employs an exact numeral as well: the rains would continue for forty days (line 274). After having suggested only vague time lapses, this precise count of the days is deemed meaningful[142]. This number, corresponding with the story in Genesis, suggests the rains' lengthy duration and, by doing so, alludes to the event's extraordinary circumstances. It seems to have acquired symbolic significance in Nahua society, as there are anecdotes about a lengthy rainy period of forty days in the Northern Gulf area, in the mid-80s, in which a ceaseless rain drowned the maize plants in the month of September. The numeral is confirmed by other Nahuas and has clearly replaced former counts. Other published Nahua versions of the flood tale cite the same number (*Seis versiones....* 1982:8-19; 49-64; Stiles 1978:11-12; Stiles Maya and Castillo 1985:22-25; Taggart 1983:192-194). The

Legend of the Suns describes the people drowning in one single day, after which the world was inundated for fifty-two years, the Aztec equivalent of a time cycle[143]. Only in a version registered by Gómez Martínez (1999:18-22) is this number respected; Nahuas of Chicontepec, Veracruz, remember the deluge lasted fifty-two days.

After this last temporal indication, the narrator hardly gives any more specific time markers. We do not know how many days, months or even years the man had to live with his family and the villagers in the canoe before the craft reached heaven. We ignore how long they floated near heaven until the waters began to subside, or how long it took before the canoe reached ground again. Since the narrator cites the survivors' arrival on earth and their discovery of the dead animals in one sentence (lines 335-340), and mentions the animals being eaten right afterwards (lines 341-343), one assumes the peasant began making a fire directly after having touched dry land, yet there is nothing to confirm this assumption. One also presupposes that God must have smelled the smoke instantaneously or slightly after it had gone up to heaven, because it is said it irritated Him the moment he saw it (lines 345-355). Though it is not indicated, He might have sent the first angel at once. Also, there is no information on the number of hours or days God waited in vain for his angel to come back, and when the procedure repeats itself with the second angel, there are no specific time markers either. However, the third angel is sent back and flies without delay to report on its findings (lines 400-401). The angel's swiftness stresses its obedience towards God and emphasizes its virtue as a loyal servant. Once he knows how matters stand, God takes steps immediately (lines 416-434).

It appears, once more, that it is important to sketch out the event's sequence, rather than its precise duration. In the tale, when there are specific manifestations of time duration (such as the three days of work, the nightly conversation, forty days of rain, or the third angel's immediate return), these seem to have a symbolic meaning, rather than the purpose of giving exact time-spans. Whereas some of these are common forms used in tale telling in general, and others are borrowed from the Genesis tale, their significance can at times be understood only if one has some knowledge of Nahua time principles. The temporal setting and story time weave time aspects with different origins into a new, coherent whole.

Time aspects in the tale: removal of time

It was already stated that the version on the flood presented above is set in a remote past. The terms announcing remoteness of the events (*uajkauaya, san kema*, etc.) primarily refer to the authenticity issue and can therefore be treated as a feature of the tale type, which in this case refers to a true tale. As

expected, the antiquity of the events is exposed by managing differences and oppositions relative to the present structuring of the world. One such radical distinction involves the tale's temporal aspect: the first part of the text establishes a negation of time. In the beginning of the scene, a peasant is overtaken by a forest that has grown overnight after he has cut it. The forest's renovation implies a reversal in time, after which the world is the same as the previous day. This way, time ceases to flow and comes to a complete standstill.

The motif of cut vegetation growing back to its former state is found today among indigenous peoples all over Mexico, such as Huicholes (for example, Lumholtz 1900-1907; McIntosh 1949; Furst 1997), Mixes (*Seis versiones* 1982:23-25), Popolucas (Foster 1945:235-237), Tének (for example, *Relatos huastecos...* 1994; van 't Hooft and Cerda 2003:91-94), Tepehuas (Gessain 1952-53), Totonacs (for example, Ichon 1990:52-55; Valiñas 1985:49-50; *Cuentos totonacos* 2000), and Tlapanecos (Lemley 1949). The motif's wide diffusion could indicate its antiquity, since joint traditions on such a large scale cannot be explained as a mere parallelism, and the shared elements were certainly not spread during the colonial period when Hispanic rule broke off former interindigenous contacts (cf. López Austin 1989:35). Moreover, in all the above-mentioned sources, the motif of a regenerating forest is associated with a deluge[144].

In the text presented here, the animal responsible for the forest's regeneration is a hare. When the peasant spots the hare, he does not immediately establish the connection between the animal sitting in the center of the clearing and the rising of the trees. Only when he hears the animal speak to the forest does he learn it is responsible for the incident (lines 198-202). It was a speech act that made the forest rise again. Words are powerful and highly esteemed in Nahua society. An impeccable verbal competence is essential to every Nahua in his daily interaction, be it in an ordinary or ritual context (cf. Knab 1983:108). The appropriate use of words in each linguistic situation contributes to its desired outcome. In a like manner, the hare's authoritative words were effective and made the forest rise again. By addressing the trees in the correct fashion, the words acquired the power necessary to make them rise.

In the tale's other versions, the animal uses different means to regenerate the forest. In one version the animal is said to "go around playing" (*Amochtli* 2000:176). In Stiles' text (1978:11) the hare jumps over the scattered trees to bring them back to their former state. In Nahua narrative, jumping over a body is often used as a means to revive animals or persons (see, for example, Campos 1993; González Cruz 1985). The hare's way of moving, hopping to and fro, might have favored the narrator's choice of this means. In a Nahua

version from the Huastecan municipality of Ixhuatlán, Veracruz, the forest rises again due to a combination of the hare's demanding words and its erratic jumping about (*Seis versiones*... 1982:28). In another Huastecan Nahua version (Maya 1979/80), the hare makes the vegetation rise by urinating on it. Urine has therapeutic applications in Nahua society and is an important substance in recipes employed by the *tepajtijketl* or traditional doctor. López Austin enlists a series of ailments for which urine was and is used as a medication among Nahuas, and says that this practice stems from European medicine (1989:193). The urine's potency to revitalize sick persons has its analogy in some Nahua flood tales in which the hare's urine revitalizes the forest. Thus, according to the variant, there are multiple means by which the hare may fulfill its objective. Regardless of the means through which the forest regains its former condition, it is always the hare that is responsible for undoing the peasant's work[145].

The understanding of the hare's role in the tale is based on several elements of Nahua thought. Part of it may be deduced from present-day valuations of the animal's conduct. Today, the hare's most salient trait is cunning: it is much faster than other swift animals, like the dogs that chase it, and it leaves them far behind. Nahuas say it is smart, "the smartest of all animals", but "bad", since it destroys the young corn and bean plants in the field. This destruction is rather useless, for the animal does not even eat these grains; it just goes about destroying the plants. By day, one has to kick it out of the *mila* by throwing stones at it. At night, nothing can be done to stop its harmful conduct if one does not want to stay and watch over the field. The combination of "smartness" and "badness" ascribed to the hare could be related to the episode in the tale in which it raises the forest: it is the only being smart enough to try to warn the peasant so he may survive the impending cataclysm. It does this by demonstrating a behavior opposite to its usual one, but one that is equally destructive; instead of undoing the cultivation, it destroys the Nahuas' work by regenerating vegetation which should not be revived.

The hare's conduct makes it a plausible candidate for a trickster part in Huastecan Nahua oral tradition. In tales about the hare and the coyote, most of them clearly derived from medieval European traditions such as the Aesop's tales, it is the rodent who deceives the coyote time and again (see, for example, Münch 1994:291-293; Preuss 1971; Stiles 1982). The coyote, which wants to devour the hare, suffers severe physical torments when it pays attention to the hare's suggestions. It has to drink the water of an entire lake in order to eat the cheese lying at the bottom --the moon's reflection on the water--, or hold for long hours a heavy but supposedly unsteady rock which might otherwise fall and come crashing down on a village. On other occasions, boiling water is poured over the coyote when it takes the hare's place in a cooking pot, or it

swallows an unripe and unpleasant fruit the hare throws in its mouth. Each tale about the hare and the coyote demonstrates the rodent's ingeniousness over the cruel, strong but credulous coyote that never succeeds in devouring its opponent[146].

When asked to tell tales about hares, people often recalled one in particular about the hare and the coyote. However, almost the same number of persons associated the request to the part of the flood tale in which the hare appears. The large number of tales about the hare as a trickster does not blot out the common knowledge of its role in the deluge tale. During a nightly conversation with the *catequista* ("catequist") in one of the villages, I asked him if he knew any tales about hares. His first answer was that he did not. Then, after some thinking, the man gave the following response:

> A: Look, a man who was a cousin of ours told us this. He says that, who knows how long ago, how many thousands of years ago already, the hare talked. And one day a man went to work in his field to cut down trees. And he went home in the afternoon and returned to his field the following day, right? And he found the trees standing up. Have they told you this one already?
>
> B: Yes, that is the one. Now, how does it continue?
>
> A: And it is said he found the trees upright. And he knocked them down again. And the next day he came back and again the trees stood upright. So the man says [wonders] what has happened, who lifted them up again? So they say he cut the trees down again and went back [home] in the afternoon. He came home to have dinner and returned [to the clearing]. And then he came to find it. He found the hare raising the trees. And then it told him why, right? But I don't remember how this continues...

Having read the Genesis story, the *catequista* did not associate this episode to the Nahua tale about a universal flood. In fact, the Nahua flood version I told him in order to complete the tale and refresh his memory, he considered totally apocryphal, and asked me if I had not read the Bible. He told me the precise number of days in which it rained, which I had described as "some say forty days, others say forty years", and said that only Noah's family survived, but not all the villagers, as in my version. Furthermore, Noah took animals along in the craft, so not every animal drowned, except perhaps for the dinosaurs who might have been extinguished then. I was obviously misinformed about the Genesis tale.

The catequist remembered the part of the hare regenerating the forest as the beginning of a tale, but he had forgotten the following argument. The disconnection of this motif from the rest of the flood tale might hint at the

episode's symbolic importance as Nahuas seem to remember it, even when they do not believe (anymore) in the veracity of the flood tale to which it is attached. In Nahua narrative it is common to find lengthy tales broken up in parts, and hear persons narrate one or two episodes of longer tales as if it were a complete story. Frequently, Nahuas fail to join these episodes to other parts of the tale because they are not familiar with these more extensive versions; at times they deliberately choose to tell only a small part. In the case of the Chikomexochitl tale, for example, some will tell the "short version" because they feel they are not prepared to tell the "long version" or because they do not have time or do not want to tell the long one. The *catequista*'s reminiscence of a regenerating forest and his assessment of its truth-value exemplify how a tale's specific episodes are accepted, while others are refuted. When the accepted episodes stand on their own, they make up a new tale; when they don't, they are often incorporated into other tales. Occasionally, however, this restructuring process leads to the extreme, in which the isolated episodes leave the narrator --in this case the *catequista*-- with an unfinished and seemingly meaningless tale.

The episode of the hare raising trees is well known among Huastecan Nahuas. To explain the rodent's role in the flood tale, this first episode must be linked to another one in which it jumps on the moon. The hare raises the trees because "it is useless to work" (line 217) since the peasant "shall not produce anymore" (lines 218-222). All the efforts to procure his family's well-being by growing corn and vegetables will be in vain. The fact that the man has already worked uselessly for three days, trying to clear the forest, provokes the same effect. The hare undoes the peasant's work because it is aware of the coming disaster. Its admonition appears to be not an act of sympathy with the peasant's otherwise tragic fate, but the means to save itself. The fact that the peasant listens to the hare and actually constructs the craft enables the hare to reach its final home on the moon.

Most Mexican indigenous peoples confirm the existence of a hare on the moon (Burkhart 1986:108). At full moon, the silhouette of a hare sitting hunched up is outlined against the celestial body's bright color, and Nahuas wonder whether the Americans encountered the animal during the moonlanding. The representation of a hare on the moon is very old and can already be found in the *Codex Borgia* (1993: plates 10; 55; 71), dating from precolonial times. To understand the hare's current symbolic significance, it is useful to draw upon some precolonial thoughts about the rodent.

According to Burkhart (1986), the Aztecs associated the hare with moral deviance, disobedience and anti-social behavior in general. In her essay, she explains how the hare's outer features and habits made it an apt symbol of the above-mentioned characteristics[147], but also of the moon and the

earth. Aztec narrative relates the hare directly to the time of the deluge. The world was destroyed by a flood and recreated in the year "one hare" (*Leyenda*...1992:120). This calendar date links the hare to a time of cataclysm which destroys humankind, an interstice between the old world and the new one, a dangerous transition period between a former order and a current one, "as unpredictable as the hare's hop" (Burkhart 1986:118). At the same time, because of the following recreation process that same year, the hare was made into an earth sign. The earth was called *ce tochtli aquetztimani,* meaning "one hare, you who are standing face up" (Ruiz de Alarcón 1987:78).

One of the passages of the *Leyenda de los soles* relates how a *pulque* deity hits the moon with a hare (1992:122)[148]. In the *Leyenda*, after the cataclysm in which a flood destroyed the world, the deities created two luminaries. Yet none of the two moved, so time could not begin. In their anger, the deities tried to shoot the sun with their arrows and tossed a hare to the moon. In another text (Sahagún 1989:479-482), the suns created after the flood did not let the deities rest; both were equally bright and, therefore, it was always day. A deity hit one of the luminaries with a hare, hurting or blinding it. This obscured its light and turned this luminary into the moon. Thereafter, a strong wind set both luminaries in motion, and time started again. The world's fifth creation had begun to take its course.

One way or other, the above-mentioned versions relate the hare to an earlier world, to cataclysms and to the moon. In all these associations, the time aspect is relevant: cataclysms are dangerous intervals provoking the end of times, and the moon regulates time. It is therefore not strange to find the hare manipulating time in the flood tale. Especially through the connection between the hare and the moon, which also controls time, the animal becomes the master of time[149]. At present, the hare is conceived as being the moon's *nawal*; it is thought to be the animal accompanying, protecting and impersonating the moon. From up above, it now influences life on earth, the same as the moon, which is seen as a vessel pouring out an invisible liquid over the earth, whose essence is light, rain and tears combined. This moon-liquid regulates the water on earth --the sea, the lakes, but also the liquids in plants, animals and man-- and may be both beneficial and harmful. During lunar eclipses, the liquid is poured out all at once, which has a negative effect (López Austin 1991). It is during lunar eclipses that the relation between the moon and time is once more evident: the darkening of the moon evokes disasters, including the end of times, when kerns, grinding stones, the griddle and the three stones of the hearth come alive or change into wild animals (*tekuanime*) and devour mankind (see Reyes Antonio 1982:48-50).

In the deluge tale, the hare gives rise to a new beginning of time, by placing the world in a cyclical process, and removing the normal time sequence through the trees' rebirth. The undoing of the peasant's work is not a destruction of his efforts by an evil force (a "bad" hare), even if the hare is the animal which annihilates this work and revives the forest in what is a destructive behavior. It is but the harmful consequence of an act which points to the existing order's disruption, the beginning of the dangerous interval between the two worlds. In a temporal metaphor, the negation of time --allowing the forest to grow anew-- announces the end of time. The removal or negation of time leads to the deluge, and only when the hare jumps on the moon is the cataclysm reversed. Hence, the hare provokes both the cataclysm's initiation and reversal, giving way to the world's new beginning and a new time count. The hare's silhouette "stuck to" the moon reminds us of the cataclysmic deluge and the commencement of the existing order.

Space aspects of the tale

The setting of the tale's first episode is "a big forest" (line 26-27). It is an uncultivated area, at the far end of a Nahua community, which is returned to its original state and does not obey society's rules which determine it needs to be cut in order to be brought into the Nahua realm. The peasant's zeal trying to gain ground upon the forest is futile, and the tables are ironically turned when the forest regenerates and gains ground upon the man´s clearing. This destruction on a tiny scale of what has become a part of the Nahua world, the clearing, is a premonition of the approaching total destruction of the world.

Upon hearing noises and spotting the rising of the trees, the peasant goes out to discover the source of this incident and searches in the four corners of his field (line 182-184). The statement, an allusion to the four directions of the wind and the four corners of the world, the ordering principle of space, implies that the peasant looks everywhere. Yet, it is in the center where he shall find the hare (lines 189-190). In Nahua thought, the number four is associated with the passage or transition to a new temporal or geographical space, the beginning of a period, or the opening to a future (Toumi 1984:35). In this line of thinking, the search for the hare opens a new episode in the story, enabling the tale's subsequent development. The place of the encounter marks a fifth point, the central axis generating the cosmic movement, a point of transcendence (Johansson 1994:120). At this spot of completeness and origin, located in the limits between two different realms, the message is given for the peasant to achieve his salvation.

After having been convinced by the hare about the coming deluge, one can assume the man goes back home, as he did the two preceding days (lines 48-49; 103). The domicile is not described, and it must therefore be understood that "home" is the standard, generic Nahua village as every listener imagines it to be. There the peasant starts building the canoe. He enters the craft with his family when the rains prevent them from continuing on earth. Thus, "home" is, in contrast to the world at the periphery, a safe haven where the device leading to man's persistence is built, whereas the message about life's coming destruction is given in a dangerous place, one of disorder, as a forboding of what is to come.

The flood rains begin. In the contemporary Nahua version the waters only come out of the sky, where God resides. This conception follows the *Leyenda*, in which God merely makes it rain. The subterranean waterways are not used to provoke an even more impressive cataclysm, as is the case in the Genesis story, where the "windows of the heavens and the fountains of the deep" are said to have opened. Other Huastecan Nahua versions confirm the rains; they do not say that other waterways have opened up (for example, Barón Larios 1994:129,172; *Seis versiones...* 1982:10,60; Stiles, Maya and Castillo 1985:19). Maya (1979/80) refers to the cataclysm as a "big storm". Only one account has the springs gushing forth boiling water, which come with rains and fire falling from heaven (*Seis versiones...* 1982:30). The duration, together with the rains' relentless intensity --"rain, rain, rain and rain"-- produce a devastating result.

If the earth is flooded then heaven is the only spot to find protection. The wooden canoe does not appear to drift randomly over the floodwaters but goes straight up through the sky to heaven; the way it is told, it is lifted up and rises inasmuch as the waters rise (lines 303-306). Yet, in the end there is such an overabundance of water that it reaches heaven; the cataclysm does not only remove time, it also removes space. Due to the craft's and the floodwaters' vertical movement, heaven and earth seem to come together and the world is totally annihilated. In the tales, the lower part of heaven bordering with the upper part of the sky is like a ceiling. Narrators say the craft "hit heaven" (Maya 1979-80), "hit and made a sound like striking glass" (Taggart 1983:192-194) or that it "ran into heaven, two times it hit" (Preuss 1982:145-153)[150]. In the *Leyenda* the sky and earth come together as well, but do this in an opposite movement: *hualpachiuh in ilhuicatl* (lit. "the sky came collapsing, came falling down", Bierhorst 1992a:87-88) is the spatial metaphor used by the author to illustrate both the intensity of the rains falling down on earth and the crushing effect this has on life on earth.

Since the celestial sphere is not an adequate place for a living man, the water level reaching heaven is felt to be extraordinary and unique. The deluge's

extreme height also suggests that no one would have survived the disaster had the craft not been built. All peaks and treetops had been submerged beneath the waters and it is certain that the peasant and his people in the canoe are the only ones saved. Only when the hare jumps on the moon to regulate time does the water begin to withdraw and earth and sky are separated again. Gómez Martínez shows this by saying that the hare's leap onto the moon alerted the deities and made them stop the rains to keep heaven from inundating (1999:20). Once the threat has passed, the peasant lands back on earth, perhaps on the same spot where he had entered the canoe, though this spatial setting is no longer relevant and is therefore not spoken of. As space vanished during the flood, all its former indications have become inapplicable. The earth has become a new different space.

Meaning in the Huastecan Nahua flood tale

Stories about a new creation proceeding from a flood have caught the attention of many scholars for many years now. Folklorists, anthropologists, linguists and other scholars have provided a generous sampling of flood tales, which have been analyzed by researchers from various disciplines with an array of different interpretation methods (see, for example, Frazer 1918; Horcasitas 1988; Dundes 1988, to name just a few). Flood stories are usually linked to themes such as the earth's renewal and humanity's rebirth from water's purifying powers. Interpretations address the deluge's punitive character in which sinful people are destroyed and morality is upheld; they associate the story with concepts about fertility, or define it as a solar or lunar myth. The deluge text as told by Don Pancho is rich enough in detail to cover multiform interpretations and valuations, some of which can only be fully explained if related to the present and past socio-cultural context. Without pretending to be exhaustive, some outstanding characteristics of the tale shall be discussed here in order to understand some aspects of current Nahua thought as they arise from the motifs in the text.

The causes of the flood

Horcasitas (1988) notes that flood tales currently told in Mexico's indigenous societies rarely argue about the deluge's causes. In his view, the narrators are rather fatalistic on this point, and never emphasize God's reasons, which is apparently not an important element for the story's development. He feels that the few narrators who do give a reason are more often than not influenced by European ideas when justifying man's destruction (1988:186-187). Indeed, the lack of concern about the flood's origin seems to be a common trait in Nahua tales, our tale included. Don Pancho does not bother to tell us why the world was meant to perish. The hare's warning does not

elaborate on the reason for the coming deluge and is limited to the phrase that it is "useless to work" (line 217).

Only a few Huastecan Nahua narrators provide arguments for the unleashing of the cataclysm. Maya (1979/80) makes a revealing remark when he says that pre-diluvian land had become too eroded; it was not possible to grow corn anymore and the people were waiting anxiously for "something" from the moon. This accounts for the idea that God wanted to fertilize the world (cf. Stiles, Maya and Castillo 1985:19). Other narrators offer reasonings that resemble the biblical acount's arguments. One mentions that God decided to erase man, as the people were "at constant war, everything was envy, treason and vice that no one could restrain," so God became "tired of you [people]" (*Seis versiones* 1982:27-31). A second one says: "And God saw it was not good what a lot of persons were doing, a lot of people were doing bad things, all of them sinned and did not believe in God" (*Seis versiones*... 1982:51). The official school book on Nahua literature used in primary schools in the Huasteca says that God was angry because the people did not respect Him (*Amochtli*… 2000:176).

No concluding remarks can be made concerning these rather open reasonings, which are isolated statements that are not recurrent in Nahua flood tales; and yet, this point is revealing as it sheds light on the contemporary tale's influences. The lack of an explanation for the flood stems from its precolonial predecessors, which do not need justifications to account for the disaster; in the *Leyenda* no reference is found on the grounds of the event. Who wants to flood the earth and why this happens, is ignored. It seems that all deities came to a consensus about exterminating the world, since further on in the text, all deities sent Tezcatlipoca to have a look at the earth, after the water had dried up.

When asked to discuss the deluge's causes, some persons in the Huasteca believe God flooded the world because "bad people" populated it. Although the act of punishing undesired social behavior can be associated to both present and past Nahua culture --Aztecs severely penalized immoral conduct such as drunkenness, marital infidelity or laziness-- it does not seem to apply to either the Aztec or the contemporary Huastecan Nahua version. The peasant and the villagers are definitely not "bad people" (they work very hard) or man-eaters like those who lived in former times (they want to sow corn and other vegetables for their subsistence), two negative qualities that could justify the flood as an indispensable transition to a morally better world. The hare tells the peasant to take all the villagers with him and does not raise the issue of the people's virtuous qualities (as is the argument in the biblical tale in which God chose Noah to survive because of his rectitude). No apparent cause can be found to explain the deluge. It just happens.

Labeling the flood as a destruction to punish sinful behavior is most probably based on Catholic principles; the issue is of little relevance to Nahuas so they are forced to seek for an explanation in the biblical source which provides an answer to this question which to them seems superfluous. In order to explain the lack of a motive for the flood, it is necessary to look at precolonial Mesoamerican thought. In these traditions, the deities did not send a sequence of destructive forces to punish mankind for its sins, but rather, because they had not made humanity as they wished. The deities created man again and again, each time out of a different material, but humans always ended up having characteristics that did not please their makers, whereupon the whole creation would be destroyed and another one made; only through death was life regenerated (see, for example, *Codex Vaticano A* 1996). Despite their devastating decisions, the deities were not believed to be either evil or good in themselves; their actions just happened to benefit or harm people. Sending a flood maintains this principle of duality: the water is destructive and restorative, for the flood has negative consequences for former mankind but also positive ones for a new creation. The cyclical destruction was conceived at periodic but unequal intervals, which meant that the duration of each world varied. Nor did it reach back to the past in order to repeat itself; each new creation began where the former left off, and founded itself on the experiences of former worlds (*Popol Vuh* 1985:64).

A cataclysm like the deluge would in this regard become one of the successive destructions of life on earth. The expressions "to clean" or "to wash" the earth, used by some of today's Nahuas when asked about the motives for the flood, can be seen in light of these sequential destructions and recreations. In our text, the statement "God saw it was not clean on earth" (lines 349-350) points to the same idea. The destructions do not connote a punitive action but a metaphorical cleansing of the world in order to make another one, like one clears away old items that are no longer of use to us. This cleaning takes place through water. Therefore, in the *Codex Vaticano A* (1996) it is Chalchiuhtlicue, the goddess of the fresh water resources, who unleashes the flood. Huastecan Nahuas of Veracruz have retained this idea when they say it is Apanchanej (Water Dweller, see Chapter 5), the Lady of the Water, who causes the flooding, following the orders of the first and foremost deity called Ompacatotiotzi (Gómez Martínez 1999:18).

The idea of cyclical endings and reestablishments of the world is mentioned in all Huastecan Nahua deluge versions except one, in which the narrator claims the world and its people were lost once every century (*Seis versiones* 1982:7-19). But one current description refers the present idea of a succession of five different worlds (Gómez Martínez 1999)[151]. Most

Nahuas in Hidalgo seem to be convinced that the world in which we live is the second one, the one that was created after the flood. Reduced from five to two epochs, the basic idea of a cyclical time process is not challenged. Water plays a purifying role in the process of the old order's cyclical destruction; it represents a destructive force which engenders the world's recreation. The destruction is not an expiatory washing of the earth, it is merely a phase in a cyclical process of different worlds shaped by the deities, whose decision to create a new world should not be questioned. This idea is paralleled in the text: after its recreation, God does not guarantee life on earth, and the new world may be wiped out again any time. The precolonial view of life's cyclical process is conserved in the contemporary tale.

Although the current lack of justification for the flood is due to Nahuas' cyclical world view, this gap can be filled in by the audience with any explanation they may wish to provide; the issue's openness leaves room for individual interpretations. If people today believe, indeed, that mankind was extinguished because of its morally abject behavior before the flood, then the lack of a corroborating explanation in the flood tale may be a sign of the narrative's slow adaptation to new circumstances. Whereas jokes and real-life anecdotes are highly flexible and easily adapted or created according to the most recent local developments, the flood tale belongs to a narrative category which is not so easily altered. In this case, we may expect an increasing, more explicit pervasion of this Christian idea in future performances.

The rescue in a craft

A similar trait in deluge tales from around the world is the warning of a coming flood and the succeeding building of a device that shall procure the events' positive outcome for the protagonist. In the Aztec tale, the deities pick out a couple who will outlive the deluge without explaining the criteria for this selection or the purpose of their survival. Most present-day Nahua tales omit these explanations as well. But in a few current versions, a clear-cut reason for the election can be found; these tend to copy the arguments mentioned in Genesis. Nahuas of the Huastecan part of the state of Puebla say God informed a man called Noah about the impending disaster (*Seis versiones* 1982:49-64). In a text from southern Veracruz –which does not belong to the Huasteca area--, God wants the people with a "good heart", meaning those who "obey him", to be saved. He warns them to get inside a craft and even closes the door himself after the people have entered (*Seis versiones* 1982:7-19). The craft's sealing in this last text coincides with the motif in the *Leyenda* version.

In the version presented, it is not certain whether God actually intended to save the peasant who survived. If the hare is indeed a messenger, then the peasant could have been chosen to survive. Other Huastecan Nahua tales about the flood can give us insight on this issue. In a version published by Stiles, the hare says God had been its informant on the coming event, thus he is acting as an intermediary between God and man (Stiles 1985:118). A second version corroborates the hare's mediatory role, when the hare gave the couple that was to survive "information concerning both the events and the decisions of the deities" (Gómez Martínez 1999:20). However, in the tale presented here no motive is given to confirm this idea and, as was already discussed above, the hare is associated with the moon rather than with God. Since both options are feasible, the narrator leaves the question open for more than one interpretation: was it a messenger and, as a consequence, the issue of the possible selection of the peasant. As was also the case when dealing with the flood's causes, this flexibility gives the audience the opportunity to understand this part of the text about the purpose of mankind's salvation in a way that best suits one's personal views.

The peasant of the tale survives in a wooden craft which is described as a *kuaakanoa*, a noun built from *kua-* (wooden), *atl* (water) and *kanoa* (canoe), meaning a wooden canoe (line 252ff.). This description fits its precolonial counterpart; its form and mode of construction are similar to those of a cypress that has been hollowed out. The description of a giant *batea*, the wooden receptacle put at the longer end of the grinding stone to collect corn dough, could also belong to the same concept (*Seis versiones*... 1982:55). Yet, the use of the terms canoe or *batea* is not representative in Nahua flood tales. Most accounts relate that the craft was a *kaxa* (box, from Spanish *caja*), *kuakaxa*, meaning a wooden box, or *kuakajo* (from Spanish *cajón*), a big wooden box (for example, *Amochtli* 2000; Barón 1994:129; Gómez Martínez 1999:19; *Seis versiones*... 1982:30; Taggart 1983:194). No further description is given about its size or form; however, the term *kaxa* or *kajo* is an exact translation of the Spanish *arca*, an ark. The portrayal closest to an ark's appearance comes from Maya (1979-80) and a narrator taped by Stiles (1985:111), who both speak about the craft as a *kuakali*, a wooden house. In a third appreciation, Castillo also uses the Nahuatl designation *kali*, a house, which at some point is translated into Spanish *caja-casa*, a box-house (Stiles, Maya and Castillo 1985:23)[152].

A noteworthy detail rises when the hare summons the peasant to build a canoe in which "all villagers" may enter. When fate is at stake, the same fortune befalls on the whole collective to which one pertains, so it is the entire village that shall profit from the peasant's efforts. In Huastecan Nahua society the local collective is important, it is the center of interaction, and all people of the community are saved in the craft. This way, the tale addresses

the *comunidad's* current values as the most significant social unit in society (see Chapter 1), in spite of the Aztec and Catholic predecessors in which only a couple or a family survives.

The smoke of the fire

When the smoke of the fire the peasant had made penetrates heaven, God discovers that some people have survived. The smoke must have emanated from a fire and only human beings could have lit it, so some of them must still be on earth. Yet, it is not so much the survival against God's will which angers Him, it is the offensive smell provoked by the cooking of the dead animals that arouses aversion: the stench disgusted God because it made Him "smell awful" (line 356). This reaction contrasts greatly with the Genesis tale, in which God is pleased by the survivors' efforts to give Him an offering as a way of showing their gratitude for having survived. In the Nahua tale, as in almost all other contemporary variants in Meso-America, the smoke and the fire are not meant to be an offering and are taken to be an offense against God, consisting precisely in making the world stink through the fire's smoke. The survivors were hindering God's plan to clean the world, for the stench and the smoke polluted it: "I smell it is not clean there on earth" (lines 349-350). The motif of the smoking sky is Aztec and is identically treated in both the Huastecan Nahua version and the *Leyenda,* in which the deities exclaim: "Gods, who's doing the burning? Who's smoking the skies?" (Bierhorst 1992b:143-145)[153]. The idea of defiling the sky is a severe offense which must be explained here.

A key for understanding the motif of the smoking sky is given in the *Leyenda* when it suggests that the smoke of the second fire, ignited by the deity Tezcatlipoca, finally made the world move and, thus, begin anew: "Now, it was in the year 2 Reed that the skies were [again] smoked. This is how we ourselves exist, how the fire drill ignited" (Bierhorst 1992b:143-145). A parallel to this event is the Aztec rite of the "new fire", celebrated at the beginning of each new fifty-two-year calendar cycle. During this rite, a priest lit a new fire that marked the beginning of a new era; its smoke went up to the four corners of the universe (see, for example, *Codex Borgia* 1993:46). Anders, Jansen and Reyes García (1993:241) remark that this ritual alludes to one in which the deities offered themselves by jumping into a bonfire and thus creating the sun and the moon; the fire ceremony is a remembrance of the beginning of time. Fire and smoke were thus related to time, an association that is paralleled by the way in which Xiuhtecuhtli, the fire deity, was conceived as the deity of the years as well.

In our tale, the smoking sky led to the beginning of a new era, a new creation, the movement of the skies and, therefore, time. The peasant's fire

had the same effect as the pre-Hispanic new fire that was ceremonially lit every fifty-two years. Both initiated a new time cycle. López Austin (1994:42) gives the following explanation of how this new cycle was started. The survivors had produced time by uniting two opposite forces when they started to cook the dead animals: the forces of the hot, dry, heavenly and vital (symbolized by fire) merged with the forces of the cold, humid, subterranean and death (symbolized by the fish lying scattered on earth). This union created smoke, and its circulation through the cosmos produced time. The world's origin begins when man starts to pollute it with the smoke from a fire.

After the generation of a new space, the world cannot exist without the course of time. Yet, it is appropriate that deities and not mortals decide the new creation's starting-point. The stinking smoke that defiles the sky not only pollutes, it also initiates the course of time without the deities' consent. Since man initiates time, man must be punished. In the *Leyenda*, the punishment is the survivors' transformation into dogs. Curiously, mankind's punishment is not at all mentioned in the Huastecan Nahua version, as we shall see further on. However, first it is necessary to go deeper into the details of why the survivors lit a fire at all.

The eating of the dead animals

Making a fire is an offense committed for nourishment purposes; the survivors were hungry and wanted to eat. In addition to smoking the sky, cooking and eating the dead animals aggravated the offense committed by the survivors and some of God's messengers, one more reason to be severely reprimanded. In the tale, punishments and rewards are bestowed on the angels who were sent as messengers to earth, and either did or did not consume the food offered by the survivors.

The motif of punishing and rewarding the angels does not seem to coincide with the Aztec tale. It cannot be found in the *Leyenda de los Soles*, in which one deity goes to earth, does not eat anything and punishes the survivors instead. The idea of sending out messengers might perhaps be inspired by the Biblical version in which Noah sends out animals to see if the earth is dry already, yet in Genesis none of these animals is punished or rewarded. Furthermore, this way of finding out what is happening on earth and the consequences this has on the intermediaries sent, can be found similarly in contemporary deluge stories from other indigenous peoples of Mexico, for example Quiché Mayas (Ek Chablé 1994:38), Mixes (*Seis versiones*... 1982:23-25), Purepechas (Carrasco, cited in Horcasitas 1988), Popolucas (Foster 1945:235-237), Tének (*Relatos huastecos* 1994, van 't Hooft and Cerda 2003:91-94), Totonacs (for example, Horcasitas 1962; Ichon 1990), and Tzeltales

(Slocum, cited in Horcasitas 1988): God sends his helpers to check who is defiling heaven or whether the earth is already dry, whereupon some fulfill their task and other do not. In all these tales God condemns and compensates the helpers in view of their merits. Again, the geographical dispersion of contemporary indigenous peoples who have represented the same idea, together with the lack of interaction among most of them, which dates from the Conquest, might point at an ancient antecedent.

In Don Pancho's tale, God sends three angels. Only the last angel informs Him about the situation on earth, which unmistakably denotes the number three as a task's completion. The first two angels stay and eat the dead meat that lies scattered around. God's punishment of the angels who ate the drowned animals, and the reward for the one who did not linger and immediately returned to heaven, refer to the failure or success of the task's accomplishment. The disobeying angels are condemned and the exemplary angel is compensated; this propagates the idea of obedience and submission to superiors as one of the accepted social standards. This idea is not new; Aztecs were highly respectful towards authorities (for example, seniors and elders or one's parents) and a refusal to comply with their requests was hardly conceivable. The elders' *huehuetlahtolli* or discourse (lit. "the ancient word" or "words of the elderly"), which is heard at each important celebration regarding the life cycle and is taught at the *calmecac* or Aztec school, constantly reminded people of "what is appropriate and righteous", that is, the proper way of social behavior. The first and primary obligation of this type was the respect and obedience towards authorities (León-Portilla 1993:234; 1997:55-56).

In the narrative presented here, the angels are physically changed into animals. Their aspect as angels is not described but it is certain they belonged to another category of beings before their transformation. In other Nahua versions of the tale, the messengers are already animals and God's judgment either condemns them to eat stinking meat for the rest of their lives, or rewards them so they can eat delicious food forever (see, for example, *Amochtli* 2000:178; Gómez Martínez 1999:21; Taggart 1983:194-197). In two Nahua versions (Taggart 1983:192-194; Barón Larios 1994:172-173) God sends both angels and animals, yet the punishment motif is handled in the same way. Through God's punishments, the ones who are angels are transformed into animals, and the diet of those that were already animals is explained. In Maya's version (1979-80), God sends six different bird messengers and all of them stay and eat. It will be the seventh emissary who reports back to God, which reminds us of the number seven's connotation with perfection and good fortune (see Chapter 1). In a distinct Nahua version, God sends a courier, Saint Lucy *(Seis versiones...* 1982:14). Saint Lucy was invited to join the survivors who were eating, and she stayed. Thereupon

God sends a goldfinch, which did accomplish its task. In one of Stiles's renditions (1985) God sends a vulture, a hare and a sparrow hawk, which all stay and eat on earth; the vulture ate carrion, the hare and the sparrow hawk ate worms. In all the above-mentioned renditions, God punishes the animals or angels that disobey Him. In Stiles's text (1985), God says the animals did not respect Him. In a tale published by Taggart (1983:192-194), God seems to punish the animals for lying to Him, as the vultures which come back to heaven allege they had not eaten anything on their trip to earth. In most versions, however, the failing missionaries do not go back to heaven and God condemns them in their absence[154].

If we take a look at the reason why the messengers do go back to heaven, more can be said about God's punishments. In one version, the vulture wants to return to heaven but cannot fly up anymore because it ate too much (*Seis versiones*... 1982:14). In the tale taped by Stiles, the first emissary cannot take off either, it is so full of meat (1985). The problem does not appear to be a voluntary disregard towards God, for the messengers try to fulfill their task. They simply cannot go back to heaven because their weight prevents them from flying. Campos (1993:222) concludes here that God punishes them for gluttony: excesses like these are not appreciated and place man in an animal condition. As a result, the emissaries lose their role as mediators between the celestial world and the earth. Yet, the second messenger sent by God in Stiles' text (1985) only ate a tiny worm and could not return to heaven either. One little worm can hardly be described as an excessive devouring of food, but the animal --a hare in this case-- is unable to return to heaven. The narrator in another Nahua version gives a reason for this:

> "God did not want them to eat those dead and drowned animals because they are animals that are already judged by God. That is why they are not good to eat anymore. God became angry because they ate the animals that were already killed by Him" (*Seis versiones*... 1982:16).

The narrator adds that it were not for having eaten dead animals, people today would be immortal. The flood tale thus marks the dividing line between two stages in mankind; one in which people were eternal --and, consequently, timeless--, and one in which humanity, by committing a serious fault, loses this privileged position and its stay on earth becomes transitory and ephemeral, that is, depending on time. The fault was to have eaten dead animals[155]. This argument is linked to one given in the flood's precolonial version. In the *Leyenda de los Soles*, eating dead animals on earth is associated with ancestors. The survivors and the messengers ate the fish into which all the people who had drowned had been transformed. In Popoluca (Foster 1945:239) and Tének (*Relatos huastecos* 1994:97; Alcorn 1984:60-61)

flood tales, this idea is preserved, and it is said that the people who drowned were turned into fish. The survivers perpetrate an act of cannibalism.

The act of cannibalism explains why God punishes the messengers, since they ate the meat as well. Even if it had only been a tiny worm, the messengers eat the fish or other animals that are scattered about. But because of the last angel, who did not eat the meat and flew instantly back to heaven, all messengers have to face their deed's consequences. The last angel or hummingbird is rewarded for the excellent fulfillment of its task and from that day on drinks only nectar. Using, once more, an olfactory metaphor, the "delicious" scent of nectar is opposed to the "not delicious" and "stinking" carrion, which accentuates the little bird's splendid compensation against the vulture's atrocious fate. The tale accounts for both the current privileges of the hummingbird, which seems to live a life of pure delight, and the present suffering of the vulture, which has to live on nature's wastes.

A detail worth noting in the eating of the dead animals is seeing the survivers cooking the meat before eating it. Lévi-Strauss already detailed the role that cooking plays as a mediatory activity indicating the transition from nature to culture (1992). Making a fire, the first cultural element which distinguishes mankind from animals, reestablishes culture while, on the contrary, God wanted to erase it (Ichon 1990:57-60). Whereas lighting a fire produces the beginning of time, roasting or cooking raw meat marks the beginning of a new mankind, one which was meant to start by judgment of the deities and not man. The ending of the Nahua flood tale is marked by death: the angels are transformed into birds of prey which, somehow, take care of the dead; eating the meat is associated with death since it is the dead animals' or dead ancestors's flesh. On the other hand, the flood tale's final episode marks a fresh beginning, one in which the current order is being established on the former world's ashes. The angels' punishment brings about the existence of some present-day animals. The survivors' acts lead to the beginning of a new era.

Postdiluvian life

Don Pancho's deluge version does not particularize the survivors' fate after they have landed back on earth. God punishes the angels who have eaten and could have done the same to the survivors, but the narrator does not elaborate on this point. Man's punishment is missing in two other Huastecan Nahua versions (Stiles 1985:117-118; van 't Hooft and Cerda 2003:95-99). Its absence in these tales is significant, for the issue of whether man is punished for making a fire, roasting and eating dead animals, and producing time is highly relevant; the human beings' persistence on earth depends on it.

In the Aztec deluge tale, the surviving couple was turned into dogs, an act which leads to the complete eradication of the previous human race. The better part of Huastecan Nahua tales includes the survivors' castigation; they are transformed into either monkeys or vultures, and mankind is extinguished entirely (see, for example, *Amochtli*… 2000; Barón Larios 1994:129-130,172-173; *Seis versiones*... 1982:12,16,31; Stiles 1978)[156]. In a version by Maya (1979-80), God turns all survivors into monkeys, except for a man who had hidden himself with his female dog; he is changed into a vulture. The vulture and the dog are transformed into a man and a woman and regenerate life. A different outcome consists in the drowning of all people (Taggart 1983:192-194), whereafter "father Noah came to be" (God created Noah after the flood). One villager confirmed this denouement by specifying that "everybody perished and God felt relieved again". He added that God then made Adam and Eve. In a Nahua version from southern Veracruz, God creates man anew from dirt, and blows life into his nose (Münch 1994:336-337). All the flood tale's distinct outcomes point to postdiluvian life as the scene of a new humanity. In the case where all antediluvian people die, God makes another generation of humans, which starts, for example, with Noah or Adam and Eve. When someone survives, this person is changed into an animal. At times, the animal is transformed into a human being again, but nevertheless belongs to a new race, a new creation.

There are but a few Nahua tales in which man survives the flood and repopulates the earth. In a Nahua text from the Huasteca (*Seis versiones*... 1982:49-64), the survivor is called Noah and makes no fire nor eats dead animals. He begins working on the land with the seeds he took with him in the ark, and God gave him his blessing. In a tale registered by Stiles (1985:112-113), the peasant and his family made a fire to cook tortillas --not meat or fish-- and were not punished. In a third tale (Taggart 1983:196), the man survives with his female dog, which is afterwards turned into a woman. This last description follows Huichol, Huave, Totonac, Mazatec and Zapotec deluge tales, among others (see, for example, Furst 1997; Ramírez 2000; Oropeza Castro 1947; Morales Fernández 1975), in which the dog-woman regenerates human life on earth after the deluge. In the Huasteca, the story of the dog-woman cooking daily for the peasant and ultimately being transformed into a woman is told as a separate tale.

Most Huastecan Nahuas believe the deluge extinguished all former human life, which is congruent with the notion that humans existing before the deluge were different from those living today. Some say antediluvian people did not eat corn (for there was no corn[157]) and remark that they were man-eaters and devoured their own children. Hernández Cuéllar (1982:44,52-53) informs that, formerly, people ate all kinds of uncooked

food and even ate each other, but as a consequence of the deluge all perished. The souls of those people who drowned stayed in hills, caves and crossroads; they are now entities responsible for all existence. They are called *ajakame* (lit. airs) and still like raw food, so people offer it to them. A few Nahuas in the Huasteca add that these people who lived before the deluge were physically the same as people nowadays, except for their neck, which had the form of a cow's neck --with superfluous flesh connecting the chin to the Adam's apple-- and their hands, which had membranes like those of a duck. In those times, not even God lived in His present form, but as a *pemuchkuauitl*, a *pemoch* tree. The tree spoke and said it was God, but the people cut it down after the flood, when Jesus was born. A third opinion is that the people before the flood were exactly the same as we are now and lived like us. They worked as peasants but were "bad persons", an idea that already popped up when discussing the causes of the flood. After the flood, God created a "good" humankind.

Though not overtly present in Don Pancho's tale, negative people, such as man-eaters or bad persons, draw an unequivocal demarcation between mankind's two eras. People now definitely do not behave like those of the past; consequently the two have to belong to distinct generations. Antediluvian people are in some way ancestors, for they are the ones who lived before those of today, but they belong to another creation, another era, and another world. The universal flood constitutes a manifest dividing-line that separates the two worlds and emphasizes the Nahuas' current features as persons with contrasting physical qualities, who cook their food, eat corn, and are good. Telling the tale reconstructs these features of present-day Nahuas and depicts the ideal human being as they want to see themselves.

Despite the separation between the two creations provided by the flood, the new world is somehow connected to the former, as the beings that were punished or rewarded (angels, animals and, at times, men) were present in both worlds. The former world is manifest in the form of some present-day animals: vultures, dogs, monkeys or hummingbirds. This phenomenon accounts for two ideas. The first is that the Nahua cyclical worldview is cumulative and is based on past experiences without constituting a completely new existence, an aspect that corresponds with precolonial thought. The second relates to the flood tales' consequences in the present: the events during the flood condition these animals' lives today and shape the Nahuas' existing relations with them.

Review of the flood tale

Taggart (1983:97) states that the power of displacement of Aztec motifs in indigenous oral traditon in Mexico is proportional to the degree of Hispanic

domination. If this is true, Huastecan Nahuas must have escaped Hispanic rule in a large measure, for the example of the flood tale examined here shows a wealth of precolonial motifs. The flood tale has not only greatly preserved the structure of its Aztec predecessor, it also incorporated into the tale Meso-American motifs that were not present in the Aztec version. This does not mean, however, that the Huasteca area did not undergo great changes over the centuries. Throughout time, disruptive forces caused by the introduction of cattle and the displacement of indigenous land in the sixteenth century, current problems like the low production in the fields, land invasions, and the arrival of protestant sects, all deeply altered the Huasteca's outlook. Nahuas have had to cope with non-indigenous political domination, religious imposition, different rules for economical exchange, and, more recently, migration[158]. All these changes resonate in their oral tradition and have produced adjustments in the existing material.

One of the major differences in the tale in relation to its precolonial antecedent is connected to the conception of postdiluvian life. The punishment that entails changing men into dogs, as stated in the *Leyenda* and other precolonial sources, is missing in almost all Nahua flood tales. Likewise, the notion that the dog is today's remnant of a former mankind or a predecessor of man is not present in today's Nahua society[159]. Most probably, Nahuas have been influenced by Catholicism on this point; Catholic priests must have repudiated the idea of dogs being formerly related to humankind and the union between man and dog to procreate humanity: the episode --in whatever form-- has been erased from present-day versions. This omission in current tales makes the issue of post-diluvian life in the tale ambiguous. Thus, the tale is ready to admit Mesoamerican interpretations of the flood marking the origin of a new mankind, and Christian ones in which the same humanity outlives the cataclysm.

Another omission in Don Pancho's version, this time derived from its precolonial antecedents, likewise provides a multivocal reading of the tale. Although the present lack of a justification for the flood is due to the Nahuas' cyclical worldview, the same gap can be filled in by the audience with any explanation they see fit to provide; the issue's open nature leaves room for individual interpretations. This way, the tale suits both Meso-American and Catholic outlooks. God's decision to send a flood or the reason to rescue some persons is at times seen from a more Meso-American perspective, as an event whose causes are not questioned; other times, it is understood under a more Christian perspective.

Through the comparison with the *Leyenda,* it could be stated that many ancient elements have been preserved in the present-day Huastecan Nahua flood tale. For example, the smoking skies and eating the meat are treated

structurally in the same manner in both tales. The fire and its smoke cause the beginning of time, just like the precolonial fire announced the beginning of a new time count. The food metaphor of the present-day text -- Christianized by naming angels as messengers-- follows the same reasoning as that of its predecessor; in both accounts the survivors committed a fault by eating meat which belonged to a previous creation.

Regardless of its closeness to the Aztec antecedent, the Huastecan Nahua flood tale expresses Christian traits as well, and many motifs have their parallel in the deluge version from Genesis. The middle nuclear part of the Nahua tale remarkably resembles the biblical version: it is, apparently, the same God, who sends a universal deluge --at times during forty days-- and only a few people escape this fate by building a wooden device, which flows on the floodwaters. This way, analogies like the purpose for making a device in which to outlive the cataclysm are found in both traditions. Some analogies, however, have been given either a more Catholic or a more Meso-American assessment. In contemporary Nahua tales, Catholic influences have superposed precolonial variants of the wooden craft in which the people were saved, and Noah's ark has become the model for describing its shape, either as a somewhat indefinite box or a wooden house. In this case, the craft's description has acquired a more Christian outlook. In others, the elements have been integrated from a Mesoamerican perspective, as for instance when the complete village boards the craft or when it is said that the canoe crashes into heaven.

Despite analogies and influences from the Genesis tale, the current Huastecan Nahua account is not a plain mixture of two traditions, Aztec and Christian; first, because some aspects of the tale seem quite new and cannot be linked to either of them. None of the predecessors names a peasant wanting to clear a field. The episodes concerning the hare --raising the field, going on the canoe, and, eventually, jumping on the moon-- do not coincide with the two other tales, except for the part in which someone admonishes the peasant about the impending flood and tells him to build a canoe. The episode in which God's messengers stay and eat on earth cannot be found in one of the previous versions either. As is understandable, the following punishment for the messengers is absent in Genesis and the *Leyenda* as well. Yet, all these episodes can be found in current Mesoamerican flood tales from other indigenous peoples, which have influenced the tale to some extent. This influence should not be underestimated, as it can clearly be derived from the events involving the hare, who plays such an important part in the current versions, that the tale is seen more as an etiological one that represents how the rodent got stuck on the moon than a universal flood tale. Though the hare's symbolic construction and its link to the moon are,

clearly, vivid remnants of precolonial thought today, the current tale's contents deviate strongly from the *Leyenda*'s plot.
Moreover, the condition of the Huastecan Nahua flood tale as a plain mixture has to be refuted since analogies with either the *Leyenda*, the Bible or both, cannot simply be traced back in order to point to its most probable antecedent. Motifs have been altered, their meaning has changed, and the tale handles new issues that are important in current society. When taking the flood tale that was presented as a reference, the interweaving of foreign elements into a primarily precolonial tale and the tale's constant adjustment in order to fit new local circumstances, seems to have been a fairly smooth process. The tale is perfectly well constructed and all elements seem to have found their place without clashing. The fact that the tale is still told among Huastecan Nahuas demonstrates the process' effectiveness and the flood tale's validity as a rich, homogeneous and meaningful story in this society. Even when broken up and told in parts, the tale addresses current opinions on its subject matter.

The flood tale places Huastecan Nahuas in today's world and reconstructs how they see themselves and their position as opposed to those of people before the flood. Essentially cosmogonic in its contents, the tale deals with fundamental questions like man's origin and purpose on earth and the beginning of a new order. These questions are dealt with without attaching explicit values to each of them; they are meant to be meaningful to a large segment of society. Thus, many people still hold the tale to be true; the tale has accordingly maintained its distinctive appreciation as such. Besides, the hare's silhouette "stuck to" the moon is seen every night to remind people of the cataclysmic deluge and the commencement of the existing order in which we live today.

Chapter 4
Differentiation in Huastecan Nahua society: the arrival of the water creatures

The thing I know is when it thunders, when it lightens,
that's when they say it's a huge snake
that is being transported from one sea to the other.
It passes over here. [...] I know it's huge. [...]
They say that when it falls the sea will come here.
But it's something like a legend.
That is to say, the snake's destiny is the sea.
If it doesn't reach the sea then the sea comes here.

One of the most popular Huastecan Nahua tales about water is on the coming of the water creatures that produce the floods. The events concerning these creatures are mostly considered genuine and are situated in a recent past. As said before, the rather open performance context of recent true tales allows people to talk freely about past events. Nahuas have heard these and other tales in many different circumstances. They distinguish tale types, know what the narrative scheme of their literary tradition is like, and are acquainted with its actors, events, themes and motifs. Furthermore, they are able to relate the tale's contents to the present socio-cultural situation and have no need to ask for many explanations in order to understand and interpret the tales. The frequent contact with tale telling helps them to memorize them and, if the situation presents itself, perform new tales that follow the narrative scheme, respect the long-standing actors, events, themes and motifs, and create meaning while narrating. When analyzing some of the manifold versions that are shaped by telling this tale, we can discern particular perceptions of the events dealt with; these are not the same for everybody. Their study provides insight into differentiation in society.

The multiple existing versions and the perceptions that spring from them illustrate how identity issues are reconstructed differently according to each narrator. In this chapter, these identity issues are associated to current outlooks on life concerning Nahua space, the dependence on a certain kind of rainwater, and the physical appearance and values of the entities that regulate the waters from the sky. By taking two versions on the same event, one narrated by Don Gregorio and the other by Don Pedro, two particular ways of performing and interpreting Huastecan Nahua oral tradition may be singled out.

A tale about a crayfish

During one of many conversations, Don Gregorio narrated one of the most dramatic events he said his grandparents had to confront several years ago in order to save their community from a disaster: the river crayfish's appearance. I had asked him to do so, since he lived near the place where the events had taken place, and thought his narrating skills would enable him to give a relatively rich account of the incident. He complied with my request, and agreed to tell about the day in which people of a neighboring community found an animal that is called *xili* in Nahuatl. Normally, a *xili* is an unharmful, little crustacean inhabiting the freshwater of the rivers in the Huasteca that serves as food. This particular *xili*, however, caused a sensation in the villages:

1	Tlapanki tlali	The earth was split	1
	mojmostla tetetstik[160] atl.	every day the water was turbid.	
	Nika nojkiya eltok	Here it was also like that	
	komo nepa tlakatijki nopa xili.	because the *xili* was born there [in a cave].	
5	Kena melaua tlalnamiki nopa xili.	It is true that the *xili* was clever.	5
	Dios kitlali para nika eltoskí tlajko tlali.	God put it here so that here would be the center of the earth.	
	Uan komo axkana kitokaro [161]	And because all this did not happen	
	kema tlatsilinki México para tonilis	when the bell tolled in Mexico, the next	
10	eltojka atl.	day the water was here already.	10
	Ya axkana	No	
	nochi molini ne tlali	everything moved on the earth	
	nochi molini ne tlali para axkana eliskí tlajko tlali.	everything moved so that it would be the center of the earth [since it was not there].	
15	Uan kema	And when	15
	uan kema tlapetlanki uan tlatomonki	and when it lightened and thundered	
	kalajki tlaltitla nopa xili.	the *xili* dug itself into the earth.	
	Yajki, asta mar kisato.	It left, it appeared as far as the sea.	

	Asta mar kisato.	It appeared as far as the sea.
20	Axuelki mokaua nika porke axkana nika tlajko tlali.	It could not stay here because here is not the center of the earth.
	Tlajko tlali elki México	The center of the earth was Mexico
	México tlajko tlali.	Mexico is the center of the earth.
	Ya nopa panok para nopa kuento.	That is what happened in this tale.
25	Uan noponi kiski.	And thus it turned out to be.
	Axkana elito porke noabuelo ijkí kiijtoyaya pues nika itsto.	It did not happen [this way] because my grandfather said this, as he was here.
	Kiajsiti sien años[162]	He reached the age of a hundred years
	sien años kiajsiti.	a hundred years old he came to be.
30	Tlen tonati tlakatki uajkaya tonati mijki.	The day he was born that date he died.
	Ipan viernes[163] tlajkotona tlakatijki uan viernes tlajkotona mijki.	One Friday in the afternoon he was born and Friday in the afternoon he died.
	Ya nopa kipouayaya nopa kuentos ke nopa kipouayaya kuentos noabuelo.	He told stories, my grandfather told stories.
35	Itoka Juan Hernández.	His name is Juan Hernández.
	Tlen ne saki inabuelo ya itoka Nicolás Martínez	The grandfather of the others is called Nicolás Martínez
	se viejito[164] tlen itstok noponi.	an old man who was here.
	Ya itoka Nicolás Martínez.	His name is Nicolás Martínez.
40	Uan san ome mokajke nikani.	And only the two of them stayed here.
	Ome viejitos para..., san ome.	Two old men..., only two.
	Tlen nika tlen tojuantin tlen nika tlanipeka	We here from below
	no se toabuelo	one was a grandfather
	uan tlen ne ajkopeka no se toabuelo.	and above there was a grandfather, too.
45	Yeka para axpoliui ni rancho.	That is why this rancho did not perish.
	Nama achi mas momiyakilijkeya.	By now we have become many.
	Itstoke miyake koneme.	There are a lot of children.
	Ya nopa.	That is it.
50	Tlen nepa nojkí kipí kuentos pampa uajkino elto telpokero[165].	Then he knew stories [the grandfather] since at that time I was a boy.
	Tlen ne noabuelo kiijto para san tonili	My grandfather said that at dawn
	kena uajkaya	indeed long ago
	nopa kema pejki uetsi atl, uetsi atl	it began to rain, to rain
	tlapetlani uan tlatomoni	it lightened and thundered
55	tlapetlani uan tlatomoni.	it lightened and thundered.
	Kema tonili mochijki atl[166]	When, the next day, water was made
	ueyi atl mochijki.	the sea was made.

	Nochi tlauelonki	Everything collapsed
	nochi kampa ne kuatlaixtli.	the whole hill-side.
60	Temok tlali	The earth came down
	ueyi tlali temok uan pejke momajmatiaj.	a big piece of earth came down and [the people] began to get frightened.
	Kiijtouaj noponi para tipoliuiseya[167].	Then they say that we would perish.
	Para axkana poliuise.	But they did not perish.
65	San nopa keuak nika monexti nopa xili	It is that here the *xili* appeared
	uan nepa no tlapanki tlali	and there where the earth was also split
	para kena nopa michi axkana piltsitsi	there was a fish, and not a little one
	uetski ueyi.	a big one fell.
	Axkana para michi	It was not a fish
70	kiijtouaj akouatl.	they say it was a water snake.
	Pero ueyi.	But it was big.
	Tlapanki tlali.	The earth was split.
	Nanayatla tekalika akouatl uetski.	The water snake fell beyond Nanayatla.
	Pejki miyak... uejueyi atl uan tlapanki	There began to be a lot... an enormous
75	nopa tlali.	amount of water and the earth was split.
	Mokauato puro sokiatl	Only the muddy water stayed
	momanato uajkatla.	it collected downhill.
	Pejki nemi	[The fish] began to move around
	pankisasneki pero axueli[168].	it wanted to come out but could not.
80	Pero tomauak kouatl	But the snake was thick
	ya kena kiijtouaj temo nopa atl	and they say that the water came down
	pero puro sokiatl	but only muddy water
	ualtemo tetetstik.	it came down turbid.
	Asta ateno onkisa.	It flowed into the river.
85	Nochipa puro tetetstik eltok	Always completely turbid it was
	eltok nochipa puro tetetstik.	it was always completely turbid.
	Uan teipa yajki	And then it went away
	pejke ualouij miyak... miyake atotome ualajke	there began to come a lot... a lot of water birds came
90	chipauake	white ones
	chipauak totot.	white birds.
	Miyake ualajke	A lot of them came
	motemaj pansokiatl	they sat on the muddy water
	kimauisoaj.	watching the spectacle.
95	Teipa motlalanki[169] ne tlen Santiago	Then [the village of] Santiago rose

	momatiltijke	[everybody] was told
	momatiltijtiyoui, momatiltijtiyoui.	they went around telling and telling.
	Pero tlake mochijtok?	But what was to be done?
	Mojmostla temo atl tetetstik.	Every day the water came down turbid.
100	Motlalanki Santiago uan Xochiatipan	Santiago and Xochiatipan rose 100
	Acomul, Xocotitla	Acomul, Xocotitla
	nochi ualajke kitlachilikoj kampa tepotskimitl tlapantok.	they all came to see where the earth was split.
105	Temotok tlapantok komo sien metros [170] temotok.	The ravine went down some hundred meters deep, it did. 105
	Uan aixkonemi nopa akouatl	And that water snake went around on top of the water
	aixkomokuetlantinemi[171] [...]	it was swimming around on top of the water [...].
110	Kejna ayi eltok ora para cholos[172].	It was not yet time to disappear. 110
	Teipa elki komo se metstli komo itstoya noponi, kiijto noabuelo.	Then, it was like a month it had been there, my grandfather said.
	Para se metstli miyake maseualme kimauisojke[173].	It was a month in which a lot of people came to watch it.
115	Nochipayok.	All the time. 115
	Kena ualajki se obispo	The bishop did come
	pero axkana Tulancingo.	but not from Tulancingo.
	Ualajki se obispo tlen Tamazunchale	A bishop came from Tamazunchale
	Tamazunchale.	Tamazunchale.
120	Ualajki nopa obispo	That bishop came 120
	nepa komo nika pejki itstinemi itstinemi.	there as well as here he began to go around, to go around.
	Uan uala kada se metstli	And every month he comes
	kada se metstli uala nika Xochiatipan	he comes every month here to Xochiatipan
125	komo eltok tiopamitl.	because that is where the church is. 125
	Uan asta nika mijki, kiijtouaj.	He even died here, they say.
	Mijki ya eltok ikuakakauayo nika Xochiatipan.	He died and his bones are here in Xochiatipan.
	Eltok ikuakakauayo, eltok.	His bones are there, there they are.
130	Nikitato kitlaltoke.	I went to see that they had placed them. 130
	Ya noponi kenouak kitiochiuako ne tlali para ma axkana achiyok ma temo.	He came to bless the land so that it would not come down anymore.
	Kena kichijki se bendición[174]	He indeed did a blessing
	bendición kichijki.	he blessed.
135	Uan ijkino uajki.	And thus it dried up [the water]. 135

	Nopa totome tlen nochi itstoya miyak nochi cholojke.	All the birds that had been there, they all disappeared.	
	Pero uejueyi itstoya totome.	They were enormous birds that were there.	
140	Yajke.	They left.	140
	Nopa kiniluiaj apatoxme.	They call them wild ducks.	
	Inijuanti nopa miyake itstoya.	A lot of them were there.	
	San tlapetlanki tonili axakak nopa kouatl.	It only lightened and the next day the water snake was not there [anymore].	
145	Nopa pejki tlaauetsi	It began to rain	145
	tlamixtenki uan noja pejki tlaauetsi uan tlatomoni uan tlapetlani.	it clouded over and began to rain and thunder and lighten.	
	Kien sabe kanika yato.	Who knows which way it went.	
	Yajki ipa mar.	It went to the sea.	
	Tel ya nopa mochijki.	And that is how it came about.	
150	Achtó tlen noponi kiski.	First the one who appeared here [the snake].	150
	Ya ome tlamantli mochijki	Two things occurred	
	ya ome tlamantli kiski	two things appeared	
	ya ome tlamantli.	two things [the snake and the *xil*].	
155	Kejnopa tlaelki.	Thus it happened.	155
	Tla axmochijtoski misa ya nochi ualtemostoski nopa tlachikili.	If the mass had not been held the whole hill would have come down.	
	Kejnopa uan nopa kaltitlamitl axonkaski.	There would not have been a village.	
	Noponi ueyi atl	A big water	
160	ueyi atemitl eltoski noponi	a big river would be here	160
	eltoski atl.	there would be water.	
	Ya komo cholojki nopa kouatl	But the snake disappeared	
	axkana para michi, kouatl, akouatl.	it was no fish, but a snake, a watersnake.	
	Ya nopa kipojki ne noabuelo.	That is what my grandfather told.	
165	Uajka na nitelpokero nielto.	I was a young man then.	165
	Uajka nomosiuajti	Later I got married	
	nika T.[175] elto.	It was here in T.	
	Ya nopa kena tlaelki.	That is what happened.	
	San kema.	A long time ago.	

Don Gregorio starts out by first giving a summary of the tale (lines 1-24). He then mentions his grandfather and another old man (*viejito*) as eye witnesses. Because the information he conveys was obtained first hand, the narrator gives credit to his source, which confers status to the version told and strengthens the authenticity of the facts described. Also, it gives the tale a

more personal quality (lines 25-50). After arguing about the tale's truth, the narrator begins his performance. While repeating the name of his reliable source (his grandfather), he reports the arrival of not one, but two aquatic beings that had come with the rain, thunder and lightning, each establishing itself in one particular village. Anticipating the coming events, Don Gregorio tells about the mud slides, the people's fright, and the event's happy ending (lines 56-64).

Don Gregorio identifies the creatures as a *xili* and a water snake and says that they wanted to inundate several communities and the cultivated land around them in order to make a sea (lines 51-73). He then mentions the restless nature of one of the creatures, the water snake, and describes the initial consequences due to its presence: great amounts of dirty, turbid waters were racing down the hill where it was found (lines 74-86). At this stage of the narration, the attention is diverted to the water snake and the *xili's* role seems to be forgotten (lines 87-115). Having been threatened twice, both by the water snake and the *xili*, the villagers of one of the communities under risk call on a priest for help (lines 116-132). The priest celebrates mass at the ravine where the water snake lives and sprinkles holy water there. As a result, the two aquatic beings flee to the sea in the same circumstances as they had come, that is, in a thunderstorm. It is said they enter the earth and disappear. As the two leave, it stops raining, the earth dries up and the population is saved (lines 133-148).

After this denouement, Don Gregorio summarizes the tale's content again, emphasizing the fact that in his view, one of the creatures was a water snake (lines 149-163). Emphasis is required because there is no agreement on the creature's precise shape; it may be either a woman, a mermaid or a fish. The story ends in a common way, insisting once more on the truthful content and referring again to the grandfather, who had witnessed the events and told them to the narrator when the latter was a little boy (lines 164-169).

A second tale about a crayfish

On another occasion, similar happenings were described in more or less the same narrative structure. Here Don Pedro gave his own version on the coming of two beings that threatened the people's life in the region. After he had given a spontaneous performance of the tale, I asked him to tell once more about the *xili* (see Chapter 2 for the recording context):

170	Nechyolmelajki nopa se ueue tlakatl tlen ne Acanoa eua.	I was told this by an old man who is from [the village of] Acanoa.	170
	Nechpouili se kuento tlen nechpaleuiko tlen nika naí.	He told me a tale, he who came to help me here.	

	Uan teipa, kiijto para nopa xili kiijto yajki	So, he said that the *xili*, said he, went as	
175	asta ne Acanoa axkana ne Xilico.	far as Acanoa, not to Xilico.	175
	Acanoa, noponi kiijto... kiski.	In Acanoa, there he said... did it appear.	
	Uan noponi keuak kiijto para... kitlachilito	And there, he said... [the *xili*] saw	
	noponi itstok se ameli	that there was a well	
	se ameli keuak noponi itstok.	a well was there.	
180	Teipa noponi	Then	180
	kiijtojke para...	they said that...	
	kichijke se junta ueuetlakame[176].	the elders held a meeting.	
	Teipa kiijtoke para axuelis ma kimijtika nopa xili.	They said then that they could not kill the *xili*.	
185	Nopa xili keuak kiijto[177], nopa atl keuak kichiua	The *xili*, he said, makes water	185
	atl kichiua tlen nopa Acanoa.	it makes water for Acanoa.	
	Teipa noponi kichijke junta.	Then they held a meeting.	
	Teipa axkana kimijtijke nopa xili.	So then they did not kill the *xili*.	
190	Teipa noponi kiitake pilkini	Then they saw that it was this small [the narrator indicates with his hand]	190
	kitlachilijke.	they gazed at it.	
	Teipa moskalti moskalti asta keja ueyi elito, kiijto.	Then it grew and grew, till it had become big, he said.	
195	Teipa keja noja sampayok keja kichijke junta.	Thus they held another meeting.	195
	Mokamouijke nochi ni vesinos uan ueue tlakame mokamouijke.	All the *vesinos* talked and the elders talked.	
	Teipa kichijke se tepamitl ijkini	Then they made a stone wall, like this	
200	se tepamitl tlaltetonili, keuak kichijke noponi	a stone wall, a dam [to contain the water] did they make there	200
	teipa noponi kampa keuak kinekiyaya ma axkana cholo	there, where they did not want the water to get away	
	nopa atl ma eltok	so that the water stays	
205	atl para nopa ranchome kininamiki para atl ma eltok tle ika ma tekipanose.	because it suits all the ranchos that there is water to sustain themselves with.	205
	Teipa noponi kichijke se tepamitl	So then they made the stone wall	
	komo se ijkini kichijke	like this [size] they made it	
	ueyi tepamitl ijkini kichijke.	a big stone wall like this they made.	
210	Teipa nochi sasampa vesinos keuak kichijke	Thus all the residents did	210
	uan tilauak ijkini kichijke	and they made it thick	
	komo se ijkini, tilauak.	like this thick [narrator indicates with his hand].	

215	Teipa noponi kitsakuilijki nopa atl.	So the water was retained.	215
	Noponi nemiyaya keuak nopa xili	There the *xili* went around	
	keuak pilkinintsi itsto, pero ueyi ueyi ueyi ueyi mochiua.	it was this small but it grew big, big, big, big.	
	Teipa asta ijkini mochiuato.	Then it grew till this [size].	
220	Teipa mas keuak kichiuilijke ilugar tlen yaí kampa ma itsto.	Then they made it a place where to be [live].	220
	Teipa nopa tepamitl molini achi ne tres metros	Then the stone wall was moved some three meters	
	keuak ma achi mas ueyi ma	that is they made it a little bigger for it	
225	kichiuilijke.	[the *xili*].	225
	Teipa noja tlachilijke para mas ueyi mochiua nopa atl no mosejkotilí	Then they saw that [the water] is increasing, the water assembles	
	axkana para kejna pano ijkini.	so that it does not flow over like this.	
	Teipa noponi noja mokamouijke nopa	Then the *vesinos* of Acanoa talked	
230	vesinos tlen ne Acanoa.	again.	230
	Teipa noponi keuak noja kichijke tepamitl	Then it seems they made another stone wall	
	seyok noja keuak se pamitl para ma itstos nopa xili... ma itstos.	another wall so that the *xili* might be there... might be there.	
235	Teipa noponi ya kitokaro ueyi keuak elito	There it befell on him to grow like this	235
	ika ijkini, keuak axoxouili, axoxouili elito[178].	and thus a pool, a pool resulted.	
	Teipa noponi mochiuato axoxouili	A big pool resulted there	
	ueyi komo ni iuajkatlajka mochijki	like this deep it resulted	
240	ne uajkatlajka ueyi axoxouili mochiuato.	the pool was made deep and large.	240
	Teipa, noponi itstok	So there it [the *xili*] is	
	kenouak nemi	it goes around like this	
	ijkini kenouak ueyi keuak mochiuato	thus it became big	
	komo se mapeli kenouak moskaltijti	like one *mapeli* [two arm-lengths] it is	
245	moskaltijti.	growing, it is growing.	245
	Teipa kiitake mas ueyi mochiuato.	Then they saw that it had become bigger.	
	Uan teipa nika nopa xili nepa moskaltik ne Acanoa ika ne inkalajkopa	And there in Acanoa, above the village, the *xili* grew	
	axkana para tlen nika Xilico, ya ne	not here in Xilico, but in Acanoa it	
250	Acanoa moskaltik.	grew.	250
	Teipa noponi, uan noja monexti nika ne tlapantok tlali kiiluiaj	Then again there appeared a ravine here, they say	
	ualajki se michi, se michi, se peskaro	and a fish came, a fish, a fish	
	para nojki	it too was only this small [narrator	
255	pilkinintsin.	indicates with his hand].	255
	Pero nojki moueyilti moueyilti.	But it also became bigger and bigger.	

	Tlen nepa tlapantok tlali tlen nika tlen ne se ueyi michi keuak mochiuato nojki.	There in the ravine a big fish came into being, too.
260	Ueyi tel ya ne kiijto, nepa tlapantok tlali	Big it was, he said, where the earth was split open
	uan noponi kejna tlen ni michi kichijki.	and there the fish was made.
	Teipa kiijtouaj kimakasiyaya, kimakasiya[ya], kimakasi.	Then, they say, they feared it, they feared it, they feared it.
	Ayok kimatij keneme kichiuase	They do not know what to do anymore
265	tlen nepa neski ya xili uan nika neski ya michi.	there appeared a *xili* and here appeared a fish.
	Uan teipa momajmatiya tlen nika uan tlen nepa.	And then those [people] here and those there became frightened.
	Keuak ta timakasis.	As you would be frightened.
270	San kentsi ompitla ayijtinemi uetsi atl	It only clouds over a little and it rains
	uetsi atl, ayojkema keuak tlatlanesiyaya.	it rains, it never cleared anymore.
	Nochipa uetsiyaya atl.	It always rained.
	Teipa, mokamouijke tlen nopa tekiuejke uan ueue tlakame mokamouijke.	Then, the authorities talked and the elders talked.
275	Teipa kinotske totajtsi	Then they called the priest
	totajtsi kinotske.	the priest they called.
	Teipa yajke komo nika ni Huejutla, komo nika axakak elto totajtsi.	Then they went afar because here in Huejutla, here there was no priest.
	Nopa obispo axakak.	There was no bishop.
280	Teipa yajke asta nepa Tulancingo.	They went as far as Tulancingo.
	Tulancingo nepa yajke para nepa kinotsato nopa totajtsi, para ma uala.	They went to Tulancingo to call on the priest there to come.
	Teipa ualajki.	Then he came.
285	Uan teipa kichiuako se misa, kenouak nepa tlapani	And then he held a mass up there at the ravine
	kichijki se misa.	he held a mass.
	Para uajka sejkanok eua ualayaya miyaki	Many people came from other places
	mosentilijtoke, nochipa ika tonati.	they gathered, always by day.
	Asta nika, kiijtouaj, motilinijke[179].	Up to here, they say, they queued up.
290	Uan asta nepa kenouak itstoke maseualme.	And till there [at the ravine] there were people.
	Ijkini ome pamitl[180] kenouak itstoke.	There were two queues of people.
	Uan nepa kichijki misa nopa totajtsi.	And the priest held mass there.
295	Kitlajtlani Toteko para ma kiniijkueni[181] tlen para michi	He asked God to take away the fish
	uan tlen nepa nopa xili ma kiijkueni.	and to take away the *xili* from there.

	Para kena kiijkueni.	And He did take them away.
	Para kenouak kichijki nopa misa.	So he [the priest] held that mass.
300	Nochi kenouak asta nika uan asta nepa kenouak kikajke misa	All the people here and there heard mass 300
	pero axnika, asta nepa tlapani.	yet not here but over there at the ravine.
	Ya nopa kenouak mochijke.	Thus was done.
305	Teipa nopa kichijki misa uan kitlaxtlauijke.	Then he [the priest] held mass and they [the people from the village] paid him. 305
	Ualajki nopa totajtsi asta Tulancingo, asta Pachuca achka kenouak.	The priest came from Tulancingo, that is, near Pachuca.
	Ya noponi kenouak ualajki nopa totajtsi.	From there came the priest.
310	Uan tikiluiaj totajtsi para nopa tikiluiaj para "padre", ya nopa kenouak tojuanti tikiluiaj totajtsi.	And we say "totajtsi" to whom we call priest, we call him "totajtsi". 310
	Ya nopa kichiuako misa.	He came to hold mass there.
	Tel teipa kichijki misa kampa ueli eua ualauij sasampa	And he held mass, everybody comes from everywhere
315	kenouak mosentilijke tlen nika sasampa.	from here they all gather. 315
	Kenouak kikajke nopa misa.	To hear that mass, that is.
	Bueno	Well then
	para kichijke misa tlaayitentok, kenouak, moijto, para nika, ayojkana san kineki.	when they held mass it was clouded, that is, say, at this place, not just because it did.
320	Tel teipa kiijtouaj para kichijke misa.	And then, they say, they held mass. 320
	Kenouak noja pejki uetsi atl	Again it began to rain
	uan tlatomoni uan tlapetlani.	and it lightened and thundered.
	Uajka nopa michi kiijkuenijke	Then they [the rain, lightning and thunder] took the fish away
325	pero ueyi michi kiijtouaj itsto	since there was a big fish, they say 325
	pero kenouak mokuetlanijtinemi, keuak ni kiijtouaj.	but [the fish] moves to and fro, thus they say.
	Kenouak atetetso	That is, it makes [the water] cloudy
	Atetetso kenouak.	it makes [the water] cloudy.
330	Ya nopa kenouak kisejkotiliskiya	They were going to gather [the water] 330
	tlen nika monexti nopa michi uan tlen ne Xilico... tlen ne Acanoa monexti nopa xili.	the fish that appeared here and the *xili* that appeared in Xilico... in Acanoa.
	Ya nopa kenouak kisejkotiliskiya nopa atl ualaskí para nepa ne Tampico	They were going to gather the water that [they wanted] to come from Tampico
335	ma ualaskí ne Tuxpan.	[and] to come from Tuxpan. 335
	Kenouak nika mosejkotiliskí nopa atl, nika eliskí ipa mar.	So here the water would gather so that here would be the sea.

	Axkana kenouak tojuanti tiitstoskiya nojkí	It is not that we would live as well
	nika eltoskí mar.	here would be the sea.
340	Ya nepa monexti michi	There appeared the fish 340
	uan nepa monexti xili.	and there the *xili* appeared.
	Para kenouak tikijtose kichijki nopa totajtsi para se nepaleuili...	The priest, so to say, did so in order to help...
	ne se bendición ika Toteko para ma	[he made] a plea to God to take it
345	kiijkueni	away 345
	ma yaui ika nepa mar	so that it would go to the sea
	porke nika tojuanti no tijnekij tiitstose.	because we also wanted to live here.
	Ya nopa kenouak kichijki.	That is what he did.
	Teipa ya noja kenouak kiijto uan	Thus he said and the promise was
350	kisenkajki nopa tlajtoli[182]	fulfilled. 350
	Teipa nopa	Then
	nepa nopa uetski atl, kiijtouaj, chikauak uetski.	it rained there, they say, it rained hard.
	Tlatomonki uan tlapetlanki.	It thundered and lightened.
355	Tlen nepa itsto michi.	The fish was there. 355
	Kiuikake[183] asta ipa mar.	They took it as far as the sea.
	Uan nepa itsto kenouak nopa xili nopa ne Acanoa	And [the creature] who was there, the *xili* from Acanoa that is
	axkana para tlen ne Xilitetsintla.	not over from Xilitetsintla.
360	Uajka ualajki noponi nopa xili komo temajmati[184]	So then the *xili* came and it was frightening 360
	ayojkana tikijtos yejyektsi.	you would not say that it was pretty.
	Kenouak se tepotskimitl kichijki kenouak kitektiyajki ijkini.	It made a rock, that is, it went cutting it like this.
365	Kichijki kanauak kichijtiyajki	It made, it went making thin slices 365
	kenouak kitektiyajki ijkini.	it went cutting like that.
	Maski tepotskimitl pero ya kitektiyajki kampa ya yajki para uetski atl.	Even if it was rock it went cutting it where it went, because it rained.
	Tlen nika michi kiijkuenijkeya uan ya no	They had already taken away the fish from
370	kiijkuenijkeya.	here and had taken away [the *xili*], too. 370
	Teipa kitektiya nopa tepotskimitl	So it goes cutting the rock
	yeka kenouak se kanoa kenouak kichijki.	that is why it made the form of a canoe.
	Yeka kiiluijke nepa Acanoa	That is why they call it Acanoa there
	Acanoa.	Acanoa.
375	Ya nopa xili kichijki nopa kanauajtik.	The *xili* made slices [in the rock]. 375
	Kenouak ijkini kitlali kenouak kampa kitektiyajki.	That is the way it left it where it went cutting.

	Pero tepotskimitl	But it was rock	
380	axkana komo tetl kenouak kitektiyajki.	not like stone that it went cutting.	380
	Uan yeka kiiluito Acanoa	That is why it became called Acanoa	
	para xili kichijki kanauajtik ueyi kenouak tlatejki.	because the *xili* made big slices, it cut it [the rock].	
385	Uajka ualajki noponi nopa inkalteno panok	Then it came, it passed by in front of their houses	385
	tlen tepotskimitl kitlamo	[the creature] that finished off the rock	
	uan nopa tepamitl kitlamo ueloni ijkini.	and it ended up knocking down the stone wall, like this.	
390	Axkana kipaleuijki maski kiijtoyaya nompa yaja noponi ma itsto.	[The stone wall] did not help, though they said that [the *xili*] would stay only there.	390
	Pero axkana, ya komo ueyi mochiuato.	But no [it did not], because it had grown [too] big.	
	Ya temajmati.	It was dangerous.	
395	Chi timoilui kiitas kejnii ni tepamitl.	You probably think that it was like this [size] the stone wall.	395
	Kiueloni kitejki, ma tlen asta nopa tepotskimitl	It knocked it down and cut it, including the rock	
	nochi kitejki.	it cut it all.	
	Kanauajtik kichijki, kiijtouaj	It made slices, they say	
400	uajkatla kejna kitejki.	it cut it below.	400
	Uan yeka kiiluito Acanoa tlen nepa Acanoa	And that is why they call it Acanoa there in Acanoa	
	komo nopa tlen xili kichijki kanauajtik ya nopa kenouak kichijtejki.	because the *xili* made slices, since it cut it that way.	
405	Tel teipa noponi ualajki nopa ne Acanoa, ne Zapote para Xilico.	And then it came from Acanoa and Zapote to Xilico.	405
	Uajka kiijtouaj motlaniketski para noponi, para kiijtouaj noponi.	They say it came down from there, they say.	
	Ayikineki yas tlen nika.	It did not want to go there anymore.	
410	Motlaniketski para yajki para Tuxpan, Tuxpan noponi.	It began to come down in order to go to Tuxpan, over to Tuxpan.	410
	Ajsito, uaktok kenouak nopa tlali, asta nepa Tuxpan kenouak komo tlalnamiki nopa xili.	It came, with the earth being dry, up to Tuxpan, since the *xili* is clever.	
415	Yato asta Tuxpan, yato ipa mar.	It went as far as Tuxpan, it went to the sea.	415
	Ya nopa kenouak kiijtouaj.	That is what they say.	
	Tuxpan kisato, kiijto[185].	He appeared in Tuxpan, he said.	
	Pero komo nama motlaltemijki kampa ijkato nopa teixtli[186]	But it is filled in with earth there where the rock stood	
420	kenouak nopa ijkini motlaltemijki	thus it was filled in with earth	420

komo uajkajki.	in time.
Yeka motlaltemijki.	That is why it is filled in with earth.

After the conventional opening in which he personalizes the events by saying that he heard the details from a man who had witnessed them himself (lines 170-179), Don Pedro states that, at first, all the village's authorities where the river crayfish emerged were happy with the animal's arrival. The villagers sensed they would benefit from its presence. The reason for their optimism is evident. The first mental connection Nahuas make when they think about a *xili* is promising: providing water for the people. It is said that the animal "opens the water", or "brings the water". The *xili*'s mouth emits a kind of foam that makes people believe it can produce water, so the community thought the animal's presence would secure their water supply. The crayfish was expected to make a pool or a spring with everlasting waters. This led the villagers to take good care of it, and, after a meeting in which the arrival was discussed, they built a place for it to stay (lines 180-221). The *xili* grew in its pool, and some time afterwards the people even had to relocate the dam they had constructed to create more space for it (lines 222-250).

Don Pedro changes the subject and introduces the second aquatic animal, a fish --Don Gregorio had classified it as a water snake-- which established itself in a ravine not far away. With two extraordinary beings in their surroundings, people started to worry about what the creatures were after. Their fear grew even stronger when they saw the huge dimensions both animals were acquiring. During this period, the climate suddenly began to change: it always rained and thundered, the villagers no longer saw the sun and the earth began to come down in mud slides provoked by the heavy rains (lines 251-272). The link between the extraordinary animals' presence and the ruinous weather was not difficult to make. People began to realize that neither the *xili* nor the fish wanted to establish a harmonious coexistence with humanity; rather, they wanted to turn the area into a sea. The continuous rains caused by the animals were endangering the villages' existence. Don Pedro turns to one of his listeners and says that the situation was really scary, "as you would be frightened" (line 269). This remark does not only include the listeners in the story, it makes them feel more involved; moreover, it breaks the story line, anticipating the announcement of an important aspect, and stirs the the attention of the audience.

As Nahuas usually do when a problem must be taken care of collectively, they called a new meeting. After discussing the turn of the situation, the villagers in the community where the fish lived decided that the best thing to do was to go and ask for the help of a priest. When the pastor arrived he said mass at the ravine where the fish was (lines 273-315); the results were successful, both the fish and the *xili* went away. In Don Pedro's rendering --

as in Don Gregorio's narration-- the aquatic species vanish in a thunderstorm (lines 316-329).

Don Pedro repeats how both animals became a threat to the residents, stressing the fact that they were making water to inundate the area. Consequently, all people living there would die (lines 330-341). Don Pedro also reiterates what the priest did to save the communities from being inundated, and says it was God who made the animals go away in a thunderstorm (lines 343-356). He then adds some details about how the *xili* left the pool where it had been. This episode stirs a great deal of interest, as can be seen from the numerous repetitions. At this point in the story, the narrator also discloses an etiological element; he mentions the origin of the name of one of the communities relative to the *xili's* actions (lines 357-417). Don Pedro ends his story saying there are almost no traces left of the events he has just presented, since, as time passed, the ravine where the fish lived slowly filled up with earth (lines 418-422).

Differentiation in Huastecan Nahua society

The two texts summarized above have the same argument, the appearance of two water creatures that inundate a particular living space. The tale's two representations show parallels and differences, which are meaningful when discussing differentiation in modern-day Huastecan Nahua society. Even though the two narrators are monolingual elderly males who both affirm the tale's truth value, they tell it from a distinct perspective, each stressing particular events and paying attention to different elements in their narration. When comparing the representation of these elements and events between the two texts, one finds divergent interests and attitudes towards the telling of the tale and its contents. Variation in the tales' representation and interpretation of different narrators reveal personal values ascribed to the tales. These values are related, for example, to the conceived identity of one of the water creatures, which is held to be a fish, a woman, a mermaid or a water snake. Each of these water creatures holds specific attributes, is linked to a specific spatial setting, and has a specific set of values attached to its appearance and acts.

After establishing the two narrators' personal approach and valuation in each text, the result shall be compared with Huastecan Nahua socio-cultural context in order to discuss associations and present ideas about the protagonists --the water creatures and their actions. The interpretation expressed in the tales, in terms of the specific values attached to each water creature, will be upheld comparing these values, which are also differentiated, and are expressed in socio-cultural life. This contextualization enables me to point out parallels and divergences between the oral presentations of the

norms and values, and the ones present in socio-cultural reality, which will show their interaction.

The narration about the *xili* is but one example of how tales interrelate with reality. Yet, its analysis does not only broach the theoretical issue of oral tradition and its relation to socio-cultural life, it also gives insight into the tale's subject matter. In broad terms, it can be said that this subject matter is the relation between Huastecan Nahuas and the water surrounding them. However, this interrelation's complexity is not fully displayed in the two versions I will analyze; they touch but a few aspects of this relation and the way it is valued. When dealing with the parts of the tales in which the flooding water creatures play a dominant role, the examination of a whole set of tales on the subject should provide a more complete picture of the values surrounding these creatures and the water world in Huastecan Nahua society. When necessary, these complementary tales are included to enrich the analysis.

Type of tale

The tale about the two water creatures inundating the land is very well known throughout the southern part of the Xochiatipan municipality; almost every person is acquainted with the events and is willing to share his vision on them. It is one of the most prevalent tales people come up with when they are asked to tell a tale. On many occasions, while chatting in somebody's house about the village's peculiarities, there was always somebody who would bring up the subject of the water creatures. The tale is, by far, the most illustrative example of a Huastecan Nahua true tale. Whatever the identity of the second water being is believed to be, all people are convinced of the truthfulness of the appearance, threat and departure of the two water creatures in former days.

The tale's two narrators, Don Gregorio and Don Pedro, are convinced too about the tale's true contents. During the performance, they both insist on the existence of eyewitnesses and the devastating consequences of their appearance had the mass not been held. Regarding the eyewitnesses, Don Gregorio says his own grandfather told him about the events; Don Pedro alleges an old man passed on the correct information. Sources like these are held to be reliable not only because of their presence on the scene but also because of their advanced age. Additional comments like "you would not say it was pretty" (line 362) or the descriptions "it was not a fish, but a snake, a water snake" (line 163) and "*se michi, se michi, se peskaro*" (line 253) --in the latter the narrator borrows the Spanish *pescado* (fish) to emphasize its animal shape and character-- connote belief. The narrators' wish to explain the

creatures' external details is because they want to convey truth to their rendering.

At the end of Don Gregorio's performance, the truth issue is taken up again when the grandfather's testimony is repeated (lines 164-165). Don Pedro does the same when he mentions that the ravine where the fish once lived has been reduced to a small hole (lines 418-422). The ravine's former existence is sufficient proof to make the listener aware of the fact that the tale has a historical foundation. It reveals once more that the tale must be situated in the past, for years have gone by. Besides, it shows that the incident was really exceptional since the gorge was even deeper before than it is now. Naming it while finishing the tale is another reminder of the story's genuineness.

Don Gregorio's and Don Pedro's texts intertwine two events, which might also have been told separately: at one particular place, a crayfish appears but is chased away; at another spot, a water snake or fish appears and is driven away. In fact, I have recorded multiple versions, in which only one of the two beings is the protagonist. People usually speak about the creature that was nearest to their homes and, accordingly, caused the most immediate peril. They do not often combine these events with the ones that occurred somewhere else. Don Gregorio was asked to tell only about the *xili* and Don Pedro narrated about the other water creature. Both, however, elaborated on the flooding produced by the two water beings, giving this additional information, which they provided voluntarily, a prominent place in the tale. Though this assimilation or processing of two true tales in one sole rendering is uncommon, the two renderings are the most extensive ones recorded on the theme of the water creatures, and thus most probably reveal a great number of details on Huastecan Nahua narrative.

The combination of two tales into one has consequences for the tale's structure. Don Gregorio's efforts to combine the two creatures and the threats they pose into one narrative is not without its flaws. It is said that both beings lived at about the same time in the municipality. At that moment, Don Gregorio observes a sequential order in which he discusses the life of both beings one after the other. At the beginning of his performance, he mentions the *xili's* appearance, but does not describe the succeeding events involving the animal. He then provides a full account on the water snake[187]. At the end, he repeats the *xili's* fate, saying that "two things" happened back then (line 81), a remark that is a valid conclusion for both animals, although the *xili* does not seem to have played a proper role as a protagonist. In turn, Don Pedro seems to incorporate both true tales creatively and without effort, maybe due to the fact that he says a personal eyewitness informed him about the *xili* in detail, and that he himself lives in

the village where the fish appeared. As the *xili* was growing near a village called Acanoa, a fish appeared in his own community (lines 123-125). The priest who went celebrated mass at the ravine where the fish had arrived, in an effort to make them go away (lines 149-152). The thunder and rains moved the fish and the *xili* simultaneously: "They took it [the fish] as far as the sea, together with the *xili*" (lines 174-175). Giving each creature its own role and story within the tale, Don Pedro's version of the events is a full and balanced rendering.

Whether told as one tale or separately in two accounts, the threats posed by the *xili* and the snake/fish constitute two of the most genuine perils of the past. Whole villages would have been swept away had the menace not been averted. The potential extermination of the locality is the most fundamental and dramatic of all events that took place recently; its permanence depended on the events' outcome. The fortunate ending secured Nahua life and is the present-day Nahuas' *raison d'être*. As a result, it is worthwhile telling and remembering.

Actors in the tale

The two tales do not deal with exactly the same actors, but some general remarks may be made about their role in both tales. Apart from the water creatures, the tales' main characters are the villagers, who are confronted with the problem of their locality's destruction. Their representation as a collective, discussing and solving problems together, is typical in this tale. The villagers have to cope with two adversaries, both water animals who flood the area. They seem to occupy places that do not pertain to them and cause distress in the villages. The water creatures' specific nature and actions shall be dealt with further on.

Another actor is embodied in the figure of a priest, who plays a crucial role in saving the people. The fact that Don Gregorio and Don Pedro agree that the priest is a bishop gives the tale more cachet, and underlines the gravity of the crisis. Of course, a bishop would not have taken the trouble to go to a place that was so insignificant and far away had it not been utterly necessary. The bishop's acts also stresses Christianity's role as an effective power and support during bad times: the villagers manage to survive the calamity through the mass' celebration and/or the sprinkling of holy water where one of the adversaries lives. This way, the priest offers a solution to the problem posed by both adversaries, and the couple is forced to abandon the area.

The secondary actors are the birds and people from other villages who come to watch the spectacle. Don Gregorio says the visitors came from several communities in the municipality (lines 100-103); Don Pedro confirms that

many people arrived from different places (lines 287-292; 312-315). Their role is meant to highlight the extraordinary events which were worth witnessing and telling, by exemplifying the anxiety and curiosity aroused in the whole area. Likewise, the enumeration of different villages registers, again, the focus on locality as one of Huastecan Nahua society's main nuclei. The thunder and lightning are secondary actors as they are responsible for the water beings' arrival and departure. The role of these phenomena in narrative and socio-cultural reality is essential for understanding the tale and shall be explained in this chapter.

Time aspects in the tale: temporal setting and story time

In the two texts, the emergence of the *xili* and the fish/snake is set in the more or less indefinite time of the elders. Don Gregorio's grandfather is said to have witnessed the events, as did the old man who informed Don Pedro. Besides the qualification of truth conveyed by the elders, their presence at the scene situates the tale in a recent past, in the time when the present-day grandfathers were young.

In this recent past, two events roughly coincide: two creatures appear at about the same time, they co-exist for a while and leave simultaneously. Don Gregorio makes it look as if both creatures appeared the same day (lines 65-70), and then informs us that the water snake was the first to arrive at the scene, and that the *xili* accompanied it shortly afterwards (lines 150-155). More than a precise indication of time or of the order of appearance, these statements' purpose is to specify the temporal coincidence of two water creatures with similar actions. Placing together two separate events in the same temporal setting makes the tale more impressive, for the threat becomes worse and attains not merely a local but a micro-regional character. The scope of the alarming situation has expanded; there are now two creatures to be countered with, and two villages in danger of extinction. The tale's outset is a true tale in which a serious problem must be faced.

After sketching the initial situation, the events' time sequence in a true tale is usually indicated by terms such as *uajka* (at that time), *kema* (when), *nama* (now), *uajkino* (thus), *noponi* (then), *teipa* (next), or *uan* (and), which show a relative time course. These references do not mark the incident's real time span nor indicate exactly how much time elapses between the episodes. Above all, they serve as links to further the tale's desired development, as it is the events' sequence within the story that it is important to describe and explain. That is, they address a chronological succession of acts whose importance and consequences are more relevant than their duration[188].

When stressing the importance of a particular action within the tale, the narrator may recur to a more precise statement in regard to temporal details. This is shown in the first tale, in a sentence Don Gregorio pronounces right after the customary indefinite time marker *san tonili* (one morning, at dawn line 51). Here, he suddenly is very precise in the temporal indication: due to the great amount of rain, the next day (*tonili*) a big water was made, the earth came down, and the people were afraid to die (lines 56-62). The virtual threat of an inundation calls for a narrative device emphasizing the event's relevance. A precise temporal statement that stands out among a great majority of relative time markers provides the required accentuation. It should be noted, however, that this device only works for experienced storytellers. Many narrators do not trust themselves and are not very outspoken about temporal aspects, because this would give their report a more authoritative outlook. Since the true tales's contents may be subject to the audience's criticism, narrators often choose to omit any distinctive and compromising details, such as precise temporal markers. A version concerning a personal eyewitness' report about one of the water creatures (van 't Hooft and Cerda 2003:164-167) is the only case in which several precise time indications are given[189].

Don Pedro recalls the *xili* arrived first and believes it had already been growing for a while in one of the communities before the fish came and also started to acquire big proportions. He emphasizes the growing process repeatedly, which connotes a lengthy duration. He says the *xili* "was this small but it grew big, big, big, big" (lines 217-218). The villagers rebuilt the dam they had constructed for the *xili* twice (lines 222-234); this work must have taken some time. As the crustacean went around, "it became big, like one *mapeli* it is growing, it is growing" (lines 243-245). At this point in the story, the fish has not even appeared yet. After its arrival, it had to grow big (lines 254-256) before the authorities took action and chased it away. The narrator integrates this arrival with the existence of the first water creature, when saying that "there appeared a *xili* and here appeared a fish. And then those [people] here and those there became frightened" (lines 265-268). Don Gregorio does not mention any growth process. The length of time in which one of the animals is in the ravine is expressed through a direct time marker: the water snake goes about for a month in the ravine before the bishop arrives (lines 111-114). The narrators' statements lead to the notion that both animals inhabited the region for a rather indefinite time period. They roamed about for a few weeks or months even and, as in one case, obtained extraordinary dimensions before they were removed. Don Pedro makes use of this time span proposing that the *xili's* growth process is a period in which the people gradually became aware of the danger the animal represented to their future existence. The longer this period lasted, the more perilous the situation became.

Following the rains (and, as Don Pedro says, the growth) in which the residents gradually began to recognize the scope of the problem, one of the villages asks a priest's help. Don Pedro enumerates the actions taken from this point on, in a series of short sentences with verbs related to decision-making and action ("they talked", "they called a priest", "he held a mass", lines 273-286), without ever referring to their duration, which suggests a swift and sensible handling of the situation in which one action follows another. The urgency of the situation called for immediate action. The community reunions in which possible solutions to the problem were discussed, the call of a priest, his subsequent assistance, and the beings' final disappearance, are occurrences that must have taken some time and effort. Again, the episode's actual duration is not the main issue; rather, emphasis is placed on the decisive and collective handling of the situation.

Don Gregorio mentions that the priest --or the bishop, in his version-- began to come every month (lines 123-125), and therefore, he refers to a process in which the priest had to bless the earth several times to finally make the water creatures go away. This process implies a time lapse and, correspondingly, a considerable effort, after which the situation comes back to normal. The mention of this rather long unsafe period is strengthened by the fact that the bishop wandered around for such a long time in the Xochiatipan municipality; it is said he died there (lines 126-129). His prolonged efforts accentuate, again, the extraordinary threat presented by the situation. It was not easy to avert the danger, and continuous efforts had to be made to reach a successful outcome.

After the priest's ultimate blessing, the water creatures went away, the water dried up and the birds that had come "to watch the spectacle" left too (lines 135-143). Don Gregorio says the water snake fled the day after the last blessing, accompanied by lightning and rains (lines 142-148), but does not elaborate on the time lapse of the other events. It might have taken a while for the earth to dry, but Don Gregorio only says it "dried up" (line 135), and does not denote the action's tempo. Nothing is said about the temporal aspects of the water birds' departure. Don Pedro does not disclose anything on these matters either. The water might have been drying up little by little during the months in which the bishop came, or it might have disappeared suddenly after the ecclesiastic's persistence for a whole month had led to a successful outcome. The water birds might have left instantaneously or not. The contrast between the lack of information in this respect and the elaborate time markers referring to the water creature's departure, discloses the latter event's importance. The villagers know their plea to God has been successful and that they are safe now.

A narrator can choose to omit words that convey information --concrete or vague-- about the tale's temporal aspects. This happens either because the events' precise succession is not considered a necessary element at that point in the story, or because its sequence is obvious to listeners and does not need any further explanation. The vague temporal markers employed in the two tales do not allow the calculation of a precise time span, but neither is this of interest to the narrators or their audience. What both narrators do want is to make sure that the threat's magnitude is recognized. The events' prolonged duration (expressed through the act of growing in the case of Don Pedro, and a repeated blessing of the earth in the text of Don Gregorio) contributes to a sense of the situation's genuine gravity, first as a period of literally increasing danger, then as a period of strenuous combat in order to survive.

Time aspects in the tale: the end of time

Misfortunes and menaces to the present order are more likely to be incorporated in oral traditions than events that did not shake up the world's course of action (Gossen 1974:83). After all, telling about critical situations is far more entertaining than remembering events that were not that distinctive. As their impact in the past conditions the present, the tales constructed around these critical situations are considered among the most relevant ones to be transmitted. This makes the *xili* tale a well-liked one for narrators to tell and for the public to listen to. The expected annihilation of the community --even though it was averted-- is a captivating plot arousing interest among the audience; at the same time it is transcendental enough to be worth remembering and telling. Narrators always stress this aspect so as to give their tale sufficient weight, as does Don Pedro during his account, when he says that the people would not live anymore because "the water would gather so that he would be the sea" (lines 336-339). Using the Spanish word *mar* (sea) and not the Nahuatl *ueyi atl* (lit. "big water"), which may mean both a river and a sea, Don Pedro emphasizes the calamity's dimension. Had the water creatures not been chased away, the result of their actions would have put and end to the Nahuas' life, which means time would have come to an end. Don Gregorio embraces this notion when saying that people thought they would perish (line 63).

An analogy with the deluge tale presents itself here; both tales deal with a destruction of (a part of) the world. In the case of the water creatures that bring on the floods, the events described deal with things that happen to a village, already established, which is accordingly located and named. To the audience, who are the residents of the villages involved, the threat's culmination would be as ruinous as a universal flood; it would also remove space or, more specifically, their living space.

The threat of a flood and its consequences, as described by the narrators, might not have been a one-time experience; no permanent solution is found when the animals are forced to flee. Parallel to the universal flood, in which God does not guarantee that a flood will never occur again, the water creatures could return any time and produce the flooding once again near a certain community. The possibility that they would do this is considered quite real, and people are aware that their community may have to confront a similar situation in the near future. In a society with a cyclical world-view, in which the world comes to an end one time and another, in a natural flow, without ever knowing when the next end will come, the termination of the existing time is always a realistic scenario to reckon with.

Space aspects in the tale

The water beings come to a place and cause an inundation that can be classified as a local catastrophe; it affects a village and, at times, some surrounding communities. In a lively conversation about the impact of a mermaid's appearance which also provoked floods in the area, two villagers confirm this idea:

> A: If at that time she would have made her house here we would not have lived here [...].
> B: The mermaid was going to make a sea here.
> A: A sea, a sea.
> B: A sea.
> A: From here till over there near Jojokapa [neighboring community in the state of Veracruz]. The whole area, all you see over there was going to be the sea.
> B: Now it's a pool.

Whereas usually a narrator refers to the affected area with vague expressions such as "those who live here" or "here would be the sea", which may be interpreted as a reference to the community where a water creature appeared, the comments in the citations above refer to a broader area involved in the events. The reference to a neighboring village implies the inundation of large extensions of cultivated land --if not villages-- belonging to several communities.

Yet, all tales are told from the viewpoint of only one community. The events affect first, the village and, consequently, the people living in it. The mention of other affected communities is not common, and the fact that the previous quotations refer to a broader nucleus may subscribe to the fact that the persons who made these comments live on a plateau that is not likely to be inundated, and only possess some plots of land below. The events' course on a local scale is typical in Huastecan Nahua oral tradition. Almost every village

in the municipality has its own water creature which formerly caused harm through excessive rainfall; in each of them, narrations about the village's survival can be heard. Protagonists in these true tales are *xili*s and snakes, or, more often, mermaids. The tales are familiar to people in more than one community, but the past events have a clearly delimited spatial setting and always deal with one particular village. Neighboring villages deal with these events as if they had nothing to do with it, even though they too might have been swept away by the floods elsewhere, at least according to the narrators. It can be affirmed that this kind of tales evolves around a local true tale.

Don Gregorio does not mention explicitly the places of arrival, but says that here (*nika*) appeared the *xili* and that there (*nepa*) a fish appeared (lines 65-66). The most probable location of "here" is a cave called Xilitetsintla ("the cave of the *xili*"). The cave is located off the road near Don Gregorio's community and most people regard it as the home of the crustacean. The cave has an entrance leading inwards, but no one dares to set foot in it. For centuries, the moisture has created stalactites and stalagmites inside the limestone cave. People say these are effigies of persons standing upright. There is no apparent sacredness about the place, for no one leaves offerings or performs curative rites inside the cave. Yet, above its entrance a little waterfall springs forth from the earth, and the place is always surrounded by fresh water.

Don Pedro's opinion about the *xili's* former whereabouts differs from Don Gregorio's. He repetitiously states that the animal emerged in a well in Acanoa, and that the people in that village took care of it (lines 174-176; 229-234; 247-250; 357-359). Acanoa is not a community near the Xilitetsintla cave. Don Pedro's information constitutes a discrepancy, for he is the only person who mentions Acanoa as the *xili*'s residence. Still, it is known that Don Pedro's informant is a man from Acanoa, so this irregularity can be easily explained. As most oral accounts situate the events in their own surroundings, it seems plausible that *vesinos* of Acanoa believe that is where the animal appeared. However, the presentation of this location in tales told by narrators who do not live in this particular village could be considered strange and not be quite accepted. Don Pedro is aware of this problem: he immediately denies the fact that the crustacean lived in the Xilico community near the cave of Xilitetsintla (although he refers once to Xilico as *nika*, here (line 249-250), while living in another village) and keeps insisting on this matter during his performance.

Concerning the snake, Don Gregorio said it had appeared "there" (line 66), indicating an undefined place away from his residence, meant to contrast with "here" (line 4; 6-7; 65) the place where the *xili* lived near his home. Further on, he makes a more specific declaration when he says the snake fell

beyond the neighboring village of Nanayatla (line 73), on the *tlachikili* (hill) (lines 156-157). Don Pedro does not mention any hill when referring to the second water creature and declares that a ravine came into being (lines 251-152). He repeats that the second being was made "there where the earth is split open" (line 259-261). Nevertheless, both men mention the same place as they narrate about this creature, a snake or a fish, which supposedly split the hill to make a ravine. All other accounts given in the surrounding communities about the snake/fish indicate the same hill as its host --simply calling it "the hill"-- so there seems to be no discrepancy on this point. The hill is located in the community, but is hard to reach because of its distance and height. In the only personal report recorded on this event, the narrator remembered how he, as a young man, had to crawl quite a stretch on his hands and knees in order to climb the steep slope to the place where the water creature lived (van 't Hooft and Cerda 2003:164).

The water creatures come to dwell in rather inappropriate living spaces, as these seem to contain little or no liquid. The ravine or hill is not an agreeable place for a fish or a water snake to be, there is no pool there. The *xili's* cave is not described, so it is not certain whether it was filled with water when the animal is said to have arrived. The well Don Pedro talks about looks like an adequate home for a water being, were it not for the *xili's* extraordinary size; because of it, the dam had to be relocated several times. The inappropriate living space is crucial for the tale's development, as they involve places on the boundaries between the Nahua sphere and the outer world. The hill is a non-cultivated area within the limits of the community, and the *xili's* cave is not only in the woods between two villages but also represents one of the openings in earth, leading to the water's outer worlds (*Apan*) and the dead (*Miktlan*). The well that currently exists inside the cave connects with Apan; the split in the hill establishes the same connection. Only when the water beings position themselves on the limits between the spaces do they become harmful to humans. Their arrival at these places triggers the tale, for it gives way to remarkable incidents that have such a great impact on society that they become worthy of telling over and over again.

An outsider can be found in the figure of the priest, whose residence is in the town of Tulancingo or Tamazunchale. The reference to these two places is quite rare in Huastecan Nahua oral tradition and also in every day speech. The symbolic relevance of these towns involvement is, therefore, not certain[190]. Perhaps their most salient trait is their remoteness from the place of action, which heightens the great efforts required to find a solution to the problem. Don Gregorio says the bishop came to the church in Xochiatipan after the people asked for his help (lines 124-125). Nowadays every village has its own church, but all are contemporary constructions and were built during the last six decades, when both ancient and new

communities started to construct their own local churches. Don Gregorio might have taken this detail into account when situating the monthly masses in the church of the municipality head (line 123). At one point, the bishop blessed the earth so the animals would leave. Although Don Gregorio does not say where or how the bishop gave the blessing, people know that this was performed at the ravine where the water snake lived. The priest had to go to the site so that his consecration could become effective. Don Pedro confirms that a blessing was given during a mass celebrated at the ravine, in which the people made a plea to God (lines 284-286; 293-304; 342-345). After holding the preparatory masses in the church of the municipality, the final piece in removing the water creatures was the celebration at the ravine in which –-people say-- holy water was sprinkled on the earth. Finally, and with the priest's help, the villagers managed to avert the threat.

Only when the *xili* and the fish/snake go back to their natural habitat, do the rains stop and the pools dry up. The population is saved when the spatial order is restored. Don Gregorio says the water snake went to the sea (line 148), but he does not tell us how. Don Pedro fills in this information; he says the thunder, lightning and rains took the fish and the *xili* to the sea (lines 321-324). Don Pedro remarks that the animals wanted to gather the water that was to come from Tuxpan (lines 330-335) and that the two animals disappeared and went to the same place (lines 410-411). Naturally, the Veracruzan port of Tuxpan is connected to the sea, but there are many ports on the Gulf Coast --like the town of Tampico that Don Pedro also mentions once. I do not know why the people of Xochiatipan specifically have this one as their reference. In distance, Tuxpan is the port nearest to municipality; it lies exactly to the east of it. Though nowadays, because of the highway connecting Huejutla to Tampico, the latter town is easier to reach than Tuxpan, in the past circumstances were the other way round. The reference to these ports is a general indication of the direction in which the sea is to be found, which is to the east.

Don Pedro discloses significant details about how the *xili* left the region. He said the animal used its pincers to cut through the rock of its dam, shaping a piece in the form of a canoe (lines 363-368; 371-383). Thereafter it walked from the communities of Acanoa and Zapote to Xilico (lines 405-406) and then disappeared. The traces left are still visible: if one goes from Acanoa to Xilico, the stony ground has marks in the form of a canoe. Don Pedro pays a lot of attention to this part of his tale, and his repetitions indicate he considers it to be a most substantial one. According to this argumentation, the tale explains the names of the villages of Acanoa ("water canoe") and Xilico ("place of the *xili*"). The toponym of Acanoa recalls the *xili's* tracks; they have the form of a canoe and were filled with water as the animal made them[191]. Xilico refers to the village located near where most people believe

the *xili* had its former residence. In fact, a majority agrees that the animal walked from the cave near Xilico to Acanoa and not in the opposite direction, as in Don Pedro's version. Whatever its route was, the incident of the crustacean is represented and remembered through the current denomination of the two villages, and the existence of some visible traces on the road between these two places. The mention of these events is another reminder of the tale's true character.

Meaning in Huastecan Nahua tales about the flooding water creatures

Students of oral traditions are not likely to be familiar with Huastecan Nahua tales about the flooding water creatures. Not many tales have been published and almost no research has been done to analyze these tales and throw light on certain issues addressed in the narrative (van 't Hooft 2001; van 't Hooft and Cerda 2003). Moreover, few contributions from other Nahua areas on this subject are known (for example, Campos 1993; de Pury-Toumi 1997; Taggart 1983). Despite this, the tales are very important to Huastecan Nahuas and, therefore, are currently being transmitted. The fieldwork material shows how different flooding water creatures are represented and valued according to their physical characteristics and acts. The fact that these representations and valuations do not completely cover the array of current ideas on celestial waters is partly addressed by a discussion of the role of the rain guardian, Saint John, and that of his helpers, in oral narrative. The discussion of the tales presented in this chapter brings in details that are relevant to understand the celestial waters' role in Huastecan Nahua narrative and that of the flooding water creatures.

Xilis in Huastecan Nahua oral tradition

The *xili* is a crayfish that lives in the rivers and springs and forms part of the Nahua diet. People see it as a rather foolish and dull animal. Its foolishness is shown by its submissive behavior. It is said a *xili* never tries to escape its waylayer, instead it swims right into its hands when someone tries to catch it. Because of this trait it is also called *burrito* (Spanish for "little donkey"). The usage of the diminutive expresses affection, which balances the negative characterization of foolishness ascribed to the beast of burden with which it is compared. At the same time, it refers to the crustacean's size in relation to a donkey, which is so much bigger. Some persons compare both animals in their narrations when commenting that the tale's *xili* had grown to the size of a real donkey.

Except for its protagonistic role in tales about the flooding water creatures, the appearance of a *xili* in Huastecan Nahua oral tradition is rather unusual. I have not heard tales featuring a *xili* other than versions of the accounts

narrated above. Though these versions differ with regard to the tale's location and other specific details, narrators always claim they are talking about one and the same event. Only on one other occasion does a *xili* play a part in a tale that appears to have a different plot (see Chapter 5). Despite its rare appearance as an actor in narrative, the tales in which crayfish play a part are considered highly relevant, and many positive characteristics are attributed to the animal; the most important one is its ability to make water.

In the versions presented here, it is not known how the *xili* reached the cave or its place near the village of Acanoa, or where it came from originally. Some accounts say it was born there, and did not appear anywhere else. Since this crustacean is found in rivers, the emergence or birth of a river crayfish in a cave is nothing unusual, particularly if there is water in the cave, nor is it peculiar if we are talking about a well near Acanoa. Yet, it was said that it was not clear whether the cave had water. It could well be the animal created a pool to create its own living space. Some persons say the *xili* made both the water and its living space, which would account for the cave's origin as well. These deeds distinguish the crayfish's extraordinary nature from the very first moment of its arrival.

The animal's extraordinary nature is also registered in Don Gregorio's first lines in which he characterizes the animal: "it is true that the *xili* was clever" (line 5). In contrast to the *xili's* normally dull character, this particular one was smart. The Nahuatl term *tlalnamiki* ("to reflect on something", -FK, today signifying "to be clever") does not necessarily imply the use of reason; animals in general can be typified as clever; they predict illness and death, rains, or other phenomena through a particular behaviour that man may interpret. The term's use in this context does not reveal any specific quality of the *xili*, yet, it connotes an undefined characteristic of the animal which makes it clever and rather special.

Due to the *xili's* positive features as a water maker, the villagers were very surprised by the course of its stay. Until they saw the creature grow to an enormous size, they had not understood they were not dealing with a benevolent being that would protect them from droughts, but with an anomalous animal whose purposes were unclear. Its anomaly distinguished it as a menacing animal, not a dull freshwater *xili*. In an attempt to describe the animal's dangerous attitude, Don Pedro's addition "you would not say it was pretty" (line 362), an understatement hinting at the *xili's* horrible physical aspect, portrays the critical situation from an aesthetic point of view. Referring, once more, to its size, this property is the *xili's* characteristic that alludes the most to the threat it represents. Its huge magnitude, together with the enormous amount of water it produced, provoke excessive rains and some perilous mud slides.

Only after the *xili* began to inundate the land did the people see their suspicions confirmed, and understood the threat it represented (line 360-361). Because of its size and the climate change it led to, they concluded it meant to harm them. Though none of the narrators elaborates on this point, a third element indicating its abnormal activity was, perhaps, the manner in which the animal created water. The tale's *xili* did not produce the water through its mouth, like crayfish usually do; instead, it brought rain.

As a water being that produces floods, the *xili* is related to Apan, the water realm. Its connection to rains, storms, lightning and thunder, mud slides, and turbid water is reaffirmed in every narrated version. As such, it represented a danger that had to be averted. Nevertheless, its visit did not have only negative traits. The cave where it lived now has a little waterfall, which is believed to have water permanently and lots of large freshwater *xili*s. The well near Acanoa is still a water place; the rocky soil in which traces of the *xili* are carved is always wet. Once the threat is over, the village is enriched with a new water supply.

Water snakes in Huastecan Nahua oral tradition

In Don Gregorio's version, one of the beings that wanted to inundate the villages is represented as a big (lines 67-71) and thick (line 80) water snake. Don Gregorio is not the only who believes this is what the water being looked like. Other persons confirm it was a snake, a big one. One rather short but complete and unequivocal account came from an adult man living in a neighboring village:

Se... istoria tlen uajkajki pejki tlen asta nosistat nechpouili se...	A... history that began long ago, which my grandfather told me...
nopa kouatl kena ualajki.	that snake [you mentioned] sure came.
X. uetski nopa kouatl.	The snake fell in X.
Uan nopa kouatl eliyaya UEYI KOUATL.	And the snake was a BIG SNAKE.
Uan... uan CHIKAUAK uetsiyaya atl uan miyakili miyak nopa atl.	And... and it rained VERY HARD and the water amassed much.
Uan teipa nopa kouatl	And then the snake
kimakasiyaya ayokinekiyaya kinechkauise maseualme.	they were afraid of it, the people didn't want to approach it anymore.
Teipa kinotske...	Then they called...
se totajtsi ualajki kiitako ya no kimajmati axkinejki kiachkauis.	a priest, he came to see it, [the snake] also frightened him, he didn't want to approach it.
Uan teipa san uajkatsi, kitiochijki nopa kouatl.	And then, from a distance, he blessed the snake.

Kiitako MIYAK atl eltok ijkí MIYAK.	He came to see that was A LOT of water, A LOT.
Uan teipa ya panuetsi aixko uan noja yaui tlatsintla.	And then [the snake] already floated on the water and goes under.
Mauilti	Playing
ken nopa nemi nopa kouatl komo miyak atl momanki.	thus the snake went about, since a lot of water had accumulated.
Teipa	So
uajka	then
nopa totajtsi kitiochijki.	the priest blessed it.
Sampa noja ualajki atl chikauak, tlatomonki uan	Once more the rain came very hard, it thundered and
tlapetlanki, tlatomoni uan pejki uetsi atl chikauak	lightened, it thundered and it began to rain very hard
sampa kitlananke noja uan kiuikake ijkí, nopa kouatl.	again they lifted it up[192], and thus they took it away, that snake.
Uajka noja nopa atl noja polijki noja tlen nopa mantoyaya.	So again the amassed water disappeared.

Although he copies the term his son used when indicating the tale type –the son had asked for the *historia* (true tale) of the snake-- the narrator makes comments of assessment when he refers to his grandfather and says "that snake sure came", which suggests he personally believes, both in the truth of the event and the identity of the water creature as a snake. The scene of the event is mentioned by name as a neighboring village; this places the tale in a local setting and gives it an additional sense of authenticity. The narrator stresses the snake's large proportions, the extraordinary rains and the great amount of water it produced, as well as the thunder and lightning that accompanied the water creature's withdrawal.

The connection between a snake and a flood is often made among Nahuas and other indigenous peoples in Mexico. In the state of San Luis Potosí, Huastecan Nahuas tell about a snake called Kuechkua that lives in a hill. It is not known where it came from. It is chained; if set free, the world would surely be flooded. In the state of Puebla, Nahuas tell a story about a seven-headed serpent flooding the land till lightning bolts chase it away (Taggart 1983:68-75). Tepehuas from adjacent Veracruz narrate about two snakes with golden heads that once burrowed into the earth, digging a pool, which almost led to the hill's collapse; a second Tepehua tale deals with a chained serpent that, after having been hit by the corn spirit, moves swiftly and, as a result, there is thunder and lightening, it becomes cloudy and a rain pours (Williams García 1972:92; 116). Otomí people from the same area call cyclones, metaphorically, "rains of a snake" (Galinier 1990:584). Among various Mayan peoples, big water snakes living in lakes, rivers, caves or

woods are associated with lightning, thunder, hurricanes and floods (Spiro 1987:24, 47-48, 68-70, ff.). These snakes cause cataclysms and mud slides, and when one appears near a community, its actions are usually destructive[193]. Don Gregorio seems to draw from an old Mesoamerican tradition that associates snakes to different manifestations of harmful waters, especially cloudbursts.

There are various details that enable the water snake's possible identification; the first appears when examining how the water creatures arrive. In Don Gregorio's account as well as in the last abstract reproduced above, the water snake dropped down from above; it came in "a great fall" (line 68)[194]. The use of this phrasing in relation to the snake leads to the animal's association with the sky. Although the noun *akouatl* (lit. "water snake", from *atl,* water, and *kouatl,* snake) usually indicates a common water snake, there exists one *akouatl* that is related to the sky; this specific *akouatl* is not an ordinary serpent but a giant one that, during the rainy season, travels on the clouds from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf Sea and back again. Villagers affirm the existence of this *akouatl*, also named *mixkouatl*, or cloud snake. Its task is to bring water from the sea to the sky so that it may rain.

While describing a second incident with the *akouatl*, the narrator of the last abstract reproduced above throws some light on its task:

Nelí[195], se uelta panok noja.	Really, on one occasion it passed again.
Kiijtouaj achi ayi mas uajka tlen ni noja tosistatua noja kiitake se uelta panok	They say that not long ago our grandfathers saw that on one occasion it passed again
pero UAJKAPA.	but HIGH.
Ijkí kema tlasouiteki ualajki CHIKAUAK nopa atl	Thus, when it lightened the rain came VERY HARD
tlemistentiualajki, ika ajakatl ualajki uan tlapetlani uan tlatomoni	it became overcast, [the snake] came with the wind, and it lightens and thunders
uan chikauak uetsi atl. Ijkí tsintlayouatiyajki, ijkí yajki nopa mixtli.	and rains very hard. Thus it became dark; thus that cloud went away.
Uan nopa kouatl, noponi kema tlapetlani uajka kitlauilí	And that snake, when it lightens there it illuminates [the snake]
nopa kouatl noponi yaui. Motlanana, yaui, kitlali ken nama mokuetlani yaui.	that snake goes there. It gets upright, it goes, and it is thought it goes undulating.

The water snake is an animal that belongs to the realms of both the sky and the sea. It moves through the celestial sphere --swaying on the clouds or, more precisely, metaphorically representing a heavy raincloud-- where it rouses all kinds of rains after emerging from the sea, which provides the water for it to perform its task. As it passes over, it rains, the crops are

nurtured and there is thunder and lightning. To Huastecan Nahuas, the two realms are connected and, at times, they are considered as one: the sky holds water that falls on earth in the form of rains; the sea functions like a container from which the sky absorbs the liquid[196]. One *vesino* explained it as follows:

> [The hurricane] must part from the sea in order to lift the water up, and it has to come with this water. Wind and water. [...] But there [in the sea] it lifts the water up, they [the *tlatomoniani,* those who make thunder] lift it up like this, they lift it up.

The serpent's figure in the sky, associated with rainclouds, sea water, and the beginning of the rainy season, is benevolent as long as it stays there. Usually, the *akouatl* carries out its role without any problems, yet, incidentally, the animal might happen to "fall from the clouds". When this occurs, it is said that the animal breaks the earth open. Don Gregorio's water snake did exactly this; through its crash on earth, it *made* the ravine where it fell down: "the earth was split" (lines 66, 72-75). The appearance of a ravine should perhaps not be that troublesome to people, were it not for another disturbance provoked by the fall. On earth, the *akouatl* surrounds itself with its customary elements: heavy rains and storms with thunder and lightning. The rains, evenly distributed and which produced fruitful harvests, become incessant, concentrating on one particular spot when the animal falls from the skies: a cloudburst. As one villager says:

> They say that when it falls the sea will come here. [...] That is to say, the snake's destiny is the sea. If it doesn't reach the sea then the sea comes here.

The snake's fall disturbs the spatial order, for the sky and sea waters, represented by the snake, eliminate part of the terrestrial space. In the tale, the water's accumulation in one single place marks a transition: the water ceases to be beneficial and becomes harmful; this is expressed here through heavy and persistent rains, --a temporal element. Furthermore, the snake brings abou muddy, turbid water currents that run down the hill. It is said the snake provoked the turbid streams: "the water was spattering and filthy, because the snake stirred it". Splashing about in the pool, the snake moved the water with its tail, tossing it out of the pool and making it flow over. The water, now threatening, acquires a distinct value and becomes a turbid, invading stream.

People fear the *akouatl* because of its potential to produce floods. Yet, they know that if it falls on the earth, they should not kill it, for it is believed that the guardian spirits (see Chapter 5) will destroy the harvest of the person who does so. Today, when it rains hard and continuously, Huastecan Nahuas

say they are afraid the *akouatl* will fall. Were this really to happen, it would be very difficult to restore the original situation. Only a storm will pick up the snake again and take it to sea.

Water snakes usually have negative characteristics in Nahua narrative, not only as creatures that bring floods with them. Nahuas from a village in the Sierra de Puebla recite a tradition about a huge snake which lived in the locality's only pool. If the people did not offer a Christian to it every day, the reptile would come out of its pool and devour all the village's inhabitants (de Pury-Toumi 1997:98). A similar motive was recorded in the Nahua town of Mecayapan in Veracruz. In one of a tale's episodes, a seven-headed snake would emerge from the lagoon where it lived to devour people in a nearby village. Thereupon, the authorities decided that one household would have to leave offerings to the beast every day so it would stop coming out of the water. If a family was too poor to give food, it was obliged to offer one of its children to the snake (Campos 1993:116-117).

The devouring of people relates to the end of humankind, as it imperils human existence. Likewise, Don Gregorio's water snake and its companions provoked a disaster that was threatening human survival, at least on a local level. Yet, as was also the case with the *xili*, the results of their visit were not merely adverse:

> They were afraid of [the snake], but at that time the *rancho* was not big. It was a little hamlet, it was not big. So you know the custom they have [in the neighboring village] that they say God [can do anything]. They begged God that the snake might go away and it did go away, they say. But the water stayed. It stayed, and it did not dry up, till today it remains. There was no water before. The snake fell, the water snake, and from there it made a spring, they say. That is to say, today it's a simple spring providing for, perhaps, the whole village. That's what they told me.

After the water creatures have left the area, their former living places turn into springs with everlasting waters. The snake's acts created the spring, attracted rains and left water for the people's benefit. Despite fear and jeopardy, the events' outcome saves the village and provides it with a permanent water supply.

Fish in Huastecan Nahua oral tradition

As mentioned before, narrators diverge about the shape of the water creature on the hill. Don Pedro believes it was a fish but does not elaborate on the specific species. A few narrators seem to agree with him and also call it a *michi*, a fish (for example, van 't Hooft and Cerda 2003:164-167). The

Nahuatl term *michi* is very broad. For Huastecan Nahuas, fish can have different forms; they catalogue all aquatic species as "fish". For example, crustaceans are categorized as fish (Hernández Cuéllar 1982:24), and Don Gregorio uses the generic term when he says that the animal was a fish (line 67) before he specifies that the animal was not a fish species within this category of fish, but a water snake (lines 69-70). The broad category of fish makes it difficult to identify the species Don Pedro is dealing with, especially because he does not elaborate on its physical aspects other than by indicating its big dimensions. Don Pedro could have imagined the water creature was any kind of aquatic species, for example a fish of extraordinary size or, perhaps, a crustacean or a water snake[197] --the broad category of fish permits all these interpretations.

Most people, however, catalogue the fish-like water creature as a mermaid. A woman tells about the events as follows:

Achtó eltó se atl	At first there was a water
se ueyi atl eltó.	a big water there was.
Uan teipa itstó se michi itoka Sirena	And then there was a fish called mermaid
tlajko michi, uan tlajko siuatl.	half fish, and half woman.
Teipa ualajki totajtsi	Then came the priest
tiochijki para ma yaui sejkanok nopa atl uan nopa Sirena.	he blessed [the place] so that the water and the mermaid would go away.
Nojkí itstok noponi seyajtok tetetstik nopa atl eltok para itstok	It is still continuously rough there where the water was.
Kichijki misa, yajki sejkanok.	He celebrated Mass, [the mermaid] went away.
Pero nama nopa tlali ueyi tlapantok uajkapa.	But now that earth is greatly split, up high.
Pero nama ayakak ne michi, yajki pero nompa tlali ayikana uajkapa tlapantok	But now the fish is not there anymore, it went away but the land is not split greatly anymore
san piltsiltsi.	only very little.

In a concise summary of the incident and keeping to what is strictly essential, the woman addresses the water creature with the Spanish word for mermaid, *sirena*, while she could have used the Nahuatl term *siuamichi* (fishwoman, lit. "woman fish"). The Nahuatl term is ambiguous, however, for it refers to both mermaids and female fish. Nowadays, the Spanish "sirena" is more often heard than its Nahuatl synonym, but both are fully understood by people in the area. The Nahuatl word for mermaid is significant, for it classifies the mermaid as belonging to the fish category. The narrator preserves this connotation and also refers to the creature as a fish ("a fish

called mermaid"), applying the generic term "fish" to define a species she identifies as a mermaid. By using the term fish, Huastecan Nahuas also denote that a mermaid is conceived as an animal, and not so much an exceptional human being or a fairy.

In another account, this time by an elderly man, the notion of a mermaid as, above all, a fish is ascertained:

Pejki uetsi atl uajkajkí komo itstó san kema	It began to rain, long ago, like never before
uetsiyaya atl, nochipa uetsi atl.	it rained, it always rained.
Uan kiitake	And [the villagers] saw
kema kipixke tonati se naui tonal pejki uetsi atl chikauak ne tlachikili nochi motlali ayaktli. Uan kiitake nepa uala atl, temo	four days after it had begun to rain hard, that the hill was wholly surrounded by mist. And from there they saw that the water is coming, coming down
tlaueloni	it exceeds its bounds
ualtemo atl	the water is coming down
axkisa atl komo kipixki komo se semana uetsiyaya atl	the water does not go away as it rained for about one week
nochipa.	all the time.
Uan kiitake ualo atl ualtemo	And they saw the water is coming, coming down
uan yajke nepa kitlachilito miyak atl elki komo tlapanki tlali ijkini	and they went there [upon the hill] and saw see that there was much water, the earth was as if split open
ne tlali tlapanki ueyi mochijki.	the land had split open wide.
Teipa	Then
kiijtouaj ualajki se michi ueyi.	they say a big fish came.
Mokajki se michi ueyi nepa itstó, komo se siuatl	A big fish stayed, it was over there, like a woman
komo se sirena, (se sirena).	like a mermaid, (a mermaid).
Kipiya itsonkal... ueueyak itsonkal, (ueueyak). Nopa youi atsintla kalaki, teipa pankisa, ijkini yaui, aixko youi uajkapa, ijkini nemi.	It[199] has hair... long hair, (long). There it goes, it submerges, then comes up on the water, thus it goes, it goes high on the water, thus it goes about.
Pero kipí, komo sirena, kipiya itsonkal ueueyak komo se ichpokatl, ijkini.	But it has, as mermaids do, it has long hair like a girl, like this [narrator indicates the length with his hands].
Itlakayo ijkini, kiijtoyaya, para... maseuali, ichpokatl, pero nika itsinkechtla michi	Its body, they said, is like that of.. a person, a girl, but from the waist [down] a fish
ya nopa eltó	that is was it was
uajkajki.	long ago.

Uan teipa kimakaske tlen nika itstoke.	And then those who live here were afraid of it.
Kimakaske, moiluia, poliuise para tla itstos nopa michi, mochiuas ueyi atl nikani, motekas[198] uan nika titlamij, kipolos.	They were afraid, it is said, to perish because with the fish once established a big water would be made here, it [the fish] would settle and here we end, [the land] would go under.
Teipa kinotske nopa totajsi.	Then they called the priest.
Kichijki misa	He held Mass
cholo	it went away
uajka mojkueni[200], kiijtouaj	then it left, they say
mojkueni uan kiski atl. Kiski atl kema kitlachilito. Noja ayiakak	it left and left the water. It left the water when they went to see it. It was not there
cholojki.	it had gone away.
Uan ayiuetski atl.	And it did not rain anymore.
Uajki nopa atl	The water dried up
ya nopa kichijki.	that is what happened.
Uajkajki.	Long ago.
San ya nopa.	That's all.

The species is first specified as a fish, then as a mermaid. As shown in the tale above, Huastecan Nahua narrative supplies physical attributes to the mermaid in accordance with occidental imagery as conceived from the Middle Ages onward, in which she is represented as a long-haired creature, occasionally blond, half fish and half woman (see Lao 1995). The upper half of her body is often perceived as that of a beautiful, young, and light-skinned woman or girl. Her eye-color, associated with the sea or with water in general, is green or blue. In one account cited below, the idea of a rather occidental mermaid combing her hair is reiterated. The frequent representation of mermaids in Huastecan Nahua oral tradition could be inspired by European traditions in which this character plays a role (Flores Farfán 1997). On the other hand, there might have been a pre-colonial concept about water creatures with human aspects (Báez-Jorge 1992), which has acquired more European attributes[201].

A hybrid combining human and animal features, the anomalous mermaid is associated with qualities relevant to society, which makes her apt to play a significant role in narrative (cf. Munn 1984; Burkhart 1986). Her activity centers on Apan, the water world, and the sea is believed to be her living space. The tales in which her actions provoke disasters talk about the mermaid leaving her home, the marine world, in order to establish herself in springs or ravines from where she causes floods or hurricanes[202]. Similar to the water snake, she splits the earth open, moves her tail and makes turbid

waters overflow their bounds. In like manner, the floods she produces will turn the land into sea. There is, however, at least one meaningful difference between the two creatures: creating sea on land, the mermaid deliberately performs her task. She is not the helpless *akouatl* falling out of the sky without meaning to, but rather, she chooses to leave the sea and establish herself at the border of the human space. A villager put the mermaid's objective into the following words:

> Only sea, truly. And we would not have been here. Because the mermaid, why would you believe that there is going to be just a river [*laughter*], or a stream. The mermaid lives in the sea.

Up to a point, the tales about the water snake and the mermaid are analogous, and the tales about the mermaid that floods the land could well have been tales about the *akouatl*. Both animals are said to have arrived in a rainstorm at the same place, the ravine near one of the villages. Both created this ravine by splitting the earth. Both put the villages' lives in danger by causing a flood. When they were chased away, they fled in the same way, accompanied or taken away by rains, thunder and lightning. Both are related to landslides, floods, rains, storms, lightning and thunder. The tales' structure is the same, the spatial and temporal setting is identical, the acts are quite alike. The difference lies in the identity of the creature causing distress; the water snake and the mermaid are two distinct beings with distinct values attached to them. This distinction demonstrates different local and personal interpretations of the events.

A young, adult man from one of the villages narrated a story about a woman called mermaid. She lived in a river near a village in the municipality of Ilamatlán, Veracruz. This village borders on the narrator's home.

> There is her house. It's a very beautiful place, it has arches and small windows, but you can't pass because it's surrounded by the river, it lies in the center. And [the water] is very deep, that's why the water is black.
> Some people passed by as they wanted to see the mermaid. At times, the mermaid came out of the river and one could see how she combed her hair. She was very pretty, with long hair and white [skin]. Below her waist she was fish, above woman, but when she noticed that they were looking at her she startled and went into the water.
> She chose to live there and built her house. As she stayed there and lived there, the river began to rise more and more. If it would have risen like that, the river would have turned into a sea. Had that happened, all the people of the communities below would have drowned. That's why they began to frighten her a lot because the river was going to rise, so they shoot rockets near to her house. She

> startled and threw herself into the water, she went away, swimming to Poza Rica[203]. After she had left, the water began to subside.
> She went to Poza Rica, but one day the mermaid has to return because she will remember she has her house here. The inhabitants are afraid that, when she comes back, the river will start rising and converts into a sea.
> The woman is the guardian of the fish.

The mermaid lived in a pretty house in the center of a deep river, where she chose to live instead of the sea, but her proximity had a negative effect on the human space, producing a rising river which threatened human existence. At the end of the comment, the notion of the mermaid as the water's guardian is stated. This guardian role is a common concept, and is fulfilled by humanlike creatures that are conceived as anomalous fish, mermaid-like creatures, or beings with a human physique who live in the water and care for all aquatic life (see Chapter 5). In daily talk, the mermaid's positive role as a guardian is more often stressed than her negative qualities:

> The mermaid, as [it] is called, is that what guards... that the river is guarded. It is what the river knows.

Using the Spanish *mantener* (to sustain, to keep, here translated as "to guard"), the mermaid's role as the water's keeper is emphasized. Due to this constructive feature, in the communities the mermaid is associated with positive values; she is praised as something extraordinary, something beautiful. It is said she represents the perfect union between man and animal, combining the finest of man with the best of the aquatic species. Since the mermaid is partly fish, she often acquires one of fish's main characteristics; she is innocuous. Paradoxical as it may seem, it is said she is not suited to create havoc. She does destroy, but she does so to make more water. Her first aim is not to dissolve the land or drown people but to make water. In sum, the mermaid has good, joyful qualities. Naturally, the villagers who had to defend themselves against the mermaid might interpret these qualities differently. Even though they know her aim is to make water, her actions were destructive and threatened the space where they lived.

Just like the other water creatures that provoked floods, the mermaid leaves a permanent water reservoir after parting. The splitting up of the hill created a place to hold water and is now filled with the liquid:

> [The place] has a, how do we say it, a cliff or a hill. Like that. And at night [the mermaid] dug like this, and left a cavity. [...] Yes, because [the mermaid] stayed for a while. And then left.[...] Ah, of course it was deep and till today it is deep.

The crayfish, the water snake and the fish/mermaid

In the versions presented above, the creatures that flooded the land were a fish, mermaid or a water snake in the ravine, and a *xili* in the cave of Xilitetsintla or in the village of Acanoa. All three creatures are associated with the sea and their appearance on land brings water in abundance. Opinions on the crustacean are not divided, and in all versions the narrators confirm the animal is a *xili*. The animal in the ravine is seen either as a water snake falling from the sky on its way to the ocean to bring rain, or as a fish/mermaid extending Apan, the water realm. The villagers who had to deal directly with this creature all agree it was a fish or a mermaid; in the surrounding communities, people allege it was an *akouatl* or water snake.

Both the mermaid and the water snake are conceptually related to water in a positive way. From the sea, the mermaid regulates aquatic life; from the sky, the *akouatl* gathers the waters. Their tasks are beneficial to people. Though they use the Spanish term *sirena,* which could lead to a more occidental view of the water creature, the villagers that claim the water creature is a mermaid can hardly be declared less traditional than the people who say it was a water snake. The concept of the mermaid has Mesoamerican traits that are represented in her behavior as a protector of sea life and provider of fish and crustaceans to man (see Chapter 5). Her destructive behavior recalls the Mesoamerican duality principle which attributes an inherent positive and negative side to all living beings. It is not clear why the people of one village believe the animal was a mermaid, whereas the inhabitants of other villages say it was a water snake. The two creatures are both related to water and floods when they leave their home, but are not viewed as the same entity. Whereas the water snake is mostly associated with the rain clouds that bring the first rains of the season, the mermaid is, in the first place, a protector of water on earth and sea, a well as of the life it contains. The water snake, mermaid and *xili* are conceived as guardians of rain, sea and freshwater, respectively. Their positive features are unmistakably present in various comments that say the places where they lived or passed are today permanent springs.

The *xili* has two characteristics in common with the fish and the water snake: its size and its actions; with the mermaid it shares her destructive conduct[204]. Unlike the *akouatl* and the mermaid, *xili*s are not automatically linked to inundations or a change in their habitat. The *xili* belongs to the water world called Apan, but is not easily identified as an anomalous being that floods the land. The water snake falling out of the sky and the mermaid coming out of the sea have a destructive character when taken out of their natural domain; the spatial alteration makes people realize they mean harm. The *xili*, in turn, seems to inhabit its own space in the well inside the cave. Its presence in freshwater is nothing unusual though its size is. Its

exceptional proportions turn it into an animal whose habitat must be the sea. The *xili* thus lives in an inadequate place as well, and its presence causes floods. Likewise, its water production, which used to be beneficial, turns destructive.

Extraordinary creatures have to be countered with extraordinary tools, and the priest's holy water was an effective way to eliminate the danger. The mass at the ravine was an act seeking divine intervention so the animals would return to their own space. Their disappearance amid rainstorms, thunder and lightning underlines, again, their aquatic habitat. Don Pedro's remark that the animals disappeared after it started getting cloudy, "not just because it did" (lines 318-319), suggests that the weather did not change naturally but for some specific reason. It reveals a positive valuation of these phenomena as a kind of aid to the people's subsistence. The water creatures always disappear in a thunderstorm accompanied by thunder and lightning. Even Don Pedro, who says God removed the animals, refers later on in his tale to the thunder and lightning that achieved the same end. One narrator said that that it had been the *auetsiltiani*, the water makers, who had taken away the animals while "it was flashing a lot" (van 't Hooft and Cerda 2003:166). The water makers come to the people's aid to secure their subsistence. Sent by God, as Don Pedro says, or operating on their own as the above cited quotation refers, they ensure human existence. The role of the water makers, the thunder and the lightning shall be discussed below.

All water creatures have one crucial trait in common: they cause a local flooding that would annihilate the land and the people living on it. This way, the tale expresses the harm that can be caused by an extreme abundance of water and, correspondingly, asserts the need of and dependence on a regular amount of water, distributed over periodic intervals, in order to enjoy fertile fields and enable subsistence. The happy outcome leads to the disappearance of those who brought about the havoc, and ends with an amount of liquid that is favorable to the villages. Today's permanent springs not only provide proof of the facts told, but the amount of water available is exactly the one required to be beneficial, that is, not too scarce and not too abundant.

Another relevant feature about the water creatures' arrival concerns the *xili*. In the introduction to his narration, Don Gregorio explained that God had particular reasons for the *xili* to make water: to make the region become "the center of the earth" (lines 6-7). In Don Gregorio's eyes, the Xilitetstintla cave would have become the center of the universe had the crustacean not been driven away (lines 8-14). It is not exceptional to conceive the home village and surroundings as the earth's center, and the tale gives information on certain cosmological principles in Huastecan Nahua society that are worth discussing. In the tale about the *xili*, however, these principles are but

vaguely present. They can be better explained through the revision of a later account, in which Don Gregorio expressed his view as follows:

Ueyi atl porke kichijki nopa *antiguamente* elki	A big water was made, that's what happened formerly
antiguamente neski para ne Xilitetsintla porke eliskiya...	formerly it was born for Xilitetsintla because there would be...
Monexti se maseuali, uala tlen antigua.	A man appeared, he came from the old days.
Kichiuaski nikani se tiopamitl ueyi	He would be the one to build a big church here
uan kichiuaski para nikani monextis se akamaya ueyi tlen ni iixnamik tlen ni tlaltipakti.	and he would make that here would appear a big shrimp that would join him on this earth.
Ya nopa eliski motlamiltiski nopa tiopamitl nopa uan eliski ueyi atl	That's how it would be, the church would be finished and there would be a big water
ueyi atl para nikani eliski komo Tuxpan, Tuxpan	a big water would be here, like the one in Tuxpan, Tuxpan
kampa eliskiya nopa istatl.	where salt would be produced.
Nika eliskiya istatl.	Salt would be produced here.
Uan eltoski para siempre.	And [the salt] would be here forever.
Ya kichiuaski nopa xili, ueyi xili.	That's what the *xili* would do, the big *xili.*
Ya nopa kichiuaski uan kichijki nopa teixtli ueyi.	That's what it would do and it made a high cliff.
Uan noponi kema kikajki tlatsilinki Mexiko para ya tlanki tiopamitl.	And then it heard bells in Mexico because the church was finished.
Uan kiski[205] nopa asteka.	And the Aztec left.
Kiski, yajki ika Ilamatlan.	He left, he went to Ilamatlán.
Neka yajki para kiijtouaj para yeka nikani.	Over there he went, that's why they say that he was here indeed.
Uan ijkino kiski nopa xili.	And thus the *xili* left.
Yajki para ne Tuxpan.	It went to Tuxpan.
Kien sabe kanika yato	Who knows which way it went
kampa eli istatl.	where salt is produced
Nika eliyaya eliski tlatlajko tlen ni México.	Here would be, would be the center of Mexico.
Nikani eliski istatl.	Here would be salt.
Kiijtouayaya, pero antiguatl	They said so, but formerly
antiguatl, axkana namanok.	formerly, not now.
Uan kema ya nopa mochijki itoka elki Xiltetsintla.	And when this was done, its name became Xilitetsintla.

In this abstract, the *xili* is represented as the helper or companion of a man who is called an Aztec. The time indicated --the two operated *antiguamente*, formerly-- refers to a remote past which contrasts with the more recent past, the more usual context of the tales about the *xili*, and is probably due to the theme of the establishment of Mexico's center dealt with in this account. The Aztec forbearer and the *xili* were going to prepare the site so that it would become the center of the earth. In this preparation, the Aztec had to build a church and the crustacean had to produce salt by making a sea.

The Aztec's figure is not very clear to me. Huastecan Nahuas do not always distinguish Aztecs as their direct forebearers, and they mostly ignore historical facts like the nahuatization of the southern part of the Huasteca area following its occupation by Aztec soldiers. I know of no oral tales from this area in which Aztecs play a part. Yet, of all the people who lived in Mexico in pre-colonial times, they are the best known. As a character, the Aztec might have been used as a time reference rather than a genealogical allusion; he is used to stress that the event took place formerly, *antiguamente*. His role as builder of a church represents the foreseen role of the locality as a religious center.

The *xili* makes salt, a primordial element in life. In pre-colonial and colonial days, salt was sold in the Huasteca, and was then taken to the center. Salt represents the sea, and the *xili* would make water or sea, and the salt produced would be a permanent supply for the people. The place then becomes important, since control of salt production in the area would produce riches (see also Chapter 5). In addition to salt, the *xili* makes water; people believe it would make a well or a lake with permanent water, so that there would be salt. Water is, of course, indispensable to any social unit; therefore, a permanent water supply --and everything that goes with it, the fish and other life-- would make it an extraordinary place to live in. Thus, the *xili* would create a kind of well of sustenance, giving people water, salt, and all kinds of food. Moreover, the crayfish made a big cliff. With its digging, the *xili* literally created the earth. By producing salt, water and earth, the animal provides everything necessary for a prosperous life.

The place where the *xili* appeared would be the center of the earth, it would be the most important place of all. All riches would be concentrated here, and the religious center would be established at the same spot. Yet, Don Gregorio says the *xili* could not stay because his village and the neighboring communities in the Xochiatipan municipality do not really represent the earth's center (lines 20-21). He knows that Mexico City lies in the center of the earth (lines 22-23), so the *xili* was forced to leave. Though the crustacean leaves behind a permanent well that provides water and aquatic riches to the

people, the people's dream that it will become the most important place on earth is shattered after the animal is chased away.

In Don Gregorio's second account about the *xili*, the animal is a symbolic representation that signals the spot where a unique site was chosen to be created. In his narration, the crustacean is a kind of omen regarding the center's foundation, which reminds us of the foundation of Tenochtitlan. The latter was conceived as a site pointed out by the deities: there would be an eagle on a cactus, at times devouring a serpent. According to the official late pre-colonial Nahuas' world-view, Tenochtitlan --now Mexico City -- was indeed the center of the world. The city was built on a tiny island in a big lake in Mexico's central valley, and was thus encircled by water. These natural surroundings were related to a particular cosmological vision with a strong relation between a center and the water.

In today's Huastecan Nahua communities, tales are told in which a village claims to have been chosen as the place of foundation --the eagle referred to came to the community and sat on a cactus. Unfortunately, something or someone --usually a careless woman-- chased the animal away, forcing it to abandon the place and go to the area which is now Mexico City: the momentous opportunity of becoming the center of the earth was missed (see Lomnitz-Adler 1992:47-55). Like the tales told today about the eagle that came to the villages but then left, Don Gregorio's second account about the *xili* presents his *komunidad's* potential prosperity, one that could not be materialized. Similarly, it links Mexico City's current political and economical domination to the center, and sees his subordinate community in the Huasteca as peripheral. Because he had a different reason for telling his first version on the *xili's* appearance, his second account articulates more explicitly the villages' marginal situation today, in relation to Mexico City's central position and the desire to change this situation.

Saint John the Baptist

To complete the tales' interpretation about the water creatures that produced the floods, it is useful to reflect on Saint John the Baptist's role in narrative and socio-cultural thought. San Juantsi, his mixed Spanish-Nahuatl name, is also associated to rains, thunder and lightning and, therefore, to these water creatures. Saint John's figure in Huastecan Nahua society is a remarkable example of how indigenous societies incorporated Catholic symbols in the native religious system without altering the core of their pre-colonial view of the world. Due to his Saint's day on the 24th of June, Saint John became associated to the summer solstice and the beginning of the rainy season. His vocation as a baptizer transformed him, giving him a new role as the one

who brings water, immersing the land in rains the way a priest immerses a child to baptize him in holy water.

Huastecan Nahua tales about Saint John portray him as a spirit of thunder and lightning; it is said he produces all kinds of rain: *San Juantsi auetsilti*, Saint John makes it rain. These rains range from drizzles to hurricanes, yet the saint is associated more with rainstorms accompanied by lightning and thunder. Weather phenomena such as abundant rains, lightning and thunderstorms seem to be Saint John's specialty. Related to the rains' cycle, it is believed that Saint John sends big clouds to earth, which lift up the waters from the lagoons and the sea. The heavy clouds then rise again and drop the waters above the fields. Saint John's task can be discerned through the rains, and it can be heard through the loud thunder announcing these rains. During the rainy season, the saying "*San Juantsi mototomotsa*", Saint John is moving, is frequently heard, which means that it thunders and rains hard[206].

Saint John is helped by little, humanlike figures with the height of gnomes or dwarfs. They are the *auetsiltiani,* "those who make it rain", referred to above, and recall the pre-colonial *tlaloque* who lived in high mountains and were the dwarf-like attendants or helpers of Tlaloc, the rain deity. According to pre-colonial belief, the clouds emanated from within these mountains, and were then lifted up to drop the rain. The rain was thus made inside the mountain and from there, the *tlaloque* assisted the rain deity. Today's *auetsiltiani* are said to reside in the hills as well.

Saint John thus operates both in the sky and at the borders of Nahua space, especially in the hills. He has no fixed residence. Spatial references have him living in the sky from where he sends rains to earth (Hernández Cuéllar 1982:82). Yet, Saint John is also identified with the sea and is called Lord of the Sea. Huastecan Nahuas from Veracruz affirm he lives in the middle of the sea (Sandstrom 1991:249). Since it is believed the sea and the sky are joined at the horizon, the two spheres are seen as belonging to the same realm and Saint John presides over it. At the same time, it is said that the saint lives in the sacred hills.

Barón Larios states that, today, the elderly people ascribe more functions to Saint John than the younger ones. The elders say he is the world's creator; this positions him as one of the most important figures in religious thought. They see Saint John as an impetuous personage as well as a lazybones and a drunkard, traits he shared with Tlaloc. Saint John's whimsical nature, expressed through an ever unpredictable rainfall, recalls the dual character of pre-colonial deities. Because of his temperament, people do not remind him of his Patron Saint day on the 24th of June. They know his desire to celebrate this day will provoke thunder and rainfall so heavy, that these will inundate

the land and all shall perish (for example, Barón Larios 1994:63; Ortigosa Téllez, cited in de Pury-Toumi 1997:181; Taggart 1983:212)[207]. Fortunately, Saint John is easily fooled, since "he cannot read or write and does not have much knowledge"; it is commonly accepted he is not that smart. Always ready to party, he constantly asks if it is already his Saint's day, so everybody tells him the date is still far away. After the 24th of June, people tell the saint that they have forgotten to inform him about the celebration. By doing so, they prevent a disastrous flood and save themselves from extinction. Their action cuts both ways, since in reaction for not having been notified, Saint John will get so angry that he will start beating --thundering?-- which makes it rain (Romualdo Hernández 1982:147-148)[208]. But since he is such an important saint, a few communities organize a celebration on Saint John's day, even if the saint himself is not invited[209].

Saint John as the granter of corn

The rains sent to procure good harvests position Saint John in the role of benefactor. This role is substantiated, as people consider him to be the granter of corn. Though he did not invent corn --its origin is attributed to Chikomexochitl-- he is the medium through which people gained access to this grain. Just as rain is needed to make corn grow, Saint John plays a crucial role when he makes corn available to humankind and allows it to grow outside the hill where it was stored. His figure as the one who brings rains and corn is fundamental in a peasant community, and the large number of tales about Saint John, as well as the recurrent narration of them, vouch for his prominent position in Huastecan Nahua thought.

In a tale told by an elderly man, Saint John is praised as the heroic granter of corn. The narrator told the tale upon request; he was asked to tell about the origin of this staple crop. As always when telling a true tale, this time about the remote past, the narrator began by trying to remember the actual circumstances. When he began talking, it was obvious that he was still thinking about the details of what had occurred. His style is not that of an experienced storyteller who narrates in an elaborate, descriptive manner, rather, he is an informer, more matter of fact. His report has relevant information about Huastecan Nahua world-view and the role that Saint John plays in it.

Chicón ikatlatsintla	Chicón downward
Chicón ikatlatsintla	Chicón downward
axnijmati tlake itoka ne altepetl..., Pastorí.., Pastorilla..., asta noponi	I do not know the name of the village...., Pastorí...., Pastorilla...[210] as far as there
eltok se tepetl, uejueyi tepetl.	there lies a hill, a very high hill.
Postejtli.	Postejtli.

Postejtli kiiluiyaya ne tepetl ueyi, ijkatok. Pero yajtok asta uajkapa.	Postejtli they called the high hill, standing. But it went up high.
Kinexkauijtó asta iluikatl, kiijtouaj.	It was next to the sky, they say.
Noponi... uan komo uajkapa eltok, achka iluikak.	Then... and it stood high, near the sky.
Uan tlen ne... seki uelis maseualme, tlajkechiuani tlakame nopa uelis ne axkuali tlakatl.	And those... others could be humans, men that do whatever, maybe the devil.
Noponi, kiijtouaj, tlejkoyaya.	There, they say, they went up.
Yauiyaya nopa Postejtli asta iluikatl, Postejtli	They went to the Postejtli till the sky, Postejtli
ontlakakiyaya iluikak.	they went to listen there where the sky is.
Tlake kiijtouaj ne iluikak, tlake immochiuaj.	What is said in heaven, what they do.
Noponi tlejkoke, kikaki iluikatl	Then [the persons] went up to listen to the sky
uan axkinejke ma kikakika tlake onka	but they [the persons in heaven] did not want them to listen what there was
kiijtouaj, para Postejtli.	they say, on the Postejtli.
Pejki tlatomoni	It began to thunder
uan tlapetlani	and lighten
uan kitsouiteki, rayos kichiua.	and it pattered, it lightened.
Kichiua rayos.	It lightened.
Tlatomonki, kiiluiaj.	It thunders, they say.
Pero axueli posteki, axueli posteki.	But it could not break, it could not break.
Nojkí temia axposteki.	It was still filling, [that's why] it did not break.
Pero molinik San Juantsi, kiijtouaj, San Juantsi molinik	But Saint John moved, is said, Saint John moved
uajkajki.	long ago.
Ya nopaí mououinatski, uajka kotonki nopa tepetl.	Then the hill shook and split.
Kotonki tepetl uan uetski kani tlejkok, kiijtouaj. Axnijmati kani nemito.	The hill split and fell where they had gone up, is said. I do not know where they went.
Mochijki eyi pedaso.	It was made into three pieces.
Uan noponi kema uetski, noponi monextik sintli, kiijtouaj	And there when it fell, there appeared corn, is said
noponi monextik sintli.	there appeared corn.
Eliko chipauak, blanko, uan amariyo uan negro.	There was white, white, and yellow and black.
Noponi ualajki, kiijtouaj.	From there it came, is said.

Noponi mochijki. Yeka komo nama onka.	There it is made. That is why it exists now.
Uan nama eltok ne blanko, amariyo, negro.	And now there is white, yellow and black [corn]. (van 't Hooft and Cerda 2003:75-76)

The tale refers to a hill called Postejtli (lit. "the broken one"), also named Postektitla, a peak near the village of Ixcacuatitla, some ten miles from the municipality head of Chicontepec in the Veracruzan part of the Huasteca[211]. The hill appears to be cut in two as if its peak has broken off, which explains its name. People point to the place as the sacred hill where corn was stored before they came to know about this grain. The hill is frequently visited by various indigenous peoples, who perform all kinds of rituals in its caves, top, and other specific places on its slope. It is referred to as the strongest or most powerful of all sacred hills. When the performance begins, the narrator has trouble finding the exact name of the village where the peak is located, but then he explains elaborately that the hill was so high it nearly reached heaven. When some people try to use the hill as a means to climb up to heaven, the storyteller says they are probably bad persons, or maybe even the devil in person. Whatever their exact identity, these persons want to spy on heaven, and its residents --it is not said explicitly who they are-- do not want this to happen. Saint John cuts the hill with a lightning bolt, one of his attributes, and the part where the people have gone falls off. When the hill breaks, the corn appears.

Saint John's role as the one who provided corn to humankind by splitting a hill draws attention to the sacred hill's role in Huastecan Nahua thought. Since pre-colonial days, high peaks have been conceived as sacred places. In the early colonial *Leyenda de los Soles*, the mountain where corn was hidden is called Tonacatepetl or Sustenance Mountain and is associated with Tlaloc, the rain deity. Following the universal flood, the deity Quetzalcoatl discovers some ants carrying corn kernels and decides to recover the grain for humanity. One of the ants indicates where it is stored, and a deity called Nanahuatl helps Quetzalcoatl by splitting Sustenance Mountain open with a lightning bolt (1975:121). The Aztecs established themselves in northern Veracruz, and we can see that the exceptional height of the Postejtli matched the Tonacatepetl's outward characteristics, its spectacular cleft corresponds totally with the tale's plot. At the time, the hill may have already been a sacred place for other indigenous peoples living in the area; it is easy to understand that the Postejtli acquired great relevance for the newly settled Nahuas as well, which could have led people in the region to pin down their sacred mountain's exact location.

Hills represent a central symbol in Huastecan Nahua cosmology. A community's denomination in Nahuatl is *altepetl*, composed by *atl* (water) and *tepetl* (hill), which can be translated as "the hill and the water" or "waterhill". A superficial reading of the term may be that the coexistence of water and a hill (or land in general) makes human occupation possible, and a village can then be established. In Mesoamerican codices, the hieroglyph of a hill is used as a toponymn to indicate a village or, rather, a reign or dynasty. But there is more to the *altepetl* or community. It is a concept that comprises distinct institutional levels within a certain territorial unit, which enable cultural, social and political organizations to operate (Reyes García 2000:39). In this notion, the term comprises a social unit's socio-political and religious organizational base, and only those who have a specific communal duty (*cargo*) or who are seen as authorities form part of the *altepetl.* In Xochiatipan, the term is used to address the *cabecera municipal;* vicinities (*barrios)* or other socio-political units, like local villages, are no longer addressed as such.

The concept *altepetl* turns the hill into the cosmological center of Huastecan Nahua life, and each village belives that at least one hill within its boundaries represents such a center. The most important hills in this respect are the ones who are thought to be totally filled with water or, at least, to harbor a cave full of water. The Postejtli is high enough to exemplify such a waterhill associated to Tlaloc and abundant rains. Gómez Martínez (1999) relates how Huastecan Nahuas in Veracruz think the hill was replenished with water during the universal flood. As the water retreated, the hill kept its water inside. High peaks or otherwise exceptional hills conceptualize fertility; water, and sometimes the main food, are kept inside (García Martínez 1987). In some tales, people themselves are born or created inside these hills, usually in caves representing, possibly, a womb. The tale reproduced above is representative of many Huastecan Nahua tales of origin in which fertilizing waters, food (both seeds and animals) and man himself originate inside the hill. The corn's origin inside a hill symbolizes the beginning of sedentary life and, consequently, the beginning of agriculture. The founding of a village is related to the period when people start to farm, and the hill becomes the new village's sacred center (Florescano 1996). Because of its special position as a hill of sustenance, the Postejtli is a most powerful mountain in this respect.

As a sacred center, the hill is more than a place with a sacred site, it itself --in its entirety-- is sacred. People believe it is special and call it *tepeko* (see Chapter 1). Sacredness, as a concept, is not attached to all hills, only to a few existing and identifiable elevations. Not every hill is sacred, and the sacred ones do not have this condition because of intrinsic features. Although some have outer qualities, like an extraordinary shape or height or a cave, which makes it easier to recognize them, any hill may be considered sacred. Like

other hills, the *tepeko* is situated on the border between the center and the periphery. Yet, its spatial position is even more special than that of any other sacred site, for it is situated at the conjunction of all realms and constitutes the cosmic axis. Though all hills communicate with the other realms, sacred hills are privileged locations to interact with beings from other realms. A mere trip to a *tepeko* might lead to this contact. During ceremonies, the spirits that regulate community life and agricultural activities and which reside in the hills, such as the *auetsiltiani*, are invoked. Similarly, people call on spirits and guardians living "somewhere" in the other realms.

As for the water creatures that brought on the floods, they established themselves precisely on these cosmic axes. Positioning themselves at their realm's outer tip, at first they posed a direct threat to the inhabitants, but afterwards they abandoned the area, and in compensation, their presence had made the sites sacred. Conceptually, the Xilitetsintla cave and the hill where the snake/fish established itself constituted passageways to the other realms; yet, they lacked the special quality of sacredness. Following the creation or expansion of the well in Xilitetsintla and the emergence of a ravine on the hill, both procured by the water creatures, the places became sacred. This sacredness manifests itself through positive features related to water: today, the cave at Xilitetsintla has deep, permanent waters and a generous number of large *xili*s, and the ravine is now a spring with permanent waters. Their shift from non-sacred to sacred places reveals flexibility in Huastecan Nahua sacred space. Some places are potentially sacred, and a special event may substantiate this potential[212]. Because of the events' positive outcome, there is more sacred space within the villages' boundaries. The tale depicts the origin of a sacred place representing sacred space. The new valuation of these places marks the special position in the village of the people who were not only able to chase away the harmful creatures but became the happy beneficiaries of the permanent waters. Just like people built a village near a sacred waterhill in pre-colonial times, modern-day Huastecan Nahuas center sacred places within the limits of their village, in the form of geographically defined sacred hills or sacred water places.

Lightning bolts in Huastecan Nahua narrative

Nahuas say lightning and thunder are caused by spirits called *tlatomoniani,* "those who make it thunder", and *tlapetlaniani*, "those who make it lighten". At the same time, these spirits themselves are lightning and thunder. They work closely together with Saint John, are associated with the *auetsiltiani* who make it rain, and live in the hills as well. During the rainy season, precipitation is mostly accompanied by thunder and lightning. As these rains fertilize the fields, thunder and lightning are valued positively, since they

nurture the crops and make them grow (cf. Barón Larios 1994:67-73). Thus, they are related to protection and life-giving:

> Our grandfathers and fathers, when it lightens, thunders, rains, when lightning bolts strike and hard winds blow, they think that God comes here. [...] God comes to our assistance. He comes to feed us, he comes to give us life. God comes so that the earth produces favourably (Barón Larios 1994:158).

The lightning bolt assumes a special position in this scheme of entities that provide rain. In Nahua tales from the Sierra de Puebla, lightning bolts are called the rainmakers. They live in the hills and are the Rain God's servants. They control earthen pots, in which wind, clouds, and rains are kept. When they put on their magic capes, they can fly and go out and create thunder and lightning (Heller, Lethin and Kodros 1993; Knab 1995:62,103-104; Taggart 1983:212-213;223-224)[213]. This way, the lightning bolt is considered to be totally responsible for water distribution and, consequently, for the crops' growth and life's existence.

Lightning bolts are powerful, destructive forces when hitting an object on earth. One of their tasks is to chase the devil, and when somebody or something on earth is struck by lightning, this is interpreted as a failed attempt to kill the devil (Romualdo Hernández 1982:145). In the tale about Saint John, the Postejtli is cracked with a lightning bolt (cf. Taggart 1983:214-215). By virtue of a lightning bolt, one of his main tools, Saint John is the granter of corn, the Mesoamerican people's prime food. Lightning bolts also play a significant part in other Mesoamerican oral traditions, as in Zoque, Tének, Tzeltal, Tojolabal or Mam tales on corn's origin, where they cleave the mountain in the same way as in the Huastecan Nahua tales (Spiro 1987).

Saint John's lightning bolt explains two of the tale's etiological details on the origin of corn. As in the early colonial tale about Quetzalcoatl, the lightning bolt provided corn to humankind. Much emphasis is placed on this episode and the narrator explains in different phrases the origin of corn: "there appeared corn, from there it came, that is why it exists now". The second aspect refers to the grain's color and valuation. The lightning bolt is credited for the fact that nowadays there are three different types of corn; its heat scorched the corn's upper part, turning it black and making it the least appreciated corn type. The middle part was smoked and colored yellow, and is now less valued than the white type, the stored corn's lower part that remained untouched. In the tales recorded by Taggart, the personage who opened Sustenance Mountain also planted the first corn (1983:214-216). To Huastecan Tének people from San Luis Potosí, the yearly beginning of the

sowing period is announced by a "little smoke" rising from the Sacred Hill, where the lightning bolt hits and burns the first field to be cultivated. Our narrator does not refer to the relation between lightning bolts, Saint John and agricultural activities, but other tales maintain the cultivation part, and Saint John is often a grower of chili or corn (see, for example, the tale about Saint John in Chapter 5).

In Huastecan Nahua thought, lightning bolts are closely related to water snakes. The water snake that brought the floods left in a thunderstorm with lightning and rain, and some say a lightning bolt lifted it up and placed back in its habitat. The lightning bolt thus secured life as a protective benefactor[214]. The lightning bolts' role as protectors is seen once again in their main task, as they have to lift the waters from the sea and, while doing so, create life in the form of fertilizing rains. The *akouatl* happens to perform the same task, and for this reason is often held to be a different appearance of the same entity; it is said the *akouatl* is the lightning bolt when it rains. Yet, the water snake is only a representation of the lightning bolt when travelling through the sky. When entering the terrestrial space, it is no longer associated with the lightning bolt but with a cloudburst. The lightning bolt continues to benefit the locality, exclusively, and becomes a benefactor of agricultural life.

Review of the tales about the crayfish

When interpreting the role of the water creatures that provoked the floods, the tale's meaning can, at first, be sought in a rather concrete and practical level. In a peasant society, the care needed to obtain a good harvest is intimately related to the constant worry about the rains' convenient distribution and intensity. The ambivalent character of precipitation, resulting in productive showers, destructive hurricanes, droughts and other weather phenomena, is reflected in the acts of water beings which dispense water. Through the concept of a local flooding, the tale suggests how an overabundance of water harms Huastecan Nahua life.

In Huastecan Nahua oral tradition, Saint John seems to be the most powerful being related to water. He is capable of destroying the world in a deluge, and is most immediately associated to germinative power and the main grain. Saint John is related to the sacred hill of sustenance, one of the places he lives in from which water is distributed to make the crops grow and from which he provided corn to people. The water makers residing in the hills are his helpers, and winds, thunderbolts and lightning bolts are at his disposal when he needs them. People benefit from Saint John's position as the vigorous bringer of rain and they think highly of him and his powers. On the other hand, they depend on him totally to obtain a good harvest. His

unreliable character creates uncertainty when trying to ensure a good crop; his helpers living in the hills release fertile rains but also devastating hailstorms.

The water creatures that flood the land seem to help Saint John. The mermaid either warns people about coming floods (see Chapter 5), whether local or universal (Ichon 1990:135), or she herself floods the land. The water snake distributes the sea water on earth. The *xili* produces water. The water beings' destructive or productive attitude is not always space-bound. Such is the case of Saint John, whose impetuous nature creates uncertainty anywhere he goes, so no one knows when to expect rainfall. However, the water creatures' actions do depend on the spatial setting. Their positioning in cosmic axes such as hills, caves, springs and wells --which, because of their connection to other spaces, are particularly receptive to their establishment-- is not an invasion or usurpation of Huastecan Nahua space; all kinds of spirits and guardians inhabit these axes. Yet, when the water creatures establish themselves there, they abandon their own space in the sky and the sea. This dislocation negatively influences the course of Huastecan Nahua life. The creatures keep dispensing water as though they were in the sky or the sea; this causes mud slides and eddies, turning the land into a big pool. The inundation is the negative outcome of a shift in spatial occupation between the village and the world surrounding it. In the end, the mermaid, bound to live in the sea where she regulates all life in the water; the *xili*, too big to belong in the river; and the snake, which has fallen accidentally from the sky, all retreat to their habitat and retake their invaluable constructive task: distributing water in a more beneficial spatial setting. The telling of the tale expresses the concern to uphold the spatial balance between different realms and, consequently, each living entity's attitudes and responsibilities.

Narrators tell tales about the *xili* and the fish/snake because of their past impact on the village's well-being and future existence. The contents of the tales about the water creatures grant Huastecan Nahuas their right to exist. They gained this right not only by triumphing over the harmful water, but because of the sacredness bestowed on the scene where the events took place. After the water beings have left the area, the place where they lived becomes sacred. The places' change in status recalls the establishment of an Aztec village's center around a sacred waterhill. The events confer a special position to the village involved, it now has a sacred center within its bounds. Though it might not be the sole sacred center within village boundaries, the emergence of this new place focuses Huastecan Nahua life, once again, around a sacred center.

Interrelationships between the realms, as described in the tales about the water creatures, project a vision on the desired social relations among the

villagers. In the tale, the existence of all *vesinos* was threatened; thereby, they became involved in the events. Together, they confronted the unfavorable situation and were able to chase the water creatures away. The use of a collective protagonist focuses on the village's qualities as a cooperative group of individuals, and situates social interrelation between the individuals at this local level. In true tales about the *xili*, the spatial categories, collective protagonist and role of the authorities and local institutions, underline the figure of the community as a natural, symmetrical and multifunctional entity, as a collective of persons interrelating according to principles of solidarity, integration and other unifying values. Leaving aside personal differences, the villagers create the main social focus. The community's reconstruction acquires significance as a natural social unit, expressing the ideal form of society. The struggle to survive as a collective against outsiders reaffirms the sense of belonging, reinforces internal cohesion and regulates the desired internal functioning. Also, the audience listening to the version about their ancestors' joint efforts to maintain the collective will find a precedent suggesting how to act in similar future situations.

The flood theme in Huastecan Nahua narrative is expressed through the universal flood tale and tales about the *xili* and its partners. Both disasters imply excessive rainfall as a destructive force which annihilates the collective. During the universal flood, the rains were permanent and inundated the land. During the floods produced by the water creatures, the rains could be turned into non-permanent precipitation and, therefore, into benevolent permanent water on earth. Tales about water creatures that created the floods are more popular than those of the universal flood. People seem to prefer to listen to the tale in which they themselves or their relatives are the protagonists, and in which their own village's outstanding significance as a united social unit is promoted. The tales about the *xili* relate to a different temporal and spatial level than the tale in the previous chapter about the universal flood, and deal with distinct protagonists, which affects the tales' interpretation. From an undefined moment that took place long ago in the tale about the deluge, time moves towards a relatively certain point in the recent past in the tales about the water creatures. The actors become different, and shift from an undefined man and his family living somewhere in the world to an identified collective of Huastecan Nahuas living in a particular village. The actor causing the flood is transformed, from God, whose aim was to deluge the entire earth, to a series of water creatures flooding the locality. This means that spatial indications have become explicit, and the names of particular communities where the events have taken place are given. If the universal flood establishes a new order for the whole cosmos, the events involving the water creatures renewed this order and placed the community at its center.

Chapter 5
The Water Lords in Huastecan Nahua narrative: The tale of the fisherman and his son the warlock.

Well, the fish have something like a saint...
there lives a dueño [guardian], that is to say, who cares for hem.
He feeds the people.
So, without permission the man went out to fish.
And, well, sometimes he didn't get to kill the fish
and he encounters him [the dueño] because all the fish were hurt,
some were not whole anymore. So that's why Timixpixketl grabbed the
fisherman and asked him if it was he who had pierced the fish,
who had hurt them.

Current Huastecan Nahua ideas about water do not only address hazards like the excessive rains dealt with in the preceding chapter, they also look at the liquid's more constructive features. Contrary to their destructive role in the tales told, in real life the water creatures that flooded the land are valued positively as entities that provide the necessary amount of rain. In the same way as the water creatures that have both bright and dark sides as water makers and flood producers, the main characters in this chapter are ambiguous. The Lord and Lady of the Water live in wells, rivers and other terrestrial water resources, where their presence ensures there is water. It is through their generosity that people have access to water and to the fish and crustaceans in it. However, in tales they may drown people, provoke hurricanes, and even have cannibalistic traits. By ascribing both positive and negative features to the Water Lords, Huastecan Nahuas manifest their relationships with terrestrial water reservoirs and their valuation of them.

Tales about the Water Lords are seen as either true tales about a remote past, true ones about a recent past, or anecdotes. The presentation of all three

types of tales related to past events provides the opportunity to study the dynamics of tale type labelling during performance. By using a series of performances of a certain kind of event --an encounter with the Lord or with the Lady of the Water-- the definition of the type of tale during its narration and the manner in which it affects the audience's understanding of the tale shall be considered. Following the same methodology as in the previous chapter, a discussion shall be held about the main parallels and divergences in their representation and interpretation, which are meaningful when reviewing differentiation in modern-day society. Likewise, complementary tales shall be reproduced to illustrate and support the ideas expressed. Bonifacio tells the first tale.

A tale about a fisherman and his son the warlock[215]

1	Itstó se tlakatl	There was a man	1
	tlen nochipaya yauiyaya tlajtlamati.	who went fishing every day.	
	Uan.. kampa ontlajtlamayaya onkalakiyaya atl iijtik.	And.. where he did the fishing he entered the water.	
5	Tlen kinitski michime nochi san kintsopini[216].	When he caught the fish he just pricked them all.	5
	Uan.. seki tlen kitsopini noja yaui choloaj	And... some of those he pricks get away, they escape	
	uan seki kena kinitski[217]	and others he indeed caught.	
10	Uan.. sampa yaui axmiyake kinionkui uan	And.. once he goes and does not return with many and	10
	miyake tlen achi choloaj.	those that get away are many.	
	Uajka sampa yajki moilui:	And once he went and thought:	
	"Kani san yauij ne michime?	"Wherever do these fish go?	
15	San nikintsopini uan noja yauij", kiijto nopa tlajtlamajketl.	I only prick them and they still go", the fisherman said.	15
	Uajka kiijto: "Nama niyas nitlachixtiyas kani... asta kani onyauij".	So he said: "Now I'll go and see where... where they go to".	
	Uan ijkí nopa tlajtlamajketl yajki	And thus the fisherman went	
20	yajki.	he went.	20
	Uajka yajki nopa aijtik[218].	He went [swimming] far into the water.	
	Uajka kiitato[219] se siuatl noponi yetok.	Then he went and saw a woman sitting there.	
	Kiilui:	She said to him:	
	"¿Ta tlake tijchiua ika nikani?"	"You, what are you doing here?"	
25	"Niuala nikintemo ne michime nikinitskisneki. San nikintsoponi uan noja choloaj"	"I came to look for those fish I want to catch. I only prick them and they still escape"	25

	kiilui.	he told her.
30	"Uajka taí tikintsopini ne michime", kiilui.	"So it is you who pricks those fish", she said to him.
	"Uajka taí tikinkokojtok miyake ne notlapiyalua", kiilui.	"So it is you who has injured many of my animals", she said to him.
	"Axnijmati tla taí motlapiyalua", kiijto nopa tlajtlamajketl.	"I do not know whether they are your animals", the fisherman said.
35	Uajka kiilui: "Xijtlachili tlake ne eltok", kiilui.	Then she said to him: "Go and look at what is over there", she told him.
40	Uan nelí kitlachili noponi miyake michime tepejtoke tlen kinkokojtok, seki ya mijtoke, nopa atsintla tepejtoke nopa michime.	And he really saw a lot of fish scattered there, which he had injured, some were already dead, those fish lay scattered in the depths of the water.
	Uan kiilui: "Nama ayok tiyas mocha, nama nika tomokauas", kiijto nopa siuatl.	And she told him: "Now you won't go home anymore, now you'll stay here", the woman said.
45	Uajka kiijto nopa tlakatl:	So the man said:
	"Axneli", kiijto, "Na niyasneki nocha, nimayanki", kiijto.	"Not at all", he said, "I want to go home, I'm hungry", he said.
50	"Ximayanto pero nama ayok tiyas pampa tikintlamokokojtok ne nomichiua uan moneki se akaya ma mokaua nama nikani", kiijto.	"You may be hungry, but now you won't leave anymore because you injured my fish and now someone must stay here", she said.
	Pero ya nopa tlakatl ipanima axkinejki, axkinejki.	But the man still did not want to, he did not want to.
55	Uajka asta ika oui[220] kiiluito nopa siuatl, kiilui:	Then after a while the woman said to him, she said to him:
	"Tla axtijneki ta tomokauas uajka xijualika se mokone tlen tlakatl".	"If you don't want to stay then bring one of your male children".
	"Axtle. Tla tijneki ma nimitsualikili nimitsualikilis se noichpoka.	"No. If you want me to bring you someone I'll bring you one of my daughters.
60	Na ome nikinpixtok uan se nokone tlen tlakatl ya setsi nijpixtok", kiilui.	I have two [daughters] and I have only one male child", he told her.
	Uajka nopa siuatl kiijto:	So the woman said:
	"Pero na tlake nikiluis[221] se siuatl na no nisiuatl", kiijto.	"But why would I want a woman, [since] I am also a woman", she said.
65	Uajka... ijkí iuan mokamouijtok asta kampa kitlanito, nopa siuatl tlatlanki[222].	So... like that they talked till she convinced him, the woman won [the argument].
	Uajka nopa tlakatl kiilui para kena kiualikas nopa ikone tlen tlakatl.	So the man said that he would bring his child.
70	Pero ya nopa siuatl ya moyolojuitok kineki tlakatl para ya kikuaski	But that woman, she thinks she wants a man in order to eat him
	axkana kineki iua itstos.	She does not want to be with him.

	Ijkí, yajki nopa tlakatl tlajtlamajketl.	Like this, that man, the fisherman, left.
	Icha yaui, mokuesojti yaui. Tlen setsi ikone tlakatl kipixtok noja ya kiualikilis	He goes home, he goes sad. He only has one son and he shall bring him to the
75	nopa siuatl.	woman. 75
	Uajka ajsito icha, nochi teiluito tlen nopa kipanti.	So he went and arrived home, he told [his family] everything that had happened to him.
	Uajka moyolojuijke para ma kimachtika tlen kejne brujerías.	So they thought that they would teach him [their son] witchcraft.
80	Uan nelí, pejke kimachtia kimachtia.	And really, they began to teach and teach 80 him.
	Ika sempouali tonal tlen moyejyekouitiya[223] para uajka yaski nopa tlakatl kikauati ikone.	Twenty days later was [the date] they had agreed on for the man to go and leave his son.
85	Kimijtijke se totolin, kitamalchijke uan kikuatij ne ateno. Nelí yajke nepa ontentoke tlakua itat uaya ina uan yaya nopa tekone.	They killed a turkey, they made it into a tamale and go to eat it at the riverbank. They really went there, they ate seated, the father, the mother and the son. 85
	Uan asta achi teipa kiitake achi ne	And after a while they saw that in the
90	atlatlajko achi pejki amomoloka	middle of the water it began to bubble a little 90
	uan kiitake kisako nopa siuatl.	and they saw that the woman appeared.
	Pero ya nopa konetlakatl, moijto tlen nopa tlatlamajketl ikone, ya kimachtijtokeya brujo.	But the young man, that is, the fisherman's son, he had been taught to be a *brujo* [warlock].
95	Uan kiijto nopa siuatl kisako kiilui:	And the woman, appearing, said: 95
	"Kena tijualik mokone".	"You did bring your son".
	"Kena", kiilui.	"Yes", he told her.
	Uajka yajki kiitato.	So she went to see [the son].
	"Bueno xijualika! Na niyo", kiilui.	"Well bring him! I am leaving", she said.
100	Uajka nelí kikalaki uan kiilui ken kikalakisnekiyaya atsintla pero ya nopa tlakatl kiijto:	So she really pulls him [into the water] and he said to her, when she wanted to pull him under, the man said: 100
	"Axtle, na axniueli niaxitlani, mejor xinechuika san niaixko", kiilui.	"No, I can't swim, you'd better take me on top of the water", he said to her.
105	Nelí aixko kiseuijti simaixko kiuika kiuika.	She really takes him, at the water's surface, sitting on the palms of her hands she carries and carries him. 105
	Kema kinekiyaya kikalakis san tlalochtli uajka nopa tlakatl kiijto:	When she wanted to pull him under, the man suddenly said:
110	"Xiuala kuajtli", kiijto.	"Come, sparrow-hawk!", he said. 110
	Uan ya nopa tlakatl mochijki kuajtli.	And the man turned into a sparrow-hawk.
	Ijkí patlantejki yaui, yajki.	Thus he flew away, he went away.
	Uan nopa siuatl ya iseltik noja kalakito aijtik.	And the woman, she went under water Alone.

Bonifacio's tale is about a man who reaches the bottom of a river where a creature, in this example a woman, orders him to stay. The man is a fisherman who has injured a lot of fish when trying to catch them with his *tlamintli* or fishing spear. The woman needs him, so she says, to remain in the aquatic world in order to cure the injured fish. When the man refuses to stay, the woman pressures him to send his son instead. The controversy ends when the fisherman gives in and promises to send his son. Yet, the son is taught witchcraft and manages to escape his fate by turning into an animal at the critical moment when he is supposed to go to the river. During the rest of the performance, which is not included here, the narrator continues relating the son's adventures: he changes into various animals in order to get a beautiful girl. Shortly after their marriage, he looses her to an abductor but manages to find the man and, due to his special faculties, is able to kill him. All the same, he rejects his rescued wife for having been with another man. The fisherman's son ends up alone and goes on with his life, transforming himself at will as warlocks do. Though this tale draws basically on the events concerning the son --the initial episode about the encounter between his father and the woman in the water appears to be but a reference to how he became a warlock-- in view of the discussion about the multiple water beings' characteristics in Nahua oral narrative, only this first part of the story is relevant to the analysis (lines 1-114). This part deals with the Lady of the Water's character.

The Lord and Lady of the Water

The motive --a person in a fresh water spring confining a human being-- is quite common in Nahua oral tradition (see, for example, Flores Farfán and Ramírez 1997; Campos 1993:94-99; or García de León 1968:354-356; 1969:307). One villager called this person Apantona (Our Mother of the Well) and gives the following description:

> Apantona is a Saint, she is the mere *dueña* (guardian) of the water we consume. She is the well who guards the children. She gives us to drink from her breast like a mother to a baby. The wells in the fields are smaller [than the others], since from there only the day laborers take water. Apantona means *Manantial de Nuestra Madre* (Well of Our Mother)[224]. She is the *espíritu* (spirit) of the wells, she is an old grandmother who gives us water. The grandmother is called *Iluiya Apantona*, and she is easily angered because, for example, when the people go cutting cane, the beasts of burden drink where they don't usually drink. That's why one needs to offer to Apantona.

Apantona is conceived as a saint, a guardian and a spirit, all in one. The three terms are seen as synonyms for beings that protect a specific part of the world's realms. Just as in the previous chapter Saint John was the celestial

waters' guardian, Apantona is believed to be the terrestrial waters' guardian. Her grandmotherly aspect connotes wisdom and authority because of her old age; her representation as a mother confers a sense of protection, guardianship, and nourishing (food provision) that one would expect from parents.

One of the guardian's different denominations is Atonana (our Mother of the Water). Atonana is said to live in the wells and provide drinking water to Nahuas. She has a male counterpart who is called Atotata (our Father of the Water) and who performs the same task (Hernández Cuéllar 1982:81). Other designations are *Mixteuktli* (Lord/Lady of the Fish) or *Timixpixketl* (He/She who Guards the Fish), and are more associated with their specific role as fish guardians. Also known are *Apixketl* (Guardian of the Water) or *Apantonal* (*Tonal* of the Water). Gómez (1999:11) calls the female guardian Apanchaneh (Water Dweller) and gives more synonyms that provide insight into their role:

> The names with which the patron of the water is also known are: *Apancihuatl* or *Acihuatl* (water woman), *Axinola*[225] (lady of the water), *Apixquetl* (*dueña* of the water), *Tlaahcohketl* (guardian of the water), *Anotzketl* (spokeswoman of the water), *Atlanahuatihketl* (regent of the water), *Amoyahquetl* (she who distributes the water), *Sihuamichih* (woman fish), *Aserenah* (Mermaid), *Tonana atl* (our mother the water), *Atlanahuahuihketl* (inexorable) and *Teatocoketl* (she who floods).

Because of the guardian role of the personages who take care of the water and the life in it, I shall use here the terms Lord and Lady of the Water when referring to them. The Lord and Lady of the Water live in Apan's terrestrial segment in the riverbed. The depths of springs, streams, wells and other fresh water resources are appropriate places of residence for the Lord and Lady of the Water, who are generally represented as human figures, mermaids, or big aquatic animals. In Huastecan Nahua worldview, these creatures have ambiguous values but are predominantly benevolent, since they supply water and seafood; they protect and distribute the element to which people owe their lives to a great extent. Both are appreciated as a pair that "is responsible for looking after the water". They "protect the living species and plants in the water" and "provide humanity with water, salt, fish and crustaceans". In some tales, they give people food and other riches (see, for example, Taggart 1983:231-237). When the Lord or Lady is presented in an anti-social posture, the objective is to obtain a human servant. It is suspected that the Lady of the Water, who wants a male partner, devours humans.

In the following tale, the guardian of the fresh water reservoirs and the life it contains is represented as a man. Feliciano relates about a spring called Tetsokopil, whose waters never dry up and where a strange creature lives.

Tetsokopil is a spring near the community of Atlalco in the Huastecan municipality of Xochiatipan. The women of Atlalco use its waters to wash clothes and to bathe. Especially in the summer, a lot of people visit the spring to freshen up while the children play in the water. The spring is divided into two parts, and only the shallow one which borders on the road leading to the community, is used. The rest of the spring, people say, is dangerous. This is the deepest part, where a little rock formation with a tiny waterfall narrows down the water area, almost covering it totally. The spring owes its name to this narrowing; the Nahuatl designation Tetsokopil means "a narrowing of stone".

The tale is about a couple that goes bathing in the Tetsokopil. The woman -- for reasons not mentioned-- refrains from entering the water, yet encourages her husband to go swimming. The man swims and at a certain moment reaches the bottom of the spring. Here he sees a village, which is described as a nice place. Then he meets a man who orders him to stay. At that time, the arguments presented by the man in the water or any authority he may have, are not discussed. Later on in the text, one of the reasons for his orders is announced: the man needs a servant. Because of his astuteness, the protagonist manages to mislead the man in the water. He promises to send another person in his place if the man in the water sets him free. The Lord of the Water agrees; the swimmer is saved and goes back home. Nowadays, because of this tale, people do not dare swim in the water's deepest part anymore; they fear the Water Lord might think they are the substitute the swimmer promised to send:

	Itstoya se tlakatl uan se siuatl tlen	There was a married	
115	mokuitoya.	couple.	115
	Ne tlakame uan ne siuame yajke kampa... maltiyaya nochi tlakame. Uajka ne tlakatl uan ne siuatl yajke maltito, kena.	The men and the women went where... all people bathed. So the man and the woman went bathing, yes.	
	Ne siuatl, pues	The woman, well	
120	nopa kiilui tlakatl, pues, ma ajki, kena	she told the man to swim, yes	120
	uan kalajki	and he went in	
	uan isiua itstok iteno tlen ne Tetsokopil.	and his wife stands at the edge of the Tetsokopil.	
	Ne siuatl itstok iteno uan nopa tlakatl	The woman stands at the edge and this	
125	malti, pues ya ajki uan yajki asta tlatsintla.	man bathes, he swam and dived down to the bottom.	125
	Kema isiua kitlachili para ayikana kisayaya, isiua, pues, momajmati uan yajki, nopa... yajki karrera	When his wife saw that he did not come out anymore, his wife, well, became frightened and went, well...	
130	icha.	went rapidly home.	130
	Uajka ne tlakatl kiijto para ajsito asta	Then the man said[226] he arrived at the	

	tlatsintla tlen atl	bottom of the water
	uan se tlakatl tlen axkana kiixmatiyaya kiilui para ma mokaua.	and a man whom he did not know told him to stay.
135	Uan tlatsintla kiitak miyak kali tlen tetl, yejyektsitsi.	And down there he saw many houses of stone, very beautiful. 135
	Uan kiilui para ma axkana kisa, ma itstoya ika ya.	And [the strange man] told him not to leave [anymore], to stay there with him.
140	Uajka kiilui ne telpokatl o ne tlakatl tlen mosiuajtito, kiilui para ma kichiya, kena	Then the boy or married man told him, told him to wait, yes 140
	para ya kiualtitlanis seyok, seyok tlen ka itstok ika ya.	that he would send somebody else, somebody else who would stay with him.
	Uajka ne tlakatl, pues, kiilui para ma kichiya.	Then the man said, well, he told him to wait.
145	Uajka kiilui: "Kena, na kena nijchiyas".	Then [the strange man] said: "Yes, I'll wait for him". 145
	Uajka kikauili ma youia iselti.	So he permitted him to leave alone.
	Uajka ne kiski nopa ne tlatsintla, kena, tlen kampa atl kiuik.	The man came up from there below, yes, where the water took him.
150	Ne kisato asta Veracruz, kena	He came up as far as Veracruz, yes 150
	kampa seyok tlali. Kisato Veracruz.	in another land. He came up in Veracruz.
	Uajka kiijtoua namantsi nochi kampa ne Tetsokopil	So now everybody says there in the Tetsokopil
155	axaka kineki ma kalaki porke nopa tlakatl kitenkauilijtejki nopa tlakatl itsto noponi atitla	no one wants to get in because the man offered [promised] the man in the 155 water
	kitenkauilijtejki seyok tlakatl, kena	he offered him another person, yes
	kampa pues ya kitekipanos noponi.	to serve him there.
160	Uajka, kiijtoua namantsi nochi tlen Atlalco tlen kiixmati ne... kuento, kena	So now everybody in Atlalco who knows about this... *kuento* says, yes 160
	kiijtouaj para	they say
	pues namantsi axaka kineki kalakis kampa ne atetsokopil porke komo ne seyok tlakatl kitenkauilijtejki	that now no one wants to get in the Tetsokopil, since he offered another person
165	uajka mouilia para aki kalakis noponi, pues	so it is said that who ever gets in there, 165 well
	axkema kisas.	will never get out. (van 't Hooft 1998)

The man in the Tetsokopil's waters and the woman in the previous tale about the fisherman both live in a water reservoir's depths. The two meet someone who has entered their space, whereupon both display the same attitude: they want the intruder to stay in the water world. They equally fail in their attempt to retain the protagonist and the latter returns to the Nahua realm after promising to send a substitute. Although in a different spatial

and, perhaps, temporal setting, the two tales draw upon the same type of event and deal with the relation between Huastecan Nahuas and the Lords of the Water.

Type of tale

The tale about a fisherman and his son the warlock is very popular in the Huasteca area. The first episode is especially well known, up to the point where the son escapes his fate, and it is often told as an independent tale; many different versions of it are going around in the communities. The narrator said the tale about the fisherman is fictional. Indeed, no idiomatic expression can be found in these tales which suggests they may be true. People agree with him and say the tale is not based on past events in their villages.

Nevertheless, the text's first part has a strong resemblance to many tales about villagers who escaped from a creature in the water, like the tale about the Tetsokopil. Well known among the residents of Atlalco and nearby communities, its plot, to a great extent, is recognized as a fact, which makes people believe the tale is true. It is also a fact that today people are afraid to swim in the spring's depths because of the Water Lord's presence. The narrator explains their fear's supposed historical context and origin. Despite the fact that the young priest in the municipality recently swam in the Tetsokopil in order to "put superstitious people in the wrong", a great majority will not risk going into the spring's depths. The text's narrator, who wanted to become a catholic pastor at the time, commented that he himself had lost confidence in the event's veracity from that day on. The priest's action did not have much effect on the rest of the population, which is still convinced the tale is true.

Furthermore, there are many personal accounts in the recent past about encounters with the Water Lords. Nahuas talk about "a boy from the community being almost drowned by them", and about villagers having reached the depths of a water body and escaping from it. The events are said to have taken place lately, and the protagonist is named. Such is the case of the uncle of a young man, who told how his relative frequently went out fishing in the nearby river. He always caught many big fish. One day he went out and caught almost thirty very big fish with his *tlamintli*. The next day he announced he wanted to return to the river to catch more. He threw his spear deep into a hole in the riverbed, the water reached his shoulder. The third day he went fishing again and tried out the same method. But then his arm got stuck in the hole and he could not get it out. Suddenly, the water began to rise and the man heard a woman's voice asking him why he would want to fetch so many fish, considering he had already taken a large number.

The man became frightened and assured her that he would not take out any more. The woman told him to leave offerings. He left them and then he was able to remove his arm and go home. At home, however, he suddenly became ill. He called on a traditional doctor for help and again they left offerings for the river. The man started to recover and was cured, but never again went back to fish in the river (Szeljak, pers. com.).

Although remarkably similar, these personal encounters with the Lord or Lady of the Water or the true tale about the Tetsokopil are never confused with the tale about the fisherman and his son; the tale about the fisherman is invariably seen as fictional, the real life event or true tale is always an undeniable fact. Thus, a more or less similar event is told as if it were a fictional tale, a true tale or a real life anecdote. People distinguish the real life anecdotes and true tales from the fictional tale. The latter has no identifiable protagonist, plays in an indefinite spatial and temporal setting, and lacks expressions of assessment. The true tale and real life anecdote have mostly opposite characteristics in this respect. Differentiation is not only present in the characters or tale's plot, but also in the labelling of tale type. The presence of this similar event in all possible narrative types illustrates its wide pervasion in Huastecan Nahua narrative and, consequently, its vital importance in Nahua thought. Each transmission, in whatever form, provides an opportunity to reflect, discuss, and evaluate the theme.

Actors in the tale

In the tale about the fisherman, the protagonist is the fisherman himself, though only during the tale's first part. In fictional tales about the Lords of the Water, an entrance into the aquatic realm defines the outset of the tale, in which the Water Lords demand a sacrifice from the protagonist. After the fisherman reluctantly agrees to bring the person who will be sacrificed, his role in the tale is over and the main role is taken over by the person who will supposedly be sacrificed, the fisherman's son. The son's subsequent adventures vary a great deal, but in most cases he lends a helping hand to a series of different animals, rescues a princess or assists another young woman in need of help, and finally marries her (for example, van 't Hooft and Cerda 2003:113-120, or Flores Farfán and Ramírez 1997). The text about the fisherman presented in this chapter seems to be an exception when, in the end, the protagonist loses his wife and must live alone for the rest of his days. The father's thematic role is professional, which makes the plot more plausible, and it is also related to family, which gives the theme of sacrifice a more emotional meaning.

The true tale and real life account center exclusively on the encounter between the protagonist and the Lord or Lady of the Water, and no shift is presented from the protagonist towards the substitute. The protagonist is the

person who reaches the water's depths. He can be any Nahua man and is not inevitably a fisherman. At times, his identity is known: he is either the narrator's relative or *vesino*. The narration focuses on his escape or, less often, on his drowning, and the narration ends when the protagonist dies or is saved. Though he might have promised another offering to the Water Lords, as in the tale about the Tetsokopil, this part is never elaborated on; the protagonist's fate is the single interesting detail worth telling.

The naming of the Water Lords is not always explicit in Huastecan Nahua oral tradition, and the audience has to deduce from the events who the person in the water may be. Often, this person has sufficient attributes to be identified as the Lord or Lady of the Water. In the fisherman's tale told by Bonifacio, the demanding woman inhabiting the water's depths is unmistakably the Lady of the Water. Although she is only marked out as a *siuatl*, a woman, the remark she makes about "her fish" and the authority she demonstrates when persuading the man to stay or send his son, allow for such an interpretation. The fish are hers, because she is the one who protects them; they go to her after the fisherman hurts them. She can rightfully claim an offering from the fisherman, considering he is a trespasser in her domain who, moreover, hurt the fish gratuitously. In Feliciano's tale, the man in the water can likewise be recognized as the Lord of the Water, although not with as much certainty. The only signs that might help to ascertain his identity are the fact that he apparently lives in the water's depths and that he tells, that is, he requests or demands, the swimmer to stay. The same can be said for the real life event, in which the protagonist is said to have seen the water rise but never physically encounters the Lady of the Water; it is said he hears a woman's voice. To Nahuas, there are no other persons living in the water's depths who can make a person stay other than the Water Lords. However, their portrayal is rather vague and the absence of an unequivocal naming leaves room for non-believers to interpret these figures differently.

Time aspects in the tale: temporal setting and story time

From the very start, the narration about the fisherman is set in an unspecified temporal situation. *Itstó se tlakatl*, there was a man (line 1), is a statement without temporal markers that leaves room for the events to have happened any time. During the narration, no further references are made to this point. The inability to determine the truth through temporal markers positions the tale as a fictional one.

The fisherman goes fishing a lot. The narrator uses *nochipaya* (always) to indicate how often, he uses an adverb which he translates as "every day", and emphasizes the fact that fishing is a source of income for the protagonist. No special time reference is given on when the fisherman goes after the fish

he has pricked. He went *sampa* (once, lit. again) fishing and afterwards, *sampa*, on another occasion, he asked himself where the fish would be going (lines 13-15). Every time he jumped after the fish to find their hiding place. The temporal markers employed underline the events' sequence rather than the fact that they happen at a specific point in time.

The fisherman swam for quite a while before he ran into the woman. It is said "he went and went, and went far into the water" (line 19-20), which indicates that the place where the Water Lords live in the water's depths is quite far. The following discussion with the Lady of the Water was difficult, but not necessarily long. *Asta ika oui* (after a while), when the woman realizes that the fisherman is not willing to stay, she gives in partially and demands instead that he sends his son (lines 53-56). Though it is obvious that the fisherman complains about the magnitude of the sacrifice requested, there is not much he can do about the situation. There is no use in having a long argument, since the Lady of the Water apparently controls the situation. The act does not always take up much time in the narration, because it is obvious that the Water Lords get what they want. At times, there is no argument at all and the Lords of the Water simply state their demands.

In most tales about the fisherman, the sacrifice is made the day after the encounter. In the tale above, the fisherman is given twenty days to bring his son, an interval which gives him the opportunity to teach his son witchcraft. The Nahua counting system is vigesimal, so the number twenty represents the last one in this system, and based on it, larger numbers are compiled. Nahuatl *sempouali* (twenty, lit. "one count") denotes the completion of a count, the completion of a time period. When the parents finally go to the river to leave their son, it is *achi teipa* (a little while), not long, before the Lady of the Water rises from the water to receive the sacrifice (lines 89-90). No time indication is given as to when exactly the appointment was due, and the different versions mention different hours. But it is on the day that the sacrifice must be offered that the tale reaches its denouement. When the Lady of the Water does not get the sacrifice she demanded, she has to go back to the water's depths alone.

The tale about the Tetsokopil is mostly seen as a true tale set in a recent past, so some specific time indications may be expected. Yet, the narrator says he does not believe the event is true and he deals with it as if it were fiction. Correspondingly, the time markers follow a fictional *kuento's* pattern and are not drawn on to determine whether it is true. Feliciano uses the same expression as Bonifacio when he begins his tale: *itstoya,* there was (line 114). The married couple could have gone bathing any day in whatever past. All time markers are relative, *uajka* (then, so) being the one most often used. Nothing is mentioned about the duration of the stay in the water.

In other narratives on the same subject, the protagonist stays a couple of hours or days before returning home. Similarly, when dealing with other beings from other realms, as for example in tales about the lightning bolts living in the hills, the stay is often short. Yet, when the protagonist returns home from Apan or from the hills, his sojourn turns out to have been much longer than expected; the days in the other realms represent years in the community (see, for example, Taggart 1983:224-226). In the other realms, time flows in a different rhythm. Just as in the deluge tale, in which the elimination of time announced the end of times, time seems to come to a stop when entering another space; the events happening in the other realms are not affected by the passage of time. When the protagonist returns home, his rifle, which is in the hunter's case has totally decayed in the same spot were it was left, and his family believes he has long been dead. The spaces are differentiated from each other through an achrony.

Space aspects in the tale

When spatial divisions are crucial for understanding a tale, these will be articulated during its narration. Toumi (1984) registered a phrasing scheme in Nahua tales that convey these divisions and which is applicable to the tales referred to above. In the beginning of the tale, the protagonist leaves home, an action described by the verb *kisa* (to take off, to leave) or *yaui* (to go): the fisherman always went fishing (*nochipaya yauiyaya tlajtlamati,* line 2), the husband of the Tetsokopil went with his wife where all people bathed (*yajke kampa... maltiyaya nochi tlakame,* lines 116-117). The events take place in a spatial setting different from the initial one. To reach that other spatial setting, the protagonist has to enter it first (*mokalaki*, to enter): the fisherman entered and went swimming far into the water (*onkalakiyaya atl iijtik*, line 4; *yajki nopa aijtik,* line 21), the man in the Tetsokopil went in (*kalaki*, line 121), swam and dived down to the bottom (*ajki uan yajki asta tlatsintla*, lines 125-126). Soon afterward, the protagonist arrives (*ajsi*, to arrive, line 131) in the new space. The tale about the fisherman describes this arrival as a visual encounter: then he came to see a woman sitting there (*uajka kiitato se siuatl noponi yetok,* line 122). In the tale about the Tetsokopil, the arrival is announced through a verb: the swimmer arrived at the bottom of the water (*ajsito asta tlatsintla tlen atl,* lines 131-132). The sequence of actions --leaving, entering and arriving, expressed through the verbs *kisa*/*yaui*, *mokalaki* and *ajsi*-- constitutes a recurrent pattern in Nahua narrative when dealing with events transpiring in other realms. However, the visit to Apan is not merely a spatial journey; it has certain values attached to it that make the tale meaningful. These values can be more fully analyzed when discussing some spatial details of the tale about the Tetsokopil.

In the beginning of the tale about the Tetsokopil, the couple leaves home to go bathing. The narrator does not conceive the situation at home as relevant and expects his listeners to know what a Huastecan Nahua house looks like, for he does not describe the situation at home or in the community. Nevertheless, a distinction can be drawn between "home" and the place of the events. In this narration home is seen as a safe haven: the woman, frightened when she does not see her husband come out of the water, runs home; the man, after having saved himself, returns home as well. In contrast with the safety at home, the depths of the water are dangerous for human beings, because at the bottom live creatures that somehow have power over people. According to certain beliefs, the depths of the Tetsokopil actually form a sea, not just a well or a spring. It is not known whether this sea is connected to the Gulf Sea, or if it is a big, isolated subterranean area, but this detail places the true tale's events in a sea or, rather, in the sea. The happenings in the Tetsokopil may be regarded as part of Apan's aquatic world, not as a mere local event.

Another relevant spatial aspect can be found in the narrator's comments, when he says that the main character let himself float on the water till he could get out in a place far from his community, in a municipality in the state of Veracruz. Not in all renditions of this true tale is Veracruz mentioned as the place where the man could get out of the water. This indication should be taken as a reference to a relatively considerable distance, and, consequently, to the time that has passed between the event in the water and the return home. Veracruz, even though adjacent to the Xochiatipan municipality, is regarded as "*seyok tlali*", another country (lit. "another land"). This conceptualization situates Veracruz outside the ordinary geographical framework, giving the true tale a certain accent. The swimmer's action acquires an extra dimension because we are dealing with something rather special, both in time and in space.

All places that have been geographically identified (at home, at the bank of the Tetsokopil) suggest safety and protection, which belong to the Huastecan Nahua community. In contrast, the non-identifiable place, the sea, is associated with another realm. The swimmer is only under risk when he reaches this other world, at the bottom of the water. The opposition "water realm" versus "Nahua world" can therefore be seen as an axis that does not only emphasize the danger and threat of the first, but also the safety and protection of the second. This contrast is expressed through a spatial distance, as the community is associated with the center, whereas Apan is located at the periphery (cf. Gossen, 1974; Taggart 1977). In addition to this spatial division, several values are attached to these places, like for example the opposition safety versus danger. In this manner, there is an axis community:center:safety against Apan:periphery:danger. The whole aquatic

world does not imply danger, since a part of the water --the bank and the shallow part where people bathe-- belong to the Nahua world and is associated with it. The division is thus made along the axis community vs. Apan, and not between the dichotomy: land vs. water.

Contrapositions like these might seem highly stylized, as Taggart (1977) already remarked, but this kind of apparently simple binary oppositions offers the storyteller the opportunity to present messages and ideas about Huastecan Nahua worldview in a more comprehensible manner. Of course, oral tradition is far more complex and has many more singularities. The valuation of the water's depths, of Apan, is not only expressed through spatial and temporal characterizations but also by handling a series of themes in the tales.

Meaning in the tales about the Water Lords

In the tale about the fisherman, the Lady of the Water who takes care of the fish, worries when they get injured. She wants the fisherman to cure her protégés or, if he refuses, to send her his son instead. The woman orders the fisherman to stay in the water's depths and she justifies her decision: "You injured my fish and now someone must stay here" (lines 48-50). She argues that, because of the fisherman's neglect and the fact that he ignored the damage inflicted upon the fish, he must now assume his responsibility and make up for his wrongdoings. If asked why the woman has the right or the power to demand such a thing, people reply that the man did not "respect" the water and must therefore "pay". They talk about the man's acts as a "violence" (Sp. *violencia*), meaning a violation, because he did not catch the fish properly and he injured them senselessly. One person said the fisherman did not have the Lady of the Water's "permission."

The explanations given evolve around several concepts in Huastecan Nahua worldview. The first relates to the valuation of Apan's protective role. The Lady of the Water takes care of the fish that the fisherman has injured; in the real life anecdote she is annoyed about the great number of fish caught. In both instances, the Lords of the Water try to balance the scale and cut their losses. The Lady tells the fisherman to cure the fish or she asks for offerings. In connection with this protective role, there is the issue of the respect people ought to have for their natural environment. One can make use of the environment, in this case the water and the life in it, but must never abuse it. In daily life, disregarding the water forces the Water Lords make a correction. They can inflict pimples on a person who urinated in a spring, or showed disrespect in any other way towards the water. The *tlamatijketl* (traditional doctor) can cure the trespasser by leaving an offering at the water's edge and pray to the water beings to ask forgiveness.

Another concept with a strong presence in the communities concerns the reciprocity principle. The woman in the tale about the fisherman represents one of those water beings whose task is to keep the balance between Huastecan Nahuas and life in the water. As Lady of the Water, she protects the aquatic world, both animals and plants, and tries to preserve her environment for the wellbeing of her protégés and of man, who will be able to enjoy this aquatic life. She provides man all types of fruits, but demands an equal relation between people and herself: one good turn deserves another. Therefore, in the fictional tale told by Bonifacio the woman orders the fisherman to stay and undo his misdeeds, which would repair the disturbed equilibrium: "You won't leave anymore because you injured my fish and now someone must stay here" (lines 48-50).

A third theme relates to the concept of sacrifice. Even though the Water Lords demand a reparation of the disturbed equilibrium, the payment of the debt or violation takes an unfavourable turn for the protagonists, for they are supposed to stay in Apan forever. The reciprocity principle is taken literally, and provision from the Water Lords should be counterbalanced by a provision from people to the Water Lords, who will put the person who was sent to work or, in the worst case, eat him, just like Huastecan Nahuas eat fish for their nourishment. Like this, the payment ends up becoming a sacrifice.

In the tales about the Water Lords, the values attributed to Apan seem to be different from those described in the previous chapter. Though the fictional tales about the fisherman, the true tale about the Tetsokopil and the anecdotes about encounters with the Water Lords describe Apan as a dangerous place, there are other themes present such as the Water Lords' contrary, protective role, disregard towards water, sacrifice, or, at times, deviant social behavior and its valuation. With each narration, a different theme or combination of themes may be highlighted.

The water realm

The Lords of the Water live in the realm called Apan. In the tales cited above, not much of a description is given about this realm. The fisherman is said to arrive at a place *aijtik*, "far into the water" (line 21), and the swimmer in the Tetsokopil reached *tlatsintla tlen atl*, the bottom of the water (line 132). In the real life anecdote, the fisherman's arm got stuck, just a little, in a hole under water. The most common way to get there is either by swimming into the waters' depths or by going in through a hole in the riverbed:

> My dad commented and told me. He went to see [in the river] and entered [the water] at a place where there were very big *acamayas*

> [crayfish]. There was a space in which he entered completely, completely, thus he entered where there are stones, stones, like *tepetate* [a type of porous rock] but even more solid. It had a hole, he entered, my dad, my dad entered, he entered.

Other accounts confirm that there was a cavity marking the entrance to Apan: "And there you would enter a hole. And you wouldn't come out anymore"; "there was a cavity down there and there he went in and stayed during the night". García de León refers to the entrance as a cave (1969:307). Like in the case of the river crayfish in the preceding chapter, the cave is the doorway providing access to Apan, located at the bottom of a pool or beyond, inside the earth.

The tale about the Tetsokopil is about an aquatic world --far richer-- which is located parallel to a Huastecan Nahua community. The narrator says that the houses are very beautiful and made of stone, representing a luxurious architecture he finds attractive. The remark describes the environment as different from the usual one, for the underwater community is not identical to a common human one. Despite the correspondences between the underwater houses and those of the real world, the first are of a better quality (stone versus mud) and thus more durable, and prettier, which gives the impression of wealth. García de León mentions the presence of tortoise shell seats to stress the aquatic environment (1968:354-355).

The place is described in more detail outside the context of tale telling, when one asks about the place where the Water Lords live. Narrating the experience of a friend who nearly drowned in the river, a young man comments:

> -And he saw that is wasn't a river but that he arrived at a land.
> -Did it have any houses?
> -Well... yes. Yes, it simply had one house and there were animals, that is, that at this plane there were only animals. But you can't see that they are fish, they are animals. For instance, I mean, they were not fish.
> -How come? When we catch them they are fish...
> -They are fish.
> -And down there?
> -Down there they aren't fish anymore. In the river they are fish, but, well, down there it's like on earth. I mean, you won't see that they are fish, they are chickens already. Different kinds of animals [are there], but in the river.

Other anecdotes agree with Apan's terrestrial aspects: "it is a plane [...] with a stone road, and very clean"; "there wasn't any water, that is to say, there was

water but not much". Apan represents both a terrene and an aquatic space or, rather, a terrestrial place at the bottom of the water. The existence of fowl stresses this terrestrial characteristic. The most common description of Apan is as a place that is very clean and tidy, with a better quality and more luxurious architecture, with lots of animals and inhabited by Water Lords. Its neatness and luxury suggests the place's special character as part of a different realm; the animal's presence relates to its role as the place of the Water Lords who provide food.

In Feliciano's tale about the swimmer, Apan is located in the depths of the Tetsokopil, near the community of Atlalco. Just like the water places dealt with in the previous chapter, these depths are sacred. The presence of the Lords of the Water ensures water supply even during the most prolonged droughts:

> Never, never. It doesn't dry up nor does it[s level] go down, nothing of that, it's always permanent, thus it is. Both [in] Xilitetsintla and Atlalco there is always water.

The characterization of Apan recalls the pre-colonial concept of a place of abundance called Tlalocan, which was conceived as a place of wealth inside or under a mountain or cave. Seeds, animals and water are produced during the everlasting season of fruitfulness reigning in this realm. From here, these riches are given to man so that he may make a living. Huastecan Nahuas are not familiar with the word Tlalocan, yet, one Nahua version from the southern Veracruzan municipality of Pajapán says the fisherman reached a place called Talogan (García de León 1969:307). In a Nahua tale from the southern Veracruzan area of Zongolica, a hunter reaches "another land" called "Tlalocan" after having pursued some deer he was chasing in the hills. Tlalocan is here mentioned as a place "not in this land but in another land", where the injured deer had fled. The man is ordered to stay and cure the animals he hurt. There is no mention of who is demanding this sacrifice, but it is said the man leaves the place only after the "father of Tlalocan" releases him. In return for his service, he is given a ring that produces money (Reyes García and Christensen 1990:87-101).

A characterization of pre-colonial Tlalocan may be helpful when trying to uncover meaningful aspects and understand current Huastecan Nahua tales about the Water Lords. First of all, the geographical location of Tlalocan seems to be relevant. It is a place inside a mountain --or, rather, a place on which "hills are founded that are filled with water"-- from which all the earth's rivers originate and gush forth (Sahagún 1989:800). Again, hills, caves, and rivers are interconnected, and the concept of Apan seems to be related

to Tlalocan. The specifications of these relations shall throw light on current viewpoints on water.

The female deity Chalchiuhtlicue reigned over pre-colonial Tlalocan. Sahagún says about her that "[...] she had power over the waters of the sea and the rivers, [the power] to drown those who went about in those waters and to create storms and whirlwinds in the water, and make ships, boats and other crafts that go about in the water go shipwreck" (1989:42-43). The friar then tells about the relationship between this deity and two other females, called Chicomecoatl and Huixtocihuatl, who were the guardians of sustenance, of food and drink, and of salt, respectively. The three sustained people so they could "live and multiply". Tlalocan was also the place where Tlaloc, the rain deity, lived (Sahagún 1989:38). All these figures may somehow be associated with current Water Lords who play protagonistic roles in Huastecan Nahua water tales.

Tlalocan was also the *tonali's* or life force's place of origin and destination (López Austin 1994). Those people whose deaths were caused by drowning, lightning or other phenomena associated with water --illnesses like framboesia or dropsy-- went to Tlalocan, the water world where existence was full of pleasure (López Austin 1994:9; Sahagún 1989:222). Through a discussion of the *tonali* concept, the sacrifice that the Water Lords request of the protagonist so he can enter Apan forever can be paralleled to a kind of death. This enables a discussion on current ideas about afterlife, human existence and sacrifice, as well as the Water Lords' role with regard to these issues.

Reciprocity and sacrifice in the tales about the Water Lords

One of the main themes in the tales about the Water Lords addresses the issue of sacrifice. Either as servants, partners or prey, people who come into contact with the Water Lords are expected to sacrifice themselves as they have to stay in Apan forever. Discourse on this theme varies in Huastecan Nahua narrative and in the tales and anecdotes about the Water Lords and their many aspects can be observed.

In the tale about the fisherman, the Lady of the Water justifies her demand. She asserts she wants a male nurse for her fish. Since the protagonist is the one who has hurt them, he should cure them as well. Assuming the fisherman injured the fish, he showed great discourtesy towards the water world and must try to repair the damage done. At first sight, the sub-theme of respect towards the other realms seems to be at play here; sacrifice is portrayed as a one-to-one relationship. The fisherman did not show the proper attitude, he took too many fish and hurt them without cause; his

impertinence damaged Apan and he is therefore punished. In other versions of the tale this notion of respect towards Apan is reproduced. The fisherman has caught too many fish and does not regard the water life's need to recover, or he is fishing in unfair ways, at times using fire crackers that kill all life in the water (cf. Sandstrom 1991:129; Aramoni 1990:52-53).

In a few Nahua versions, the fisherman catches fish and brings them to his mistress instead of his own family, whereupon the mermaid tells him to stay in the water (cf. García de León 1969:307; van 't Hooft and Cerda 2003:121-124). In these tales, her actions are a punishment for the man's social transgression against the moral order, but even more, they are the result of the inappropriate disposal of the food obtained through the water. The fish in the water are said to become ill when the fish caught are eaten by a lover (Taggart 1983:231-233); the mermaid drags the fisherman into the water only after he has given his mistress fish, and it is said that before "nothing happened yet, since the fisherman only passed to see her [the mistress]. Thus, he called and called on her, though he never gave her fish" (Flores Farfán and Ramírez 1997). In one version on the Tetsokopil, the woman is said to have pushed her husband deliberately into the water in an attempt to drown him and go and live with her lover. Here, the protagonist is explicitly punished for a social transgression, this time committed by his wife[227], yet an allusion is made to the unfair sharing of the food as well. Even in cases of conjugal infidelity, the main theme seems to focus on the relationship between Huastecan Nahuas and Water.

To people, the claim of the Water Lords, however justified, cannot be deemed fair, for it implies a permanent move into the Apan realm. The Water Lords's anti-social stance when demanding such a sacrifice can be illustrated by one Huastecan Nahua version, in which the fisherman stays in the water where he cures the fish he injured with otter's excrements. Even so, the Lady of the Water does not consider this reparation as sufficient payment. Once her fish have been healed, she sets the fisherman free yet demands a substitute in the person of his son (Güemes Jiménez, pers. com.; see also Flores Farfán and Ramírez 1997).

In the tale about the Tetsokopil, the reason for demanding a sacrifice is not disclosed, or justified. It seems that the swimmer has no other option than to obey the order, and he only manages to escape when he promises to send another person instead. Other Nahua versions show omissions on this point as well. In the Balsas region of Guerrero, Mexico, Nahuas believe the Lord of the Water does not need to have any motives at all to have people stay in the aquatic realm. The person who meets the Lord or Lady of the Water indiscriminately stays with them forever (Flores Farfán and Ramírez 1997). The mere intrusion into the water world seems to be the main reason for the

demand. Although the swimmer has entered this realm involuntarily, he should not have done so and must now face the consequences.

In the narration about the fisherman, the woman shows cannibalistic features as she aims to eat the fisherman's son (lines 69-71). The request to cure the fish seems to have been but an excuse to obtain food. The Lady of the Water wants a male and misleads the fisherman by insinuating that, if the father does not choose to stay, she wants his son to accompany her. In fact, she wants to devour a human. Not only does she demand a sacrifice, she too wants to perform one of the most atrocious and anti-social acts as well. In a tale about the boy called Buen Joven (lit. "Good Young Man") narrated by Don Gregorio, the facts of the sacrifice she has demanded are explained in the following terms:

"Kena, kena, pampa mitstemo mopapá nepa	"Yes, because your father is looking for you over there
ya mokueso pampa axmitskauato atitla.	he is sad because he didn't leave you in the water.
Atitla noponi mitskauaski para ika tetlamaski[228] motlakayo	He would have left you there in the water in order to offer with your body
ika xitetlajpalo ika tetlajpaloski[229] papá.	he would have given you as a present, your father would have given you as a present.
Pampa ya kineki uejueyi michime".	Because he wants very big fish". (van 't Hooft and Cerda Zepeda 2003:117)

The Lady's behaviour can still be explained in terms of mutual exchange, but in a broader perspective than just a recompense for the damage that has been inflicted upon Apan by hurting the fish. The reciprocity canon is given concrete form here: food (fish for the people) for food (a human being for the man-eating woman). Either to cure the fish or to be taken as food, the woman in the water demands a male in return for what she grants, otherwise she will not give seafood to the fisherman anymore. In case he wants to eat and sell fish for his sustenance, she has the right to require some kind of sacrifice from him. This sacrifice is conceived as an "offering with one's body" or a "gift" to the Lady of the Water. The idea of sending another person "to serve" the Lord in the Waters of the Tetsokopil could be interpreted along these lines; the person sent shall be serving in Apan forever.

At the beginning of the tale about Buen Joven, the provision of the fruits of the water and the request of a sacrifice in return is more explicitly stated. It is here understood that, once the sacrifice is made, the fisherman may keep on fishing with no restrictions. This turns the sacrifice into a kind of exchange

in order to obtain goods in the future. The father mentions this to his wife when justifying why he wants to take their son out fishing:

Tijuikase pero nama nechinama[230], nechinama, kiijtoua ne Buen Joven.	We'll take him but now [the water] charges me, it charges me, it said [it wants] Buen Joven.
Ne tokone ya ma mokauati ma nitetlamakati ne atitla[231].	So that our child may stay and I may feed the water.
Para san tlen michime nikinkixtijki, nama nitlauikak[232].	Because I've already taken out a lot of fish, now I owe it.
Ya nopa nechkuilise ne tokone pero nama na nijuikas.	It will take away one of our children, but now I'll take him.
Nijuikas para na nijneki para ma... para achiyok nikinitskis nopa uejueyi michime.	I'll take him because I want to... so that I may catch more of those big fish.
Nikinkixtis tlen uejueyi.	I'll catch some really big ones. (van 't Hooft and Cerda 2003:113)

People "owe" the Water Lords for the fruits they bestow on man, and the Lords "charge" Nahuas in exchange. The father says he had caught "a lot of fish" already, so that the time had come to give back something to the water in order to be able to keep on fishing. Through the gift of a sacrifice, the Water Lords would allow him to catch "more of those big fish". They told him to sacrifice his son.

There is not always a one-to-one relationship between the person trespassing, showing disrespect or desiring to catch more fish, and the sacrifice involved; it is not unavoidably the protagonist himself who should be sacrificed. The swimmer manages to return home and someday someone else will have to pay his debt when venturing into the Tetsokopil; likewise, Buen Joven's father sends his son. The Lady of the Water in Bonifacio's tale tells the fisherman that, because of the damage done, *someone* must stay (line 49-50), but it does not necessarily have to be the fisherman himself. The Lords of the Water demand the son who is most loved (Campos 1993), the only son (as in the example above and in the tale about Buen Joven), or tell the fisherman to choose (Flores Farfán and Ramírez 1997). Their claim is, at times, a cruel decree to hand over the protagonist's most precious possession, at others a giving in to the fisherman's insistent pleas to let him go, while sticking to their demand or, simply, a way of demanding a sacrifice.

In most tales, the protagonist is forced to send a family member, usually his son. In a society where the family is seen as an economic and social unit in which all members have a specific task, a punishment for one is a punishment for all. If the fisherman wants to keep fishing in order to feed his family, the sacrifice must come from that specific family, regardless of the

identity of the individual who was punished. The father sacrifices his son not only as a way of securing the sustenance for the rest of the family but also so he can escape this fate. As provider, the man is indispensable to his family and has no other choice but to think about their well being. If he failed, his relatives might perish, while sending a son would at least secure the survival of the rest of the family. This more pragmatic point of view may be illustrated through the tale recorded by Flores Farfán and Ramírez (1997) in which the fisherman decides to sacrifice his son after pondering his two children's age and economic role: his daughter is a little older than her brother and is already of some use to the man, helping out at home. Despite the grief this judgment might cause, he looks at his son and decides he will be be the Lady of the Water's next prey.

De Pury-Toumi (1997:91-124) makes a clarification when she associates eating or being eaten with the end of the world. The verb "to eat" in Nahuatl is *tlakua*, *tla*, an infix that means "something," and *kua,* the root of the verb "to eat" (to eat something). The word can also take the form of *tekua*, in which *te* is an infix meaning "someone" (to eat someone). *Tekuanime* (*ni* being a suffix that makes a noun out of a verb; *me* a pluralizer) are beings, like a tiger, a poisonous or otherwise deadly snake, or the Devil, who can eat people and, by doing so, destroy them without exception. They can put an end to humanity, as much as a *xili* or a mermaid/fish do this by flooding the land. This means that eating, if done by ferocious malignant beings, can be a destructive action that endangers the Nahua world and is able to terminate it. The flooding (by a deluge or by the water snake/fish and the *xili*) and the devouring of people (by the woman in the water) are two manifestations that represent one concept: humans' total annihilation The description of the Lords of the Water as *tekuanime* is the portrayal of a very serious threat to the future existence of the fisherman and his family.

The Water Lords demand from people as much as they give them; they seek to establish a balance in this practice. In Nahua worldview, maintaining the balance between people and water does not automatically imply human sacrifices as in the tales. Nowadays, Huastecan Nahuas try to sustain and affirm their interdependence by leaving food offerings at the side of a spring, a well or a river. When passing by a water place at noon, the time when the water beings are said to eat, people always leave a piece of their tortilla or whatever they are eating at the water's edge. Around noon, it is risky to use or drink the liquid, if one does not want to offend the Lords of the Water (Hernández Cuéllar 1982). In line with this metaphor of the food offering, in one version the son is to handed over at twelve o'clock (van 't Hooft and Cerda Zepeda 2003). As seen in the first chapter, food plays a crucial role in upholding the network of interpersonal relations in society. Festivals and rituals are usually accompanied by large quantities of food. Giving, receiving,

exchanging and sharing food are key words on these occasions, when Huastecan Nahuas create and confirm interpersonal ties among relatives, ceremonial relatives (godfathers, *mayordomos*, etc.), villagers, or other people from the area. To give food offerings or to serve a meal to the Lords of the Water is part of this pattern of exchanging food to strengthen relations, in this context between people and Apan. The food sharing principle is directly at work here as the power that sustains personal relations, this time across the realms: the water gives prosperity, and Huastecan Nahuas give comestibles to the water in exchange.

The anecdote of the fisherman whose arm got stuck in a hole in the riverbed supports this line of thinking. After being liberated, the man had to leave offerings to the water in order to be really free from the water's influence. At first, the woman in the water seems to punish the fisherman for being greedy. Greed is socially denounced as a negative conduct. However, the narrator explains that the woman in the water is not punishing the man for a social transgression towards his community but for his inconsiderate and excessive fishing that does not take into account the life in the water. The water gives, but one should not take more from it than necessary. The fisherman not only takes too much from the water, he does so without giving anything in return. His offerings to the water are a means to reestablish the constructive relationship between him and the water[233].

Thus, offerings somehow function as a substitute for human sacrifice. Once I was told that the Water Lords were angered because the fisherman did not have their permission to fish and he had not left the awaited offering before going fishing. In these incidents, the Water Lords are portrayed first of all as the protectors of water life; their actions are linked to the guard who is responsible for making sure the water is not treated in a disrespectful or harmful manner. Both the water and the life in it benefit man. Their use must be wise and sparing, and the Water Lords' gifts must be widely acknowledged through periodical offerings.

Of course, the Lords of the Water are not obliged to give people any benefits just because they bring them food. An offering pleases them, but does not automatically imply fulfilment of the matter desired; the reciprocity principle is not lineal. Illustrative of this are rain ceremonies. Though no longer performed on a village level in Huastecan Nahua communities in Hidalgo state, in the Huasteca of Veracruz Nahuas still hold a ritual called *atlakualtilistli* (lit. "the act of giving food to the water") in which they honour the water. Held in May, one of the hottest months of the year, they enact a three-to-four day ritual, in which they make offerings in the *xochikali* (the traditional temple) and the springs, and go up the sacred hill, the Postejtli, to give a series of offerings at different sites where diverse spirits live (see

Gómez Martínez 2002:108-113; Martínez de la Cruz 1999:75-97; for an example of the prayers see Reyes García and Christensen 1989:55-59). A rain ceremony is not celebrated to make it rain, it is held to tell the guardians that people are in need; it is meant to implore their compassion, to appease them and strengthen or restore the ties between humans and the water. Accordingly, an offering to the Water Lords in itself does not secure the water supply, yet it helps smooth the way and create optimal conditions in the relation between Nahuas and the water. At best, one may aspire for it to be a means that could trigger constant reciprocity. The guardians are whimsical even though they themselves demand respect, and they never are in debt with the people even if the latter treat them impeccably.

In the Xochiatipan municipality there are many different versions about people intruding into the water world. Some of these intruders come back alive, others do not. Often, the villagers declare that the protagonist entered the water world in a similar fashion to the fisherman in the tale, that is, out of curiosity. In these cases, it appears as if the Water Lords do not have the means to actively obtain what they want. The protagonists enter the water world voluntarily or at least reach Apan unintentionally, and the Water Lords do not have any influence on whether they arrive there or not. Only after the men have reached the bottom of the water, the Lord or Lady succeeds in making them stay. Occasionally, however, the person is said to have almost drowned and to have been close to death when he reached the pool's depths. Then, it is sustained, the Water Lords deliberately pulled that person into the water: "They seize you by the foot and draw you under, they pull you and you don't come up anymore"; "when they seize you [...] all the water begins to swallow and swallow [you]". At times, this seizure is explained as a whirlpool:

> You would go in there to bathe, and then the whirlpool would begin. And there you would enter in a hole. And you wouldn't come out anymore. A lot [of people] disappeared there.

In the tales believed to be fictional, this drowning is represented as the Lord or Lady of the Water pulling the victim under water:

> A big fish came and dragged her down by the foot.
> It went dragging her down.
> The wife went screaming
> they say she called out to her husband to help her get out.
> But they say that... he didn't help her [since he had promised to offer her].
> Up to the middle of the water, there they dragged her to the bottom.
> (van 't Hooft and Cerda 2003:123-124).

Thus, the Water Lords can also actively procure food and, by doing so, assert their rights. They wilfully swallow people and act based on the reciprocity canon. As the Water Lords pull someone into their domain, the victim is destined to stay there forever, provided he does not manage to flee.

In the tale about the fisherman, the Lady of the Water is presented as a malicious, devouring ogre with the ability, strength and authority to finish the world by eating or drowning all people. In the tale about the Tetsokopil, the man in the water is more vaguely defined, yet he also wants a human sacrifice. Both Water Lords express their anti-social character. At the same time, people depend on them for water and fish. Their presence in a pool guarantees a village's water supply (a drought would mean they have physically left the place), but it also endangers the permanence of individual persons when drowning or otherwise confining them to the waters.

Atonana (the Lady of the Water) and Atotata (the Lord of the Water) carry out their task together, one being the counterpart of the other. Yet, they are one being, or, more precisely, two parts of one central concept. This dual perception of the Water Lords, regarding their ambivalent conduct and double sex, can be more thoroughly broached when one studies the viewpoints on the mermaid in Huastecan Nahua narrative and socio-cultural life.

The Mermaid

When speaking Spanish, the Lady of the Water is often referred to as the *Sirena*, the Mermaid[234]. The Mermaid, who up to this point has been dealt with as a destructive force that settles near villages to make a sea, is in this new context the opposite: a protector of water life. This leads to a shift in her habitat; in these examples she does not belong to the sea but lives in springs and rivers. Thereby, she is not the same as the Mermaid who lives in the sea and occasionally comes to the space where people live. A villager asserted:

> There is someone who takes care of the river. That's why, that's why there are fish, you see, sometimes there are fish and sometimes there are no fish at all. [...] It's the Mermaid.

There is not much information on the Huastecan Nahua concept of the Mermaid. Sandstrom mentions it is the way people call Apanchanej (Water Dweller), the female water spirit, when speaking in Spanish. Apanchanej lives in rivers, streams and lakes, where she traps people entangling them in her long hair. Yet she also lives in the sacred hills from where she dispenses the water brought by the *pilhuehuentsitsij,* the honored little old ones (cf. the

auetsiltiani of the previous chapter), meaning the clouds (1991:250). The name Apanchanej is not recognized in the Hidalgo part of the Huasteca, but it is clear we are dealing with the same *dueña* or water guardian.

The term Apanchanej is also registered by Gómez Martínez, who gives one of the most elaborate descriptions of the Mermaid, according to Huastecan Nahuas of Veracruz:

> Apanchaneh is imagined as a young fish-shaped woman, light or dark skinned, with long hair tinted black; she possesses a fishtail with whirlpools and sea beings. Her clothes are similar to the ones used by indigenous women. She wears a white blouse with embroidery on the collar and sleeves in cross-stitches, adorned with conch-shaped and stylomorf designs and Grecian frets; her white cotton skirt presents an ornamental border on the latter end embroidered in red or blue, on which appear four *xochicuahuitl* (blooming trees); also, over the blouse she gets dressed up with a *kechkemitl* (cape). Her hair is plaited with multicolored ribbons, apart of which is adorned with a spindle of unspun cotton, tassels and *poloco* (sticks with curls); around her neck shine crystal necklaces, clams and shells. On her head, she wears a *mamalli* (shawl) in the style of a turban; her right hand takes hold of a *ohtlapatlachtli* (spear to tighten cloth) with which she fragments the clouds, provoking lightning and rains, while her left hand holds a *tzicatl* or pumpkin recipient destined for the storage of water (Gómez Martínez 1999:11-12).

Oral tradition from this part of the Huasteca has its parallels with the Hidalgo tales: in one account Apanchanej is highly annoyed because a fisherman has injured and killed fish, and on top of that, his wife also gives fish to another man. She sends the alligator, one of her children, to kill him; the fisherman escapes but dies afterwards (Sandstrom 1991:185-186).

However, there is another tale in this area about a mermaid called Achanej (Water Dweller) or Asiuatl (Woman of the Water), in which she teaches people how to work the land and gives them salt, fish and crustaceans. Rafael Martínez (pers. com.) recollected a tale, in which people highly respected a woman, called Achanej, who gave them food and counsel. At one point they began to distrust Achanej, they thought she had to sleep with the men who gave her the food she provided. Four persons were ordered to spy on her at night, and they followed her to a well near her house where she was transformed into a mermaid. In the water she combed her hair, and salt fell out of it. Then she shook her body and all kinds of crustaceans and fish dropped from it. After having been notified, the people wanted to reprimand and exile her, for she had given them "filthy food". They all went to the well and beat her up with stones and sticks. Then a figure called Ueyi Chakali (lit.

"big prawn") defended her and Achanej was taken away by thunder, lifting her up in a storm and bringing her to Tamiahua, a lagoon at the Gulf Coast, where she still lives. Ueyi Chakali told the people they had behaved so badly with Achanej that they would suffer droughts and floods. The crustacean told them to leave offerings to Achanej and to go to the sacred hills to ask forgiveness. And that is why the people now have to go as far as the sea to obtain salt. All the same, it is said that the well where she bathed never dries up, as it was Achanej's home. Now Ueyi Chakali lives there, who is like her *tonali* (life force) and gave his name to the well.

The tale shows the mermaid's antecedents and explains her role in Huastecan Nahua worldview as a provider of salt, fish and crustaceans. Her defender, Ueyi Chakali, reminds us of the *xili* or shrimp of the previous chapter. In the Hidalgo part of the Huasteca a similar tale is often heard. The following version is told by an adult man and relates how a woman sustained her family with seafood. We never quite find out who the husband is, but it is said that the couple lives with her brother, Saint John. In the tale, the woman prepares fish daily for her spouse and her brother, and the men want to know where she gets such good food. Saint John sends his brother-in-law to find out how the woman obtains provisions, and the brother-in-law spies on his own wife. He sees how the fish come out of her body, and reports his findings to Saint John. Upon hearing this, the rain provider becomes angry and leaves his home, going south. The tale is well known in the area, and people mostly classify it as a fictional *kuento:*

Uajkajki itstoya ome iknime	Long ago, there lived two siblings
se tlakatl, tlen itoka San Juan, iuaya iuelti.	a man whose name is Saint John, and his sister.
Uan nopa San Juan kiajsik[235] se itex.	And Saint John received a brother-in-law.
Uan kema ya kiajsik itex pejki iuan tekiti	And when he received that brother-in-law he began to work with him
uan	and
kintlamakayaya kuali pero axkimatiyaya kani kikixtiyaya tlen tlakualistli tlen kuali.	[the sister] fed them well, but they did not know where she obtained such good food.
Uajkino kimokuitlauijki, uan kipantijki, kema tlajkotona kichiuiyaya nopa tixtli.	Thus [the brother-in-law] spied on her and found that, at noon, she made dough.
Uajkino kikauayaya uan maltiyaya noponi kikixtiyaya nopa michime	Then she left it and went bathing, from there she obtained the fish.
uan kejna nopa kintekipanoyaya[236].	and thus Saint John's sister sustained them [her brother and her husband].
Uan kema kiiluitiyajki nopa..	And so [the brother-in-law] told..

San Juan iikni kiitak kualia nopa kichiua.	Saint John that he had seen well what his sister does.
Uajkino kualanki nopa San Juan uan kistejki, yajki ikatlatsintla. Uajka yeka[237]	Saint John got angry and went away, he went downwards [to the south]. Far away, y*eka*
nama peua uetsi atl, tlatomoni, pero nochi tlatomoni para ikatlatsintla kena porke noponi yajki San Juan[238].	now [when] it begins to rain, to thunder, all the thunder comes from downwards, because Saint John went in that direction.
Uan michime axkema tlamij pampa iuelti itlakayo ipankisaj.	And the fish never finish because they come out of his sister's body.

Although the woman has no name and it is not said whether or not she goes to sea, one can, undoubtedly, recognize Achanej in this version as a provider of seafood (yet not of salt). The text also unveils a tie between her and Saint John, who in this case is her brother. It is mentioned that the fish come "out of her body", which could mean that they come out of the woman's vagina, as it is stated in some variants. In another Huastecan Nahua version (*La Sal* 1982), the woman got salt from her nose, shrimp from her hair and fish from her armpits. In this last example, she lived with her two brothers, who chased her away when they discovered her secret. The woman left home, was taken away by a cloud, and and then settled in a place where she formed the sea. Gómez Martínez (1999) tells how lightning, thunder, clouds and wind took her to Tuxpan, her actual residence, and kept her safe. In all the different versions, a series of correspondences can be discerned. The Mermaid is usually a woman who provides seafood and, sometimes, salt to her relatives or to the community as a whole. She lives among people who, at first, think highly of her and are unaware of her extraordinary attributes. Her beneficiaries normally become suspicious and want to find out whether or not she obtains food in an orderly and decent manner. It would be unacceptable if she acquired food as a gift from a lover, or if she had bought fish with money of unclear origin (usually from a lover as well). When she is caught and it turns out that she herself produces the food, people in her surroundings do not understand the good fortune she bestows upon mankind. Instead, they feel deceived and chase her away. She goes to the sea or, more accurately, she leaves and creates the sea. As a result, the community now has to travel far in order to obtain seafood or salt[239].

The tales relate the Mermaid to the pre-Hispanic Chalchiuhtlicue, Huixtocihuatl and Chicomecoatl, the three pre-colonial female deities of the terrestrial waters, salt, and sustenance, respectively. By pulling persons into the water or confining them in her realm, she reminds us of Chalchiuhtlicue who reigns over the terrestrial waters of springs, rivers and the sea, and drowns people at will. Chalchiuhtlicue is Tlaloc's wife and is related to death, inundations, fish, lightning and thunder, primordial maternity and birth

(Báez Jorge 1992:283). By providing salt to the people, she resembles Huixtocihuatl, the guardian of salt. Sahagún tells how pre-colonial Huixtocihuatl, sister of the rain deities, was pursued and banished to salty waters because of a "certain disgrace", and there she invented salt (1989:131). Through the gift of water and seafood to people, the Mermaid parallels the acts of Chicomecoatl, the deity of sustenance. This last role is highlighted in the tales in which the woman gives away seeds and teaches people how to cultivate the field, that is, how to grow corn.

Huastecan Nahua tales about the Mermaid justify her capricious mood. It is said she is still angry for having been chased away, and she provokes droughts or floods to punish the people for behaving badly towards her. At the same time, because of her existence, people can always count on there being fish, shellfish and salt, for she is the mother of all the fruits of the water. Nahuas of the Sierra de Puebla tell tales about the fisherman in which he is still given riches, even if the wife gives the food to a lover, making the fish sick, or if he catches the river's last fish (Taggart 1983:231-237). The role of the Mermaid or Lady of the Water in Huastecan Nahua worldview is ambiguous; she has both positive and negative characteristics. By analyzing tales about the fisherman and its variants, mostly her destructiveness as a captor of people she has won a place in this area's oral tradition.

The Mermaid's tonal

Rafael Martínez declares that the prawn Ueyi Chakali is seen as Achanej's *tonali*. Nahuas believe every living being has a *tonali*, which is a Mesoamerican concept representing the life strength of each being, be it the earth, the sacred hill, the stars, plants, animals or any other entity that is alive. The noun *tonali* stems from the verb *tona*, whose general meaning is "to beam" or "to radiate" (Fr. *rayonner* in Toumi 1984:33). *Tona* also means "it is day", "it is warm" and "the sun shines". The concept *tonali* is usually referred to as the life strength of humans which gives vigour, warmth and courage to an individual (López Austin 1989:225, 228-229). *Tonali* is also associated with one's personality. As an inherent part of a person or living entity, the noun is always accompanied by a possessive prefix: *notonal* (my tonal), *motonal* (your tonal), and is therefore most often written without the absolutive suffix -i. It is copied into Spanish as *tonal*.

Against today's Catholic background, the tonal is usually amalgamated with the idea of a soul, though the term's Catholic meaning has been transformed. Nahuas of the Sierra de Puebla describe the tonal as follows:

> In the heat and light of the sun, the tonal sprouts and grows. The tonal gives us our life when we are born, our luck and our fate. The

> tonal is the part of us that goes everywhere. It lives in Talocan; it lives on the earth, in Talticpac. It lives in the sky in Ilhuicac, but it is only well on earth or in the sky with the sun. The tonal is that spark of life that it us. It is what makes you you and me me. (Knab 1995:42-43)

A newborn baby is not equipped with a tonal, but receives his or hers in a ceremony called *tepitsa* (lit. "to blow someone"), also known as *maltilistli* (bath), which welcomes a newborn and gives it its place in society through a series of offerings, the bathing of the baby and the blowing in its ear. Also, it is a sort of payment to the spirits whose realms have been defiled by the birth of a new human being, especially the ones of the earth and the water, so that they may "forget" was has happened and will not harm the baby in reprisal. The midwife softly blows into the baby's ears so that he may *tlakakis*, hear or listen. In some communities, the midwife whispers good advice into the baby's ear, so he may be obedient, strong or industrious (Hernández Cuéllar 1982:61-62). Tamales are distributed among those present. Thus, the notion of tonal becomes a social construction. The blowing or whispering furnishes the infant with its tonal, as each participant breathes a part of its own tonal into the newborn. The baby receives its life strength from the community, from the people it will share its life with, its work and its food. The ritual also establishes that the child belongs to the village, since the ritual is only performed when the child is born within the limits of the *komunidad*[240].

The tonal becomes stronger with age and the experiences it acquires (García de León 1969:288). Babies and young children have a weak tonal, but its strength will increase through time. The tonal enters a person through the crown of his head; therefore, this place represents one's tonal and is called *kuatonal*, *-kua-* being the compound element indicating the head. The place of the crown must be right on top of the head if the person is to be good person; an individual with an atypical crown is attributed to have a deviant personality. The farther away from the top of the head, the more deviant one's character is held to be, and it is said the girls would not want to marry this person even though he has shown no signs of deviant behavior, for it is most likely that one day he will turn out to be a drunk, a wife-beater, or even a murderer. Some people have more tonals (*kuatonalijke*), consequently, they have more than one crown on their head. This is not necessarily a bad thing, however, since these tonals may all be "good", yet the owner will have a split personality and it is believed his children will die because the parent cannot transfer a single and sound tonal to them. Only a ritual in the *tepeko*, the sacred hill, whose help is requested and in which a big, ritual tamale or *tlapepecholi* is offered to it, will keep the newborn babies alive in the future.

Both the concept of the tonal and the vigour it acquires are intrinsically related to a view of the world in which the agricultural means of subsistence is vital. The tonal is strengthened through work in the field and the activities derived from it. Contact with the earth, the working conditions in a communal way, planting and eating corn, all these empower one's tonal if carried out in a legitimate, that is conventional, way. The consumption of the produce outside the household, the stealing of food and other products, the unfair distribution of the harvest or any other activity that does not respect the community's ways of life, do not produce tonal and, on the contrary, generate weakness and may cause illness (Briseño 1994:46). It is the earth, corn, and water that cede part of their tonal and give it to man. Therefore, man must let these providers rest for a while after having used them so they can regain their life strength. The earth is left fallow for the necessary period. Part of the corn is put away for next year's sowing. From the water, one may only take the food that is indispensable for the family –not more. During the rites that are performed before sowing, tonal is returned to the earth; the rites held after harvesting restore the grain's tonal, giving the water back its strength.

The tonal is related to one's being alive, to one's personality, to farming life, and to one's place within the cosmos. Nowadays, there is a second meaning attached to the concept of a tonal in Huastecan Nahua communities. A tonal is a creature, customarily an animal from the forest, which is perceived as an animal impersonation, complement or counterpart of a man, and which shares the same life force. This "twin soul" protects man from the dangers of the forest (Weitlaner 1981:169). Nahuas believe that every human being has an animal tonal, although one might not always be aware of this companion spirit's identity. The kind of tonal someone lives with usually depends on his or her character. Weak individuals have impotent tonals, which can be birds or little mammals. Traditional curers mostly have powerful tonals, like felines or a thunderbolt, and may have more than one. Some traditional healers can even transform themselves into their counterpart(s) at will, and if a person has such a power, then he is called a *naual*. His animal counterpart is likewise named *naual*. The *naual* is the animal that guides this person when entering the other realms (see Knab 1995:88). A lot of tales are about persons who, at night, inflict damage on their fellow villagers in their *naual* disguise. If the *naual* is finally beaten and killed, the person it represents is found dead too. The two anecdotes about witchcraft told in the first chapter deal with this kind of transformations.

The tonal is an intrinsic part of man; he cannot live without it. In the same line of thinking, Ueyi Chakali is an intrinsic part of the Mermaid, who needs the shrimp in order to exist. It is her animal companion, which does not live with her, but is strongly related to her. Ueyi Chakali is the shrimp who

protects the Mermaid. People say it lives in wells, but they are not clear about what it does exactly. In contrast with the *xili*, snake or Mermaid of the previous chapter, Ueyi Chakali does not come to another realm. The space where it lives belongs to it, and its presence does not cause any problems. In fact, it seems to have a very positive role, because the waters where it lives are very deep and never dry up. Thus, it provides drinking water for the community. The Mermaid is capable of transforming herself into Ueyi Chakali, she *is* Ueyi Chakali. Ueyi Chakali is thus an appellation, representation, and complement of the Mermaid. In Rafael Ramírez' version, the shrimp is viewed as her replacement and servant, who watches over the well after she has left, and is at the same time the Mermaid's impersonation[241].

The water's tonal is what makes the water be water. The Mermaid's tonal is present in every stream, river or pool. In the tale about Buen Joven, this principle is illustrated when the protagonist's sister, after overhearing her parents' conversation about how, they have decided to offer the boy to the water, tells her younger brother to flee:

'Uan tijuikas se moateko para axkana tiatlitiyas ne amelko.	'And you'll take one of your water gourds with you so that you won't go drinking water in the spring.
Noponi tiyas	There will you go
san tlachikili tlachikili tiyas	only in the hills, in the hills you'll go
tiyati tiyati	you'll go and go
axkema xipanos atitla!'	don't ever cross the water!'
[...] tlen iikni nopa okichpil ya tlakonanki yaui yaui yaui	[...] and her brother, the young boy, he started to go and go and go
tlachikili tlachikili tlachikili yaui.	in the hills, in the hills, in the hills he goes.
Axkema kipano atl, ya tlakonana yaui.	He never crosses the water, he starts to go.
Kema kampa kiita eltok atl san kitlayaualkuili	When he sees that there is water he just turns around
sejkanok yaui	he goes somewhere else
tlachikili yaui.	in the hills he goes. (van 't Hooft and Cerda 2003:114-115)

Even if Buen Joven manages to run away from home in order to avoid being sacrificed by his father, he cannot have any more contact with the natural water from springs, wells or pools. The guardian is everywhere and will snatch him away from the water's edge at the first opportunity. On one occasion, a narrator commented how the boy, thirsty and tired from fleeing,

kneeled down by a spring to drink some water whereupon the liquid got stuck to his face and began to suck him into the water. In a Nahua tale from southern Veracruz, the Mermaid manifests herself in the little amount of water scooped up in a gourd (Campos 1993:96). The Water Lords are omnipresent in their realm.

Tonal loss

The concept of tonal is related to indigenous conceptions about the human body and its place in the cosmos (Aramoni 1990:51). The tonal is a non-material part of the human body and its vigour is a gift from the spirits. A person cannot live without his or her tonal, yet the tonal is able to leave the body, especially when dreaming or drunk, during sexual intercourse, or when one hits one's head against something. Likewise, it is vulnerable to attacks by entities from other realms who may take possession of it. The fortunes of man and his complement are strongly related. It is said that if a tonal is trapped, wounded or killed, the real life person he belongs to receives the same fate. When the tonal leaves a person, he is sure to die within days or weeks. After the tonal has abandoned the body and the person dies, it may go to different places, according to the causes of death. One of these places is Apan, the water world, where those who die of illnesses related to the water go. Apan seems to be a most pleasant place of death, for the tonals residing in this lofty garden spend their time playing, dancing, and singing. It is said that the tonals that go there are happy with their destiny, they do not wish to go back to the world of the living.

It is believed that persons who drown in the water do not go to heaven since their tonal "has to stay in the river". Their tonal stays in the river or pool and remains in the aquatic world[242]. From time to time, the drowned persons startle mortals at the water's edge and snatch away their tonal, their life force:

> My father stayed [drowned] in the river. Why would I lie to you, my father stayed in the river. And he hasn't frightened me [taken away one's *tonal*]. I've stayed [overnight] in the river and he hasn't frightened me. I've stayed there, everywhere. To me, when I'm drunk, I've more than enough *valor* [courage]. On occasions when being drunk I've stayed [overnight]. And I go to the river at times when I want to fish. At times my cousins are here, at times we make a *prieta* and we send it to the other side of the water, we cover it and we fish and there I'll stay. They tell me: "You stay, cousin, whereas we go, we'll bring you half a *topo*". "OK, you go", I'll tell them. "I'll stay", for my father was *buena gente*, he was a good person [so he will not frighten his son]. He was a fisherman, he was *buena gente*. But he did go fishing...

The water has its tonal and the tonals of drowned persons live in the water as well. The tonals of the dead persons do not usually drown visitors, since that is the Lords of the Water's privilege, but they may "frighten" the people at the water's edge. When this happens, the frightened person loses his tonal, which is then held captive in the waters. The besieged individual does not immediately die but becomes ill with *majmatili* (fright) or *susto,* as it is known in Spanish[243]. This illness may go unnoticed during the first days or weeks, in which the victim slowly begins to show symptoms like loss of appetite and physical weakness, he may become feverish or sleep a lot, and his pulse and the elbow are cold. It is said that when the person suffers this illness, the beating stops in these two places, which means that the blood stops flowing. The tonal is heat, so its absence must be cold; the seizure of the tonal is interpreted as the fright of the blood, "it is the blood that goes away", and nothing but an idle liquid remains (Aramoni 1990:79). Finally, the person is unable to work and perform his family and community duties.

It is at this point that family members go to a doctor in search of a cure. Their herbal teas, iguana meat, and other domestic remedies, adopted from traditional common knowledge, were of no use. The illness is probably worse than expected and the need of a specialist is evident. Depending on their insight on the probable causes of their relative's disease, they call on a doctor from the clinic or a traditional curer or *tlamatijketl* for help. In the communities, medical science presents an integrated way to combat illness, and if the family members detect or suspect only somatic features in their relative's disease, they will first try to medicate him in the clinic. Yet, despite all kinds of vitamins prescribed by medical science, a patient ill with fright will not recover. When the disease turns out to be more than just a somatic one, the family ultimately recurs to the *tlamatijketl.*

The traditional doctor will examine the patient, yet this examination is not merely physical. To determine the disease, it is necessary to inquire into the patient's past activities and his relationship with his environment, with the people of his household and community. Whatever the symptoms, the traditional curer will ask what the patient was doing when he fell ill: Did he go to some dangerous spot, such as a pool or the forest where spirits linger and inflict harm upon the people? Have there been any disagreements, disputes or fights among the family members? Is one of them not taking care of his duties in the community? Could someone harbour a grievance towards them? This information is necessary to know what illness is afflicting the patient and, it is just as important to learn where this has happened. If there is a problem or if a particularly controversial event has occurred in the family, this may provide the reason of the illness: a *vesino's* envy because of their riches, a deceased family member's restless tonal; the guardians of the earth, the river or the animals have been disturbed. After obtaining this

information, the traditional doctor can now establish what the disease is and where it was contracted. In the first example, the envious person might have hired a witch to do the harm, in the second example it is the deceased's *tonal* who has frightened the patient. The third case happens when a person trespasses into other realms, whether voluntarily or not. As said before, the illness may fall on any member of the household. The envious *vesino* will aim to bewitch the entire family, without caring which individual falls ill; the deceased family member's *tonal* will snatch away the very first relative it encounters; the guardians retain everybody who enters their realm. Children are more often victims of tonal loss because theirs are still weak and can be more easily taken. In all cases of tonal loss, the tonal has entered one of the other realms and is now retained by the guardians of that place.

In some cases, the traditional curer consults corn kernels in an act called *tlayejyekoa* (lit. "to measure something") or he lights a candle (*seratlati*) when he wants to find out more details to confirm his findings. The consultation of the corn refers to a ritual to "throw one's luck", in which corn kernels are tossed on a handkerchief covering a *kuartiya,* the wooden recipient used to measure. The *tlamatijketl* may now interpret the pattern formed by the kernels on the *kuartiya;* he sees the causes of the disease, its diagnosis, and its most appropriate cure. The candle is used to interpret the way it is burning, since it was lit for the patient during prayer. The *tlamatijketl* now also knows who has inflicted the disease on the patient, yet this information is not always made public so as to prevent retaliation, especially when dealing with a case of witchcraft. A third way to diagnose is established by interpreting the form of a sulfate stone melted on the *komali*, the clay griddle, through which one can tell the place or entity that inflicted the harm.

If the diagnosis is that the patient has "susto"*,* the traditional curer will report his findings to the family. He will tell them their relative's tonal has left the body at a certain moment, a guardian is holding it captive at a particular spot, and preparations must be made to recover the tonal and return it to the patient. The family will have to purchase the necessary items for the curing ritual called *tonaltsajtsilia* ("the calling of the tonal"). The curing procedure consists, firstly, in a *limpia* or ritual cleansing of the patient. This ritual, at either the *tlamatijketl*'s home or the patient's residence, is performed three times a day during three consecutive days, time lapse in which the patient may not bathe. The *tlamatijketl* cleans the patient with a potion of *uino* (liquor), nine types of curative herbs, and some ether. While sitting in front of the home altar, this potion is sprinkled over various parts of the patient's body. At the same time, candles are burnt and the traditional doctor invokes the guardians and persuades them to return the tonal. He will also pray to the Virgin and the saints so that they may help bring back the tonal.

The ritual's second part contains an offering at the site where the tonal was lost. If this site is very far away, the *tlamatijketl* may also make the offering at his own doorstep an appropriate place for such an offering, as it is the division between outside and inside or, metaphorically, between the Nahua world and the other realms. A little *uino,* a piece of bread and sometimes, a few hard-boiled eggs, are scattered over the earth, which means the *tlamatijketl* is feeding the guardians who possess the tonal. The food offering and prayer will replace the tonal, which in a way is also offered to the guardians, be it unwittingly. The *tlamatijketl* invokes the guardians in prayer, pleading for them not to mistreat the patient's tonal, to release it, and bring it back, so that his life course may not be interrupted (see Aramoni 1990:217-232; 246-247, Barón Larios 1994:67-73, and Segre 1990:219-234). The same ritual is held three times a day during three days. Occasionally, the *tlamatijketl*'s tonal travels to the guardians' realm at night, in his dreams, to persuade them to return the patient's tonal. A traditional doctor with more than one tonal has a big advantage in retrieving the lost tonal, since he has more entities who can help out in this respect[244].

Apan is one of the places of the dead and a space in which the tonals of the living are captured but may be returned to the Nahua realm. The different versions of the tale about the fisherman deal with these two aspects of Apan. In the real life anecdotes in which a person is said to have drowned in the water, Apan is mostly remembered as one of the worlds of the dead. The Lords of the Water capture a tonal and do not return it to the Nahua world; the person dies and stays in the water realm. The anecdotes and the recent true tales about people who almost drowned in the water but were then released, reminds us more of the value that the water realms have for people as a source of wealth; they deal with the relationship between the two realms. In all the examples described above, the Water Lords, granters of all water life, are angered due to several reasons that explain the seizure or retention of the tonal.

In the fictional tale about the fisherman, he goes after the fish and reaches Apan. His physical entrance into Apan as described by the narrator may be seen as a metaphor to indicate that the Water Lords capture the man's tonal, without which he cannot live. In the versions in which the fisherman or his wife give the seafood to a lover, the capture of a tonal might be the most appropriate explanation, as their tonal is weakened by the unjustified distribution of food. In the tale's many versions, the reasons for capturing the tonal vary, ranging from an obvious validation such as having to cure the injured fish to the lack of any explanation. In this last case, which is also present when dealing with anecdotes or recent true tales, the mere intrusion into the water realm forces the person's tonal to stay there.

After his conversation with the woman in the water, the fisherman returns home. The Lady of the Water has given him permission to leave Apan and fetch his son in his place. The fisherman's stay was momentary; the Lady of the Water captures his tonal but then releases it. His son's tonal, on the other hand, is meant to stay permanently in the water. The son is meant to drown as an offering to the water (see Foster 1945:202). Yet, the fisherman's son is taught to be a *brujo*, a witch, and one of the things he has learned is to change into his *naual* disguises. On the date scheduled for the tranfer, he turns into one of his *nauales*, a sparrow hawk, and flees from his opponent, the Lady of the Water.

When the swimmer of the Tetsokopil enters the water and does not come up anymore, his wife believes he has drowned. A permanent stay in the water is associated with death, and the drowned people's tonals remain in the water world. It is said that the Water Lords have captured one's tonal permanently or that they have eaten one's tonal. A parallel can be found in the behaviour of Miktlantektli, the Lord of the underworld, who is also associated with death. When Miktlantektli kills a person, it is said that this is done as follows:

> "¿Kenke para axkana nijkuiliski? Tlaxikó, ayi kipiya fuersa. Na kipí para nijkuiliski naí, nochi tlamantli tlen para kipiya para nijkuiliski uan nika nijpixtos".
> Pero axkana para kipixtoski sino que kikuaski. Axkana para kikuaski san sampa tlen nochi tlen kejna ni. Axkana, sino que solamente sa itonal para kikuaski. Uan kejna nopa kualiliski.
>
> "Why don't I take him [from God]?". He is tired, he doesn't have any strength anymore. I have what it takes to take him for myself, everything necessary so as to take him and I'll have him".
> Yet it is not so as to have him but to eat him. It is not that he would eat him wholly at once like that. No, it is only his *tonal* that he would eat. And thus he would eat it.

Just as Tlakatekolotl devours tonals and produces death in this manner, the Water Lords in Huastecan Nahua tales eat people's tonals and bring about loss of life. The Water Lords come across these tonals in more passive or active ways, either through a fortuitous encounter or a deliberate pull. These actions lead to a permanent or temporary tonal loss. In narrative, the Water Lords feed themselves on the people's tonals in the same way that the offerings feed them in daily life. These offerings restore the vigour of the water's tonal that has been weakened by giving its fruits. The giving and taking by the Water Lords is a crucial part of the relationship between Huastecan Nahuas and the water.

Review of the tale about the fisherman

The Water Lords are the guardians of the water world, that is of the water and of all living things in it. They protect the aquatic life, both of animals and of plants, and try to preserve their environment for the well-being of their protégés and of man, who will be able to enjoy the fruits of this realm. Terms that denominate the Lady and Lord of the Water as Atonana, "our mother of the water", and Atotata, "our father of the water", already imply that these creatures are looked upon as parents, not only in regard to the water life, but also to Huastecan Nahuas themselves. They are parents who care for their children, and give them everything they need, as in the example of the Mermaid, which provides people with water, salt and seafood. Their existence in a well, stream or lagoon guarantees the existence of water, as the reservoir is believed to have permanent waters. In return, the Water Lords expect offers and respect from those they support. As all parents do, now and then they punish their children for their mistakes, as when people do not make an offering or show the necessary respect.

The Water Lords are intermediaries between the Nahua world and Apan. The villagers pray to them when they need the water's help; they make offerings to them to strengthen the relationship between people and Apan; Huastecan Nahuas come in contact with them when they encounter them in the water. Atonana and Atotata are a woman and a man that carry out their task together, one is the other's counterpart and yet, they are one single being, or, more specifically, two parts of one central concept. They are also beings who, on the one hand, protect water life, the element to which humans owe their lives to a great extent, as in the case of Saint John's sister, but who, on the other hand, are prepared to bring about the people's ruin if they put the water environment at risk or in danger.

The texts frequently emphasize the appropriate behaviour that members of a certain society should have towards the water. Offences or, as people say, disrespect, are punished. In the text about the fisherman and his son, the magician, the offence is produced in various ways. The fisherman did not show the required respect towards animals when he did not catch the fish in the appropriate manner and hurt them without need; his wife did not show respect when she gave away the food obtained in the water sources; the fisherman incurs in an act of disrespect when he goes into the forbidden water space. Different explanations of how they disregard the rules open the tale to diverse interpretations and valuations of the water.

The concept of food exchange is one of the most fundamental underlying principles regarding interpersonal relations in society. In oral narrative, this principle is directly or indirectly present when expressing demands and actions ("you must stay because you injured the fish"), but, as time passes, it

is not respected and carried into effect. The antisocial characteristics of humans (not sending a substitute) and the water beings (capturing one's *tonal* without any justification) are more pronounced, and the texts expose the difficult and precarious relation between Huastecan Nahuas and the water. The Water Lords try to drown a person, eat him or keep him as a servant. When the Lady of the Water is represented as a Mermaid, as in some versions of the tale about the fisherman, she is not represented as the destructive Mermaid associated with Saint John that wants to inundate a locality or region. She is the opposite, the fish's protector who demands a servant. To the fisherman involved, the sacrifice is huge and the demand unjust. However, a sacrifice generates a promise of more fruits for the living. It returns tonal to the water so that Apan may fulfill its role as a provider of water and other riches.

The water represents a crucial but unpredictable element, and is a constant threat. Thus, the Water Lords are granters of fish and water; they give life, but are also connected with death. The tales give directives to deal with this unstable situation, especially through the emphasis on reciprocity by means of offerings. Though the Water Lords drown people and inflict occasional harm on the villages by taking a tonal, the water world as a place of death is believed to be a most pleasant place. The valuation of Apan in narrative is addressed through an access to this realm. No entrance into any other realm goes unnoticed, and the return to the Nahua world is always full of obstacles, be they time shifts, physical impediments, or a combination of both. On the other hand, the protagonist's return not only deals with the theme of sacrifice, but is also a means to corroborate and assess the existence of Apan, especially when the tale is considered a true tale or real life anecdote.

In Huastecan Nahua narrative, Saint John and the Mermaid or Lady of the Water are siblings, spouses or are connected through some other blood relationship. Both are related to water, though they seem to govern different realms. Saint John is the rainmaker responsible for the waters from above. He reigns over thunder and lightning, induces storms and other types of rain, and in his rage might unleash a flood. The Lord and Lady of the Water, mostly represented as a man and a woman, are also capable of flooding the earth. Yet, they are not related to the sea or the sky, but to the fresh water reservoirs on land. Both Saint John and the Water Lords are food suppliers, connected with farming activities; the Mermaid teaches people how to farm the land, and Saint John opened the mountain where the corn was held (see Chapter 4). Yet, whereas Saint John is often remembered in tales as one who bestows corn, the Mermaid is frequently represented in an anti-social posture.

Both Bonifacio and Feliciano say they do not believe the tales they narrated are true. To them, the Water Lords are fictitious characters that only come to life in entertaining tales that divert them for a while. Even so, their tales' content corresponds with prevailing notions on water and attitudes towards it. These notions and attitudes are corroborated through oral tradition by many anecdotes that are told in the communities about people who have drowned or encounters in the water, and by tales like Feliciano's, whenever they are considered genuine. Huastecan Nahua tales about the Water Lords, regardless of whether they are true or not, dwell upon themes that are most relevant to people; thus, they provide a means to present and discuss them in this society.

Conclusions

In Huastecan Nahua society, identity issues are articulated, in the first place, at the community level. They are conceived as ideas about belonging to the community and are manifested collectively through expressions like the organization of existing socio-political institutions and religious life. The community's reconstruction acquires significance as a social unit, expressing the ideal form of society in which all members are cooperative and respectful towards local authorities and way of (farming) life. This does not imply that other factors –other than being a village resident-- are not significant to people. It means that the community is one of the main factors which determine identity among present-day Huastecan Nahuas and that this identity is often articulated in daily life. A study of the identities concentrated on this level may help us retrieve ideas and values that are meaningful to Huastecan Nahuas when positioning themselves in Mexican society.

Parallel to socio-cultural reality, the ideas and values attributed to Huastecan Nahuas' residential identity are expressed in tale telling. The narration of events in which the water creatures that produce the floods were involved, reinforces the sense of community through the main character's presentation. By representing the villagers as a collective of protagonists in the tale, the audience has no individual hero to identify with for his deeds, intelligence or other personal skill and is gently pushed to dwell upon the community's values in daily life. Regarding the threat posed by the crayfish, Don Pedro explains how communal authorities and elders talked, and came to a joint solution: to engage a priest. The problem can be solved, when all inhabitants come together to form an alliance, and with the support of the village's local organizational structures. Thus, the performance of the tales promotes and reaffirms values like respect for internal local institutions, communal integration and cohesion, and the need to function in unison against the rest of the world. In addition, a shared past suggests the village's

past and present existence and this, in turn, suggests the future they share as an entity. The community stands out, explicitly, as the provider of a network of relations furthering the individual's well being, as well as that of the collective. The tales show that by cooperating, the individual forms part of the *komunidad* and will be protected by it. Expressions of residential identity can be found in other narratives as well, like for instance in the flood tale when the peasant takes along all the villagers, and in the tales about the Water Lords in which local events refer to water resources in each of the communities.

That this local identity has firm Mesoamerican roots was made clear in the third chapter. Active processes in which Spanish introductions were adapted to the local indigenous situation can be traced in both Huastecan Nahua socio-cultural reality and tale telling. Gossen already mentioned the cyclical view of historical processes in Maya societies, he linked this view to a "secondary progressive, linear theme" (1999:100), which creates the notion of historical progression in a continuously upward spiral. This Mesoamerican concept of time is retained in the Huastecan Nahua flood tale and is strengthened by other cultural concepts of pre-colonial origin, like that of the hare and its connection to the moon. Another Mesoamerican trait is the lack of a motive for mankind's destruction, which contrasts sharply with the Genesis tale in which God sends a universal inundation as punishment for human wrongdoing, that is, sinful behavior. Punishment in the tale was meant to be a reprimand, not for having survived, but for having built a fire (that is, they initiated time) and for eating dead animals (the act of cannibalism). These and other elements make the flood tale a representative exponent of diachronic processes of change in Huastecan Nahua society. In the flood tale, some elements have pre-colonial roots, others are borrowed from the Bible, others again are taken from sources that cannot be traced back directly to either of these sources. In other tales, many aspects, like the ideas about the sacred hill and the conception of the water realm as a place of death, reveal that even today Huastecan Nahua cosmology as articulated in the tales shows much continuity with well-known concepts of the past.

Several elements are adapted to current circumstances and allow multiple interpretations, when the old narrative structure is maintained, as in the flood tale –a true tale. The idea is for it to be meaningful to a large segment of society today. These multiple interpretations allow a dynamic practice in tale telling through which identity may be reconstructed in an equally dynamic way. When dealing with a fictional tale or anecdote, some of these elements are taken up again, and are used to discuss the true tale's meaning. An example of this practice are the widespread anecdotes about people who nearly drowned, which recall the Lady of the Water and the values of life and death she connotes even when her name is not mentioned, or when people

do not believe in her presence or existence. Thus, the practice of tale telling maintains a continuous valuation on issues that are important to Huastecan Nahuas.

The thematic criterion for selection on which this study focused concerns tales dealing with all kinds of water aspects. The aim was to see how water is conceived, represented and valued through tales. Rather than focusing on particular narrators and their competence, the thematic guiding line and my having come across tales that met this requirement, resulted in a series of tales from narrators whose profiles had not been sought deliberately. Even though the narrators that contributed their tales are not representative performers, their tales give several clues on how to understand Huastecan Nahua oral narrative in relation to water.

Tales about water show how Huastecan Nahuas position themselves primarily in cosmological relationships towards the outer world. Water is a cosmological category that defines time and space in society as well as in its oral tradition. Water paved the way for the present world to come into existence; time started in a new space after the retrieval of the universal flood waters that wiped out the former world. Today, the cosmos, as created after the flood, is divided into different realms, one of which represents the water world called Apan, which runs across communities in the form of lakes, rivers and wells. The belief that this realm does not belong to Nahua space – that is the community-- is marked in narratives by a temporal achronism. Values attributed to each of the realms help set them apart and define each one according to categories that are meaningful to Huastecan Nahuas. The realms outside the community, as well as the limits that separate them have positive and negative attributes as both benevolent and dangerous spaces. Encounters between Huastecan Nahuas and entities living in the other realms stress these attributes: all realms provide benefits to people as long as the beings living in them –including Huastecan Nahuas themselves-- do not cross the borders of the realm to which they belong. If they cross it, then the realms become dangerous and the creatures that belong to them become destructive or otherwise harmful entities.

Water is also a core element in the foundation of a village, providing it with a right to exist. Huastecan Nahua communities are built around the sacred hill that harbours water as one of its main components. The abundance of tales about the sacred hill's different aspects puts this concept in the foreground and expresses residential identity through tale telling. The sacred hill positions the village in the center of the cosmos; it constitutes the worldly axis that unites the four realms and represents the cosmological heart from which resources like water, food and germinative power emanate. The sacred hill, center of the community, is valued as a place of origin (*altepetl*),

abundance (water and corn), and fertility (rains, thunder and lightning that rise up from inside the hill).

In Huastecan Nahua tales, water is represented through a series of beings that take the form of animals (a snake, fish and a crayfish), humans (a man or a woman) and hybrid creatures (a mermaid). All these beings take care of a part of the water supply and are believed to have special characteristics because of their intimate connection to water. They live in two water realms, that is, in the fresh waters near the communities and in the sea/sky, a realm that is conceived as one. In narrative, the water creatures of Chapter 4 and the Water Lords of Chapter 5 are controversial figures that continuously threaten society. In Huastecan Nahuas' socio-cultural perception, the water beings discussed in Chapter 4 and 5 are not only harmful. The water snake usually brings fertile rains and the crayfish produces water; the Water Lords are mediators, responsible for protecting the balance between humans and aquatic life. The water beings in Chapter 4 did somehow get involved in anomalous situations, which make their otherwise profitable characteristics disastrous. In the end, the permanent springs that they left behind turned out to be a positive reminder of their presence. The Water Lords turned aggressive for want of some kind of compensation in return for their contribution as the ones who bestowed aquatic wealth. However, their presence in a well near a community ensures this community with a permanent water supply.

All these beings and their acts articulate cosmological dimensions of life, like the values attributed to other spaces, the community's foundation, the ideal amount of rainwater or ideas on the categories of life and death. Huastecan Nahuas found their perception of life in these cosmological dimensions, rather than than in the socio-cultural distinctions between themselves and others, such as mestizos or other indigenous peoples. Ethnic (Nahua) or regional (Huasteca) expressions of identity are not common in tales about water and are not believed to be relevant categories in today´s Huastecan Nahua society.

The order of norms and values is related to ideas and values of water; thereby, tales about water express social identities. The tales about the water creatures that flooded the land and the Water Lords verbalize a cosmological concern to uphold the spatial balance between the different realms and, consequently, the social attitudes and responsibilities of each living entity. The tales set the rules for interpersonal contacts between the entities of all realms. A person has to obey the culturally set rules of behaviour so as not to disturb his relation with other segments of society, such as fellow villagers, mestizos, spirits or guardians. This notion is clearly transmitted in the tales about the Water Lords. The central part of the analyzed texts in this paper is

the relation between people and aquatic life, more specifically the beings that protect this life. In these tales, the trespass consists of a penetration into Apan, sometimes in combination with a lack of respect for the water world, as in the case of the fisherman who fishes too much, defiles the water or does not distribute his catch properly. In addition, the tales about the Water Lords constantly remind us of the reciprocity principle that exists in the communities between man and the water resources. When these norms of non-penetration, respect and reciprocity are disturbed, the water guardians become threatening, anti-social characters that endanger the permanence of individual persons.

The personages in the water have an ambivalent and contradictory nature, especially when they require a sacrifice from people in exchange for the goods they have granted or when they start inundating a locality. In the first instance, the water realm becomes a place of death that demands the most precious gift from man, life itself, in order to keep producing goods for the living. In the second case, the creation of water leads to the annihilation of the local community. Excess is used to draw attention to correct or desired relations between the realms. The extravagant demand of sacrifice can be mitigated when the norms in force are observed. By giving an example of excess water that is successfully turned into a permanent water supply, the tales about the water creatures express the need of an evenly distributed and balanced amount of water to which Huastecan Nahuas have access.

In answer to different socio-historical and sociolinguistic conditions, oral tradition is dynamic; it changes and adapts itself to new realities. Consequently, the transmission, perception and even content of the texts show modifications through time. In Huastecan Nahua oral tradition, one may distinguish several ways to handle changes. With respect to modifications in content, the flood tale provides a good example of how an old tale is adapted to present-day ideas about water as the ordering principle of a new time and space. Elements that were introduced through time, such as the raising of the forest, show that elements of diverse origin have become meaningful, and are incorporated into existing tales to form a new, coherent whole. In relation to the transmission of the tales, we saw how the identification of the water creatures that establish themselves above a village varies according to each narrator's opinions; this changes the values ascribed to the protagonist and the events involved. The contributions from various narrators were relevant when discussing this kind of differentiation in society. Differentiation in perception situates Huastecan Nahua tale telling in the center of a dynamic understanding of oral tradition. In the tales about the Water Lords, a similar event is conceived as genuine or not, according to the narrator and his audience, so that tale type labelling constitutes a first

means to value the tale. Both the narrator and his audience contribute to this valuation during the interactive process of tale telling.

The dynamic character of tale telling leads to different versions of tales, to a multifarious understanding of certain elements, and, in consequence, to particular valuations of a tale with each performance. During the performance of the tales discussed, a community defines itself in relation to water and associates internal and external relationships to water. The tales show that water is a crucial category in Huastecan Nahua thought and that its study throws light on the way people reconstruct their cosmological and social identity. Though the concept of water is encompassing and central, the study of other concepts may contribute to the discussion on what is important in society. These concepts' specific role in oral tradition and their relevance for the reconstruction of identity will show more aspects of how Huastecan Nahuas position themselves in present-day society in Mexico. Also, they will show once more the importance of studying oral tradition as a means through which people express contemporary identity issues that concern their community.

Endnotes

Notes on Nahuatl language, translation and orthography

[1] Part of this pre-colonial pictographic writing system is preserved in today's designs of pottery, textiles, *amate* paper drawings, and other expressions of indigenous craftsmanship.

[2] In Nahuatl, all vowels have a long and a short variant. The vowels /o/ and /u/ are interchangeable in Nahuatl and refer to a sound between [o] and [u]. When used in diphthongs, /u/ is pronounced [w].

[3] The use of the letter /j/ stands for more than one pronunciation. It is the indication for the so-called *saltillo* or glottal stop, which in practice is pronounced as a fricative [h]. Examples are *tlajtoli* (word), *mijki* (he died), or *ijkatsa* (thus). Also, it is employed as an intervocalic [h] --an aspirate--, for example in *ejekatl* (wind). Thirdly, it is used when writing vowel length.

[4] In the Huasteca area, today's spoken variant is called Northern Nahuatl (Launey 1992:342) or Huastecan Nahuatl (Lastra de Suárez 1986:190). Beller and Beller divide this Huastecan Nahuatl variant into a western and eastern type, which makes the one spoken in Xochiatipan to belong to the eastern type (1978:vi).

[5] See Hill and Hill (1986:61-66) for a contrasting observation regarding the intelligibility of the 1982 alphabet among Nahuas living in the Valley of Puebla-Tlaxcala.

[6] To give two short examples of the new spelling: whether in Spanish the letter /c/ may be pronounced either as [k] (before -a, -o or a consonant) or [s] (before -i or -e), and becomes [k^w] in combination with -u and a following vowel, Nahuatl orthography has evaded this ambiguity and now writes /k/ when sounding [k] or [k^w] and /s/ when dealing with [s]. The "geminate l" (transcribed /ll/ in classic Nahuatl) does not exist in today's Huastecan Nahuatl and [l] is now written as a sole /l/, which eliminates confusion about its pronunciation either as [y] -as a Spanish reader would say it-, or as [l]. The classic drafted *calli* (house) may now undoubtedly be written and pronounced as *kali* [kali]. Independence from the Spanish has not been fully obtained, as other sounds are still based on the Spanish language system. For example, the writing of /u/ follows Spanish pronunciation rules as either [u] or [w].

[7] According to Nahua etnolinguists, vowel length contrasts are not always audible, which fuels the discussion on the need of a distinctive transcription of the long vowel. The omission of vowel length in modern writing is a heritage from classic Nahuatl, in which vowel length was not indicated either.

[8] Correspondingly, and apart from the foreign letters already mentioned, the use of proper names and topographical indications might give way to the occurrence of /c/, /h/, and /q/ in Nahuatl texts.

Introduction

[9] In Mexico, ethnic affiliation does not necessarily include racial descent, but is above all a cultural and social construction (Bartolomé 1997:23), whose dynamic and strategic qualities make it difficult to define ethnic groups in terms of conclusive settlement boundaries, a common language, or a unitive and homogenous set of beliefs and cultural practices. For the Nahua group the same situation applies. From

pre-colonial times on, Nahua-speaking communities were scattered across Mesoamerica where they formed a set of separate, often warring states, so Nahua cultural history cannot be reduced to the history of one single ethnic group and region. Today, Nahuas are living in states all across the country. Interaction exists within certain regions, yet contact between these different Nahua agglomerations is scarce or non-existent. Though they speak variants of the same tongue, which is more or less mutually intelligible, Nahuas can hardly be described as constituting a sole ethnic group. In the multiethnic Huasteca area, Nahuas live next to a major group of mestizos as well as Tének, Totonac, Otomí, Tepehua, and Pame peoples with whom they often have more traits in common than with Nahua peoples from other areas. I use the term Huastecan Nahuas to distinguish Nahuatl speaking people living in the Huasteca area from other Nahua-speaking collectives elsewhere in Mexico.

[10] Oral tradition has also been called folklore, verbal art or oral literature, among others. For a discussion on the use of these terms and their implications, as well as a concise outline of the most important theories for the study of oral traditions, see Finnegan (1992:1-52).

[11] While trying to approach oral narrative, I decided to use the term tale as a generic denomination of narrative (according to Bal's definition 1999:9), as a product of telling. This product may consist of the tape recording of the performance, the written-down transcription or publication of the recorded version, or the performance itself. All oral narratives discussed in this study are called tales.

[12] The term Mesoamerica as coined by Kirchhoff is conceived to be the one delimiting the pre-colonial space that now comprises central and southern Mexico and the greater part of Central America, in which several indigenous societies coexisted and succeeded each other. Besides this geographical definition, the term denotes the existence of a cultural unity --one that had developed slowly after people became sedentary--, since all societies had characteristics in common, interacted in various ways, and shared the same historical development. Here, it is employed to address both past and present characteristics shared by indigenous societies in this region.

[13] For the Huasteca area, publications on oral tradition have been limited to the presentation of diverse material, mostly narrative, in miscellaneous journals. This material is neither contextualized nor analyzed, and often lacks the original transcriptions in the indigenous language (for an overview on published Nahua oral tradition in this area, see van 't Hooft 1998).

[14] A separation between celestial and terrestrial water phenomena in two different chapters may seem somewhat artificial or arbitrary, but the two waters relate to and complete one another. Following the pre-colonial subdivision into two water realms, it was Tlaloc, the rain deity who governed the celestial domain. Chalchiuhtlicue, his female counterpart, was the deity of fresh waters on earth. This Mesoamerican division has been retained in Nahua oral tradition.

Chapter 1

[15] Regarding transportation and other services, one must take into account that 1994 was the year when the Zapatista rebellion broke out in the Mexican state of Chiapas. Because of the fear of other indigenous uprisings, the federal government promoted a series of services in rural areas where other violent outbreaks could be expected because of comparable social tensions, economical distress and a situation of political marginality. One of these areas was thought to be the Huasteca.

[16] In the Hidalgo part of the Huasteca, mestizos cover a heterogeneous group of mixed descent. Schryer (1990:51) mentions an influx of Spaniards and other Europeans, Arabs from Lebanon, as well as North Americans to this area, which means that the typical mestizo, a person of mixed Spanish-Indigenous blood, is only a part of the group called mestizo. The term is here employed as a denomination for non-indigenous people in general. As shall be seen further on, this does not always imply a purely ethnic distinction.

[17] *Tiitstoke*, from *itstok* (to be, to live). The translation of the verb as either "to be" or "to live" depends in each of the following cases on the narrator´s interpretation.

[18] In Nahuatl, plural forms are only applied to animate beings, so the noun *komunidad* (community) will always be used in singular even when referring to two or more communities.

[19] *Ualtlejkoke*, from *tlejko* (to go up, to ascend, -FK). The infix *-ual-* indicates a movement towards the speaker, which means that the narrator is living in the upper part of the village, since the ones near the riverside came to him when moving.

[20] *Tomotlamakaj* derives from *maka* (lit. "to give something to someone", -FK) and, adding the infix -tla-, as *tlamaka* refers to the serving of food. In a broader sense and as a reflexive verb, it also signifies the way to sustain oneself.

[21] *Mopaleuia* (lit. "to help each other") is how Nahuas call the work in the field when they are paid by someone else.

[22] *Totlayime* derives from *-tlayi*, uncle (father or mother's brother). In Nahuatl, nouns implicating an intrinsic relationship with the speaker, such as body parts or kinship terms, may never be expressed without the obligatory use of a possessive pronoun. The possessive pronoun of the first person in plural (*to-*) is used to address these relationships in a less literal interpretation. In this manner, the meaning of *totlayi* (lit. "our uncle") is extended to all male persons, *totlayi* also being any man in general. This feature also explains the irregular way of forming the plural of this noun: the possessive pronoun is here seen as an intrinsic part of the word and thus pluralized as if it were a non-possessed form.

[23] *Apile*, composed form derived from *atl* (water) and *pileta* (Spanish for basin or constructed water place).

[24] *Altepeko* (from *altepetl*, village or town, -RS, and locative *–ko*), translated by the narrator as the municipality head. In the municipality, only the *cabecera* is called *altepetl* because of its size and services.

[25] The noun *ueuentsitsiya* (from *ueue*, old man) is here translated by the narrator as grandfathers, probably to give the noun a connotation of affection and, with this, express the reverential way of addressing the elderly in Nahuatl.

[26] *Kalpanoa* (lit. "to go by the houses") means to go from place to place, visiting people.

[27] *Tlaixpiyali*, from *ixpia* (lit. "to have eye", to watch or observe) means the observance of a ritual.

[28] *Titlajtlakolchiuaj*, derived from *tlajtlakoli*, a noun the narrator said it means sin, and *chiua*, to do.

[29] *Tonantsi* (lit. "our revered mother") is the Nahuatl name of Mexico's patron saint the Virgin of Guadalupe, but is here translated by the narrator as all saints in general.

[30] *Altepetl* is here translated by the narrator into Spanish *ciudad*, a city. On the concept, see Chapter 4.

[31] *Ualtiuala* is derived from *-ual-,* an infix indicating a movement towards the speaker and the verb *uala*, to come. The action thus stresses the movement of coming to the community.

[32] *Atoli* (from *atl,* water, and *toloa,* to swallow something) is a beverage made of cornstarch, at times flavored with a kind of fruit, seed or herb. The drink is often prepared at communal celebrations when it is used as both an offering and a treat to those attending.

[33] A tamale (from Nahuatl *tamali*) is a kind of steamed empanada, made of corn dough and filled with meat, beans or other ingredients, seasoned with chili and wrapped in banana leaves, corn husks or *papatla* leaves (see note 37). Their size varies from little ones wrapped in one corn husk, to some with a 1.5 meter diameter as in the case of the *sakauili*, a huge tamale made during special celebrations.

[34] *Posada* is the Spanish term for lodging, and is a representation of the way Joseph and Mary went asking for lodging in Nazareth, when their son was about to be born. The village accompanies the persons who hold the statues of Joseph and Mary when they go from door to door. At each door, the couple asks permission to stay but is turned down until they come to a house where they are given shelter. The residents of that house receive the two statues, adorn them, and pray a rosary. The next evening, the statues are taken from this home and the *posada* repeats itself until, on the 24th of December, the couple is taken back to the church.

[35] *Jues* (from Sp. *juez* or judge) is the name of the village´s official representative in the municipal administrative system. In 1986, this position became named *delegado* (lit. "delegate" or "representative"), yet the people continue to use the former term (cf. Schryer 1990:57). The person in charge of public order, the *delegado* meddles in local disputes, puts people who commit offences in the local jail or turns them in to higher authorities in the *cabecera*. He also leads the daily meetings, proposes tasks for the *komuntekitl,* charges fees to those who did not comply with their communal duties, and organizes the village in case of a death. Three assistants help him perform his task.

[36] The narrator refers to the confirmation of the persons whose turn it is to dig the tomb and arrange the *velada*, the vigil for the dead person.

[37] A *papatla* is a tree with long and green leaves that are used to wrap up tamales.

[38] *Uino* (sugarcane liquor) is omnipresent as an offering in rituals and as a means of social exchange among men. See Lomnitz Adler (1991) and Szeljak (2002) for a comment on cultural use of alcohol among the indigenous population in the Huasteca area.

[39] *Brujerías*, a Spanish word for witchcraft. The Nahuatl term is *tetlachiuia* (lit. "to do something to someone") from *tlachiuia* (to bewitch someone, -RS).

[40] *Tepajtiani* is the plural form of *tepajtijketl* (which root is *pajtia*, to medicate), he who medicates or cures someone.

[41] *Axkuali techiuilijketl* (lit. "he who does things to someone that is not good") is a common Nahuatl term for a male or female witch, also known as *tetlachiuijketl* (lit. "he who does something to someone"), in Spanish called *brujo*.

[42] *Tlen mopajtiaj* (lit. "those who are curing themselves") refers to the patients.

[43] *Tlatemoua* (lit. "to look for something" or "to search for something", -NS) concerns a ritual oracle in which the traditional doctor consults the corn in order to find out several aspects of his patient´s illness (for a short description of this practice, see Chapter 5).

[44] For an explanation of the concept of *tonali*, an ethereal part of man that may be defined provisionally as one's life strength that is responsible for a person's vital power, physical growth, temperament and cognition or rationality (Klor de Alva 1993:184), see Chapter 5.

[45] The meaning of the verb *xoleua* is not clear to me, for the usual translation as "to get skinned up by a blow", or "to peel something" (-AM, -FK, -RS) does not fit the context, and neither do the renditions "to break, ruin, spoil, throw, hurl" (-NS). Bonifacio says the verb refers to the performance of an act called "presentation", in which the traditional curer addresses the entities living in the other realms and implores their help.

[46] A *tepeko* is a sacred hill (see Chapter 4).

[47] *Kionpojpouaj* (they go clean him/her) stems from *pojpoua*, to clean something, combined with a directional suffix -on- that indicates a movement away from the speaker.

[48] *Toaui* (lit. "our aunt") is used to address any woman in general (cf. note 22).

[49] The *komisario ejidal* represents the village in cases of land disputes. Whenever a problem comes up between villagers or, more often, between the village and another *rancho*, he is the first one who is responsible and must look after the matter.

[50] Arroyo Mosqueda confirms this union of two settlements, but, unfortunately, does not mention its motive (1993:39). The introduction of electricity took place during the mentioned period: the community benefited from its geographic strategic position, when electricity poles were installed on its territory to bring this service to the municipality head from the adjacent municipality of Benito Juárez in Veracruz.

[51] Hernández Beatriz (1989:VI) lists seven communities that disappeared recently in the municipality, but does not refer to any time span of this process.

[52] In colonial times, people living in these higher parts of the Huasteca "escaped the worst effects of the onslaught of forced dislocation, excessive tribute demands and the introduction of slavery", for cattle ranches and their implications on the local population were present in the coastal zone, predominantly. This way, many of the existing communities in Xochiatipan were able to persist through this period (Schryer 1990:76-77).

[53] Some narrators claim that their *rancho* was among the first to be established (at times by an extraordinary old couple), ranking their settlement above others in a time metaphor in which antiquity is valued over modernity. Others note that their ancestors have begun building the town hall and church in the *cabecera*. Even though they are not living in the municipality´s most important settlement, their initiative certainly contributed to its present existence and confers status to the *komunidad*. Others again say that their village was a refuge for famous heroes of the Mexican Revolution, which concedes them a place in one of the most glorious periods in Mexican history. Two of these recollections are published in Miranda San Román (1982:31-34) and Reyes Antonio (1982:31-34).

[54] Galinier (1990:111-115) asserted already that, even if this spatial dichotomy in the village stems from colonial times (as demonstrated by Foster), the values attached to this division reflect Mesoamerican ideas of dualism, with its stress on complementarities, asymmetry and the antagonistic features of this opposition. Discussing the particular situation of the Huastecan Otomí, he mentions how some villages base their political-religious organization on this spatial division. In the Nahua villages studied here, no such disposition was observed and might have been lost.

[55] In Nahuatl, the house as a material living space is called *kali* and represents the construction --the architectural structure in which people live. This term is adopted when referring to the house´s physical features or existence, as for instance when the narrator who told about the foundation of the village relates how, at first, there were four to five *kali*, houses (line 410). A second term used to address the house is with the noun *chantli,* which refers to the home, the residence as a place of origin and as a place to live in. The meaning of this term is twofold given the situational context. When speaking to a person from the village, *nocha* (my home) refers to the home as a distinguishable social unit within the village. When the interlocutor lives in another village, this same term will be interpreted on the level of the community and stands for the locality as a place of residence or origin. According to Nahuatl grammar rules, the noun *chantli* cannot stand alone and must always be accompanied by a possessive pronoun, a feature that reflects the conception of the home as an inalienable part of man (see note 22) and as a place of belonging. This place of belonging involves the people living in the same household or community,

and thus addresses their belonging to a collectivity. Derivations like *mochantia* (to settle) or *chane* (dweller, resident) equally reflect a personal bond with the place. For a description on Nahua housing and construction, see Raesfeld (2001:136-144) and Sandstrom (1991:107-114); Samyn (2000) includes the construction process of a *sakakali* (lit. "house of fine grass").

[56] Besides the *kaltokayotl* principle, it is costumary to give two names to a child; one is the official, registered one, the other is the "name of affection", which is the one by which he will be identified in its household and village. If this aspect is added to the family´s *kaltokayotl* or house name, the internal system by which a name is given completely changes a person's identification. Perhaps one of Bonifacio's reasons for omitting this pattern of spatial divisions and naming in the village is, precisely, its local character, which is only meaningful to the insider.

[57] The noun *maseuali* does not necessarily denote a sense of poverty, yet when it is contrasted with a category of a rich person it means poverty. In a strict sense, there is no Nahuatl synonym for a poor standard of living, though derivates of the verb *tolina* (to crave some particular thing to eat, -FK) are often translated as such. A discussion of the concept and etymology of *maseuali* can be found in León-Portilla (1993).

[58] Cases of changing identities in the Huasteca area are increasingly present. Bonifacio once complained of being called a *koyotl* behind his back, for having had the opportunity to study a career. His stable income as a coordinator of the federal literacy program and the fact that he does not have to participate in the *faena* during his yearly two months' stay in Tampico for his studies, could have contributed to his fellow villagers' different perspective. Migrants who return to the community with cars, pay off their *faena* duties, and engage in other than agricultural activities are considered to have become *koyome*. Though this label is not openly told towards the person concerned, it may be shared among most of the villagers.

[59] The use of the terms *maseuali* and *koyotl* as described here is, of course, a dichotomous labeling that varies according to the speaker´s position. A person who is a *koyotl* in the eyes of a *maseuali* will consider himself to be "*gente de razón*" (people of reason), yet it is also possible that he, according to the situation, prefers to manifest himself as a *maseuali*. As a "*gente de razón*", he will call the *maseuali* "*indio*" (Indian, which in Spanish has a strong pejorative connotation). Though it is not always visible to an outsider who is *maseuali* and who is not and, in addition, the labeling is not entirely based on ethnic principles and a person may shift from one category to another, people in the region distinguish who is who in their surroundings and continue to use this categorization.

[60] Of the persons in the village who are economically active, 83% are said do not earn the minimum wage established for the state of Hidalgo, 13% said they earn from one to two minimum wages, and 4% earn from two to five minimum wages (INEGI 2000a).

[61] In 2002, the average rate of the Mexican *peso* was $0.11, which means that 35 pesos are a little less than 4 dollars. Less often, women also work as day laborers in the field, earning 20 pesos a day.

[62] Although only a few migrants establish themselves definitively in the city, their number is increasing. The scarcity land available for the growing number of people that is entitled to a plot has provoked a change in the custom that says that every male, when he turns eighteen, automatically is assigned a piece of land. Today's young generation does not acquire land in the community anymore. Deprived of their source of labor within the village, youths have to go out to find jobs elsewhere.

[63] For the Veracruzan part of the Huasteca, Gómez Martínez documents how, from the beginning of the sixteenth century on, all attempts to evangelize indigenous peoples failed because of the large extent of the territory (with a poor infrastructure, extreme climate, high insecurity, and other discomforts), armed conflicts, and indigenous resistance to being converted, which resulted in but a superficial conversion to Christianity (2002:42-55). It was only until the seventies that a new Catholic evangelization movement took up this task with some success (Gómez Martínez 2002:55; 143-148). For the Hidalgo part of the Huasteca, especially the municipality of Xochiatipan, Hernández Cuéllar sets this date in the early eighties (1982:9). On the issue of Nahua Catholicism, see Chapter 3.

[64] The dancing with the dressed-up corn during the *elotlamana* merits a parenthesis on Nahua ritual dancing. There are several occasions in which ritual requires dancing. This is done in two ways. First, almost every village has a male dance group which is almost always present when there is a local celebration or ritual that involves dancing, irrespective of its character. Second, there are dances that are only performed according to the occasion, such as the dance of the *mekos*, the disguised ones, who dance during Carnival. Dancing is seen as a religious expression through which communication with the entities that reign over life´s different aspects is established when Nahuas devote all their energy, sweat, and fatigue to them. This devotion can be interpreted as a kind of offering, if the term is interpreted as an oblation meant to establish a means of communication between the profane and the sacred. Indeed, dancing is the foremost way of offering, since through dancing Nahuas turn their own bodies into offerings. And offering is the foremost way of paying homage to the entities, since they demand this in return for the bounties they bring (see Chapter 5). For this

reason, dances are a crucial factor in most ritual acts and are still a vivid part of Nahua culture. For a collection of short descriptions on various ritual dances in the Huasteca, see Sevilla (2000). More elaborate accounts of the *elotlamana* ritual can be consulted in García Franco (2000), Hernández Cuéllar (1982:74-80), Ixtlamahua (1982), Miranda San Román (1982:98-105), Montiel Pascuala and Güemes Jiménez (2000:171-172), and Williams García (1966).

[65] Primary schools were institutionalized in the Huasteca area in the fifties, yet the schooling index is still low --3.73 years—while that of illiteracy is still high, some 59% of the population over fifteen years old (INEGI 2000a). People can continue their education at the *cabecera*, where there is a secondary school and *telebachillerato* (television high school that has one teacher per grade who works by means of television programs provided by the Ministry of Public Education).

[66] Klor de Alva thinks that the patron saint´s figure substituted the pre-colonial *tlaquimilolli,* the sacred bundle containing relics and/or belongings of a town or village´s divinized founder. This bundle was a medium through which the group acquired its legitimation, protection and shared identity. Secondly, it substituted the tutelary guardian of the *calpulli* or community. Then, as now, the tutelary guardians are the "immediate, familiar gods [sic] with which the community identified and around which they articulated the rites and beliefs that guided their everyday spiritual and secular lives" (Klor de Alva 1993:179).

[67] Nahuas use the term *meko* as a verb which means to disguise. In speculative note, Osorio Cruz (2002:147) gives a few possible translations of the word, ranging from "filthy" --n an allusion to the dancers´ once painted bodies-- to a derivation of *chichimeka*, the noun used to address the semi-nomadic peoples living in the arid zones north of Meso-America. As the Huasteca area borders this zone, occasional raids from these semi-nomads are likely to have been either a common experience or a common fear. When seeing the Carnival in the Huasteca as a rite of reversal (Provost 1975), the festivities might be, partly, a remembrance of these times.

[68] For extensive studies on the Nahua Carnival, see Báez-Jorge and Gómez Martínez (1998), Reyes García (1960), or Provost (1975). Short, descriptive articles may be revised in Sevilla (2002) --which includes local tales about the origin of this celebration-- and Williams García (1997:127-129).

[69] The term *axkuali* (lit. not good) already indicates that good and bad are not seen as opposites, but as contingent realities, the absence of one representing the presence of the other: the concept of evil does not exist as an ethical absolute contrasting with good. See also, for example, *kuajkualtsi* (beautiful), whose negation means ugly, and *ajuiyak* (delicious), whose negation stands for a bad taste.

[70] Transcriptions and translations of a series of prayers to Tlakatekolotl are inserted in this publication (Báez-Jorge and Gómez 1998:79-89).

[71] Nahuas say number seven represents "the center, it is like perfection". The corn spirit Chikomexochitl (lit. Seven Flower), source of sustenance, is related to this number. Since precolonial times, the number is associated with abundance and riches (Anders and Jansen 1988:67). According to Sahagún, seven is the number of good fortune and prosperity, the number of the pre-colonial deity of sustenance (1989:250).

[72] Crayfish are believed to make water. The animals are put in a glass of water so they will not die quickly; when released, they will provide the deceased with the liquid since they dig into the earth and create a pool (see Chapter 4).

[73] Lok (1991:33-50) offers a more detailed description of the activities following a death among Nahuas of the Sierra de Puebla, which show considerable similarities with Huastecan Nahua rituals and ideas concerning death. For the Huastecan Nahua area, see Barón Larios (1994:30-36;58-62) and Hernández Cuéllar (1982:90-94).

[74] In contrast, Tlalocan still plays an important role in narrative, as it is associated with the realm of the Lords of the Water. In these tales, the water realm often turns out to be a place of death (see Chapter 5).

[75] The noun *Xantolo* appears to stem from Latin *sanctorum* that somehow was borrowed and incorporated into Huastecan Nahuatl and came to signify the festivities around All Saints' and All Souls' Day. Publications on the festivities around Xantolo may be found in Ramos Castañeda et. al. (1992), Ruvalcaba (1992), and Tanaka (1995), among others.

[76] However, see Raesfeld (2001:93,193) for an opposite view. She says that people respect the Xantolo rituals for their dead family members "as long as they remember them": this extends to three or perhaps four generations.

[77] According to the villagers, *kokolotsi* means the act of asking for alms, *chiua* being a transitive verb meaning to do or to make something.

[78] Examples of Huastecan Nahua tales about people that disregard the Xantolo celebration are included in Sevilla (2002:221-229).

[79] On Nahua concepts on disease and medicine, see Gréco (1993), Reyes Antonio (1982), or Sandstrom (1978).

[80] A *tlamatijketl* or wise man is a person who knows how to speak to the beings in the other realms (cf. the speech to Chikomexochitl during the ritual of the young corn). A *tepajtijketl* is a person with exclusive knowledge on medicine. Some of his treatments may include prayers to the beings from other realms. A *tlamatijketl* is often also a *tepajtijketl*, yet not all *tepajtini* are *tlamatini*.

[81] Envy is a very dangerous feeling for a community´s well-being, for it disrupts its unity, yet it is always latent in a marginated society that has no share in the wealth accumulated by others. It is seen as the first cause of witchcraft (cf. Signorini and Lupo 1992).

[82] A dialogue between a potential client and a witch in which the latter is asked for his services is reproduced in Knab (1995:1-11). In this study, Knab gives an account on ideas and practices of Nahua witchcraft, curing and curers in relation to their worldview and socio-economic context.

[83] Galinier (1990:121) would classify this type of *cargo* system under the one he denominated as simple, in which a relatively homogenous group functions on an equal basis. Theories on the functioning of the *cargo* system vary; some say the system provides a way of leveling existing discrepancies in riches within the village (for the ones with the *cargo* spend their private earnings); other say the system recognizes and justifies local social differences since the persons with a *cargo* gain prestige and status in the village. For a more elaborate description on the selection process and tasks of each of the authorities in a Nahua village, see Romualdo Hernández (1982:57-93).

[84] Progresa is paid on a two-monthly basis to the mothers of school-going children; the idea is to prevent the men from using up the resources --often they have been found to spend them on drink-- and is therefore seen as a government aid to women (lines 378-380). In 2002, the name of this program was changed into *Oportunidades* (opportunities).

[85] The *ejido* type of land tenure was introduced after the Mexican Revolution, and originally consisted of a grant of usufruct rights of land officially owned by the state. The grant was made to a locality or group of localities and consisted of the inhabited nucleus or nuclei, and parcels of farmland, pastures and woods. The parcels were divided among the *ejidatarios*, the male heads of the family, who would work them, and part of the land was reserved for communal purposes. In 1992, a reform of Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution made it possible for individual *ejidatarios* to sell or rent the parcel or parcels to which they had usufruct rights, turning the *ejido* into *de facto* private property.

Chapter 2

[86] Though not commonly used, the term *tlatempoualistli* (tale) is the one officially recognized and employed at primary schools in the Nahua part of the Huasteca to address narratives.

[87] The noun *tlamantli* (thing, things) refers to any tangible or intangible matter. *Uajkajki* is an adverbial clause indicating a former time, long ago. *Pano* can be either a transitive or an intransitive verb meaning to pass or to cross, which is here applied in a wider sense and becomes "to happen".

[88] *Mopaxialouaj* is also pronounced *mopaxalouaj*. Its root *paxialoua* or *paxaloua* is borrowed from the Spanish *pasear*, "to go for a walk", which is adopted to mean "to visit".

[89] *Tiualtiualayaya* (lit. "we came coming"), is translated by the narrator as "we were", but indicates a process of becoming.

[90] *Melauak* (truly, really, actually) is something straightforward, true, genuine or honest. It stems from the verb *melaua*, meaning to stretch oneself out on a surface, to straighten something out, or to get directly to a point or destination (-FK).

[91] *Kiyolijtiaj*, whose root is *yolijtia*, is the causative of *yoli* (to live, to come to life, or to hatch, -FK), and means to enliven, to vitalize. The narrator's translation as "to make things up" suggests the idea that the tale is invigorated but is, above all, meant to be interpreted literally as inventing, that is, as producing something fictitious.

[92] *Neli,* something true, certain (-FK).

[93] The analytical distinction between a remote and a recent past is not made by Nahuas, though they differentiate between tales about a past in which the elderly people of today were present and tales whose events happened so long ago that no eyewitnesses are alive anymore.

[94] The person referred to here is György Szeljak, a cultural anthropologist who was also working in the Xociatipan municipality and with whom I collaborated during my fieldwork.

[95] The boundary between a true tale about a recent past (*tlen uajkajki panok*) and an anecdote is not clearly established. According to each situation, one and the same tale can be seen as either a *kuento* or an anecdote.

[96] Though this is not the place to go into the theme of the incorporation and re-semantization of foreign terms into the native system of categorizing, I am grateful to Daniela Merolla for pointing out the potential effects regarding the perception of tales when using terms stemming from the dominant society.

[97] As shown by official figures, 42% of the population in the municipality of Xochiatipan is monolingual in Nahuatl, against 57% of bilinguals and a very small minority of monolinguals in Spanish (INEGI 2000b).

[98] The relatively little influence of the dominant language on modern Nahuatl in Xochiatipan does not suggest that the latter does not have Spanish as its resource language. Spanish words, adapted to Nahuatl morphology, are incorporated into daily speech, yet, for several reasons, not as often and consistently as in other municipalities of the area (cf. Hill 1985).

[99] Bartolomé (1979:12) mentions a meaningful setting when describing that Chatinos of the Mexican state of Oaxaca tell each other tales when doing seasonal work in the coffee farms. The coming together of Chatinos from different villages creates an opportunity to reconstruct group identity through telling tales in the native tongue (cf. Taggart 1997:6).

[100] Even though in Huastecan Nahua society there are no restrictions regarding the person who tells of past events, some narrators are more talented performers than others, and are more acquainted with the facts told or are more willing to narrate them. Drawing upon the native literary canon that provides the framework of local standards about composition, contentual units and narrative style, each narrator improvises a new text, in line with his intentions, individuality and creativity; he does so according to the set of rules about characters, events, time and space concepts and the collective value systems (Jason 1977).

[101] Competence also implies familiarity with the system of rules that controls the transmission of the traditional product in question.

[102] It is remarkable how Don Gregorio's remark diminishes the elder´s role as the wisest, most articulate and most respected authority in Nahua society.

[103] Don Pedro hints at his capacity to manage aspects regarding content (the protagonist´s identification, the constituting elements of each event, the sequence of episodes in the correct order, the completeness of the tale regarding the number of episodes, etc.) and not to his talent as a performer.

[104] In his preparation for the performance, Don Pedro guided us (my student and myself) to the main building and closed all doors so that nobody would come in and disturb us, which is very peculiar in a Nahua village where people only close their doors when they are not at home. He then put a chair in front of the bench where we were sitting and assured us again that he really was able to give us the correct information. It was obvious that he had gotten nervous and that he considered the forthcoming session to be a very formal matter.

[105] Thus, Don Pedro's contribution was taped under most unfortunate circumstances. However, the reason for including Don Pedro's version here was made on the result of the performance. Probably due to the context --his telling of the tale became a formal act--, his tale turned out to be one of the most elaborate and complete narratives I was able to record on the subject of the water creatures that had flooded the land.

[106] Don Pancho's decision could have been influenced by the fact that his profession allows him to have a more regular contact with people from outside, which forces him to speak Spanish daily and not just ocasionally.

[107] By no means did this mean that Don Pancho tried to hide his performance from his family or from other members of the community. His house stands at the village´s main entrance, at the main road, and almost everybody passes by when going to the fields or the municipality head. Those who might have wanted to join us could have done so.

[108] Once again, his profession as a schoolteacher might have reinforced the assessment of his indigenous background and its traditions. During the last ten or fifteen years, usually bilingual schoolteachers take up the task of restoring lost traditions and reevaluating traditional life within the indigenous communities (Bartolomé 1997).

[109] In later years Feliciano pretended not to speak Nahuatl very well anymore, which was a perfect excuse for not having to tell tales --it would make him a lousy narrator-- and expressed, perhaps, his view that he had become more and more a mestizo. He did, however, tell some anecdotes in Spanish.

[110] Women are not often recognized as storytellers, and their narrating skills and contributions to the transmission of oral tradition, though significant within the family nucleus or when narrating to a group of women, are not conceived relevant when dealing with oral tradition. A narrator is the man who knows how to tell tales during communal work or other group activities. Women are not expected to narrate during these public sessions of storytelling, at least not when men are present. Women themselves refer to their family´s male members or to other men within the village when asked about good narrators, and it is

rather difficult to persuade them to tell a tale. But a few contributions of female narrators could be included in this study.

[111] In a series of workshops on Huastecan Nahua tales with primary school children in a few localities, almost all children remembered hearing tales from their parents and/or grandparents, both male and female.

Chapter 3

[112] It seems that Huastecan Nahuas of Veracruz show a different pattern. Sandstrom (1991:315ff) thinks that people have integrated Christian symbols to a fair extent, but in a way that best suits the Nahua spiritual tradition, at the same time keeping the two systems somehow apart. Nahuas distinguish rituals and teachings that belong to the Catholic Church from those pertaining to the *kostumbre*. In some Veracruzan communities, there are two buildings of worship: one a Catholic Church, and the other a house of the *kostumbre*, each with its corresponding religious acts.

[113] In contrast, the Spanish expression *judío* (Jew) has become an equivalent for the devil. The expression *jew* has no connotation with the historic Jews. Based on the idea that the Jews betrayed Christ, the expression is now used in a general way to address nonbelievers.

[114] Of Mesoamerican pre-colonial peoples living at the time of the Conquest, the Aztecs or Mexica are the immediate forebears of today's Huastecan Nahuas. In the fifteenth century, under the reign of Moctezuma I, Aztec soldiers occupied the southern part of the Huasteca region, displacing and nahuatizing Maya-speaking Tének indians (see Durán 1995:215-229), which accounts for the present-day existence of Nahuas in this area. For a general outlook on pre-colonial history in the Huasteca area, see Ochoa (1979; 1999:39-78).

[115] On the presence of Negro slaves in the Huasteca area, see Herrera Casasús (1989) and Cook and Borah (1971). For a study on African influences on indigenous oral tradition, particularly on the figure of the mermaid, see Báez-Jorge (1992:157-201).

[116] A presentation and preliminary discussion of this tale was published in Anders and Jansen (1996a:99-125).

[117] Karttunen (1992:147) distinguishes between *mili* (field, cultivated land) and *mila* (place where there is an abundance of cultivated land). In the Huasteca area, the two voices seem to have become synonyms.

[118] The Nahuatl verb *tlai* refers to all actions undertaken while preparing the ground before sowing (-RS), especially to the breaking of ground for planting (-FK), and here is translated as to clear.

[119] *Itlanejua* is a possessive and plural form of *tlanejtli* (peon, day laborer, -NS), which derives from the verb *tlaneua*, to borrow. The term does not necessarily imply a contractual relationship in which the employee gets paid for his services, but comprises all sorts of existing labour relations.

[120] *Sintoka,* from *sintli* (corn) and *toka* (to sow), which are contracted into one word expressing the act of sowing corn.

[121] *Kinseuijke* stems from *seuia*, which is a transitive verb (to rest oneself, to get someone else to rest, to relieve someone, -FK). This verb is most commonly used as a reflexive one, which means to sit down.

[122] *Sombrero* (hat) is a Spanish word, often used, that has largely replaced Nahuatl *tsonakauili* (lit. "something that covers the head").

[123] *Kuatini* is the plural form of *kuauitl* (stick, tree). In Nahuatl, only animate beings (persons and animals) have a plural form (see Chapter 1), yet the extraordinary fact that the trees themselves rise, transforms them into beings with a will of their own and, as such, can be pluralized. The decision to use or not a plural form under these circumstances depends on each individual narrator´s judgement.

[124] *Mana* means here "to offer something or to stand" (-NS), and should not be confused with its pre-colonial meaning (to spread something out flat and smooth, -FK), today used in constructions like *mantok atl* (lit. "spread out water", a lake, -NS).

[125] The reflexive verb *meua* (to get up, -NS) refers to the act of rising oneself.

[126] The plural form of possessive nouns is made by adding *-ua* to the root. For non-possessive nouns, one of the plural forms is the employment of *-me* at the same place. The adding of *-me* to a possessive form is grammatically incorrect, though a common practice in everyday speech.

[127] *Kualtsi,* reverential form of *kuali* (good, well), emphasizes the fact that the forest was in a good shape.

[128] *Timakilise*, from *makilia* (to hit, -NS).

[129] *Fiero* (fierce, cruel, harsh) is a Spanish loan that now means bad or wicked.

[130] *Iluikak* is the locative form of *iluikatl* (heaven).

[131] *Momajkajki*, reflexive form of *majkaua* (to hurl, send, throw s.t, -NS).

[132] *Kaxani* (lit. to loosen, to slacken s.t, -NS) is here meant to have a more figurative denotation.

[133] *Axtlakualka* is translated by the narrator as an adverb meaning unclean. It probably derives from *kualtilia* (to clean something, -AM).

[134] The black-headed vulture or buzzard is called *tsajpilotl*. Kartunnen (1992:319) has the entry *tzopilotl*, from which Spanish *zopilote* is derived. Over the centuries, its pronunciation has slightly changed in the Huasteca area.

[135] Usually, Nahua narratives do not have any titles; if they are applied, then a summary of the tale´s first episode suffices. This mechanism is also applied in the tale about the deluge. The encounter of a peasant with a hare makes up the text´s initial part and is therefore retained in the title. The tale would never be entitled "The Flood" or "How the Hare Came to the Moon", even if these occurrences are central in the tale. There are several ways to describe the term flood in Nahuatl. Gómez Martínez (1999) uses *ueyi atokolistli*, meaning "a big drowning". Miranda San Román suggests *tlalakomuli* (when the earth became a big pond), *apoliuilistli* (loss by means of the water), or *atlejkolistli* (the rising of the water). None of these terms is much used in daily speech.

[136] According to its style, the *Leyenda* appears to be an interpretation of a perhaps late pre-colonial codex or *lienzo*. Both Velázquez and León-Portilla note that expressions like *inin tonatiuh* (this sun) or *nican ca* (here is), which flavor the story, certainly point to a methodical recitation and, at the same time, are a meticulous commentary on a pictographic document (Velázquez 1992:ix; León-Portilla 1993:101). The enumeration of the consecutive worlds which are created and destroyed follows the order displayed on the Aztec *Piedra del Sol* or Calendar Stone, whose carvings picture these events in an impressive manner and which, almost literally, embodies the cornerstone of Aztec cosmogonic thought. The *Leyenda* could well have been a direct reading of the central part of this imposing work of art. If the text really reproduces a reading from a pre-colonial pictographic document or, indeed, from the Calendar Stone itself, the margin of possible deviance from its precolonial predecessors will be limited. Mnemotechnic devices, together with the native literary canon, give the tale its specific structure from which strong deviation, at least during this relatively short time period, is not likely (cf. Ong 1996). Also, as the early colonial source is based on oral legacy, it can be even more legitimately applied as reference material (see, for example, Hill Boone 1994:71).

[137] It should be noted that this order of cataclysms is not unanimously agreed upon, for other pre-colonial and early colonial sources give a different sequence. Then as now, oral tradition was heterogeneous and variable.

[138] See Horcasitas (1988) and León-Portilla (1993:100-101) for a list of pre-colonial and early colonial documents containing Mesoamerican versions of a universal deluge.

[139] Van der Loo mentions two advantages of this kind of analysis for contemporary studies on indigenous issues. Firstly, it provides the possibility to understand the pre-Columbian world through the study of present-day indigenous peoples. Today's indigenous cultures may provide elements whose current meaning gives clues about how to interpret former similar meanings (van der Loo 1987:18). Many studies of this kind have proven this method to be productive and revealing (for example, Anders and Jansen 1996a, López Austin 1989; 1994; 1998). In light of these studies, it can be said that this tool also works the other way around; current Huastecan Nahua narrative may be interpreted through known elements and concepts of Aztec culture and, more specifically, Aztec narrative. Former Aztec tales are not disconnected from today's Nahua ones and, indeed, are one of the main sources of current Nahua oral tradition. Even after years of change and transformation, many aspects of past tales have been preserved in tale telling today, though perhaps in a different presentation or with a distinct valuation. When analyzing the elements that both tales have in common regarding their context and assessment, the insight provided by pre-colonial concepts found in Aztec tales could help when studying these concepts in present-day Huastecan Nahua oral tradition.

[140] Only people who go to church every Sunday, a minority, may hear the biblical flood story once a year. In this context, it must be taken into account that masses in indigenous languages were introduced only in the 70s. Before this date, lectures in Spanish or Latin must have been poorly understood by Nahuas.

[141] The term *kiijtouaj* refers to shared cultural knowledge which connotes, in turn, a general acceptance of truth by the ruling opinion, making the tale authentic.

[142] The number thirty mentioned earlier seems to have been arbitrarily chosen, as part of the forty days of incessant rains in which the water had risen so much, that the peasant, his family and his fellow villagers finally entered the craft (lines 297-302).

[143] In pre-colonial days, this period of fifty-two years was called *xiuitl molpia*, lit. "they bind together the years". It consisted of the total possible combinations of days, signs and years which make up the Mesoamerican calendar system, after which a new count began. For an introduction on Mesoamerican calendar systems see, for example, Anders and Jansen (1988).

[144] Two exceptions to this relation between the rising forest and a universal deluge must be mentioned. In the Quiché Mayan *Popol Vuh,* the divine twins Hunahpu and Xbalanque are confronted with the same phenomenon when they are clearing the wood and, thereafter, find the forest like it was before. In the *Popol Vuh* this episode is not related to a universal flood but, interestingly enough, it does contain an incident of a hare caught by the twins for raising the trees (1985:125-128). The second exception are Tzotzil tales in which the peasant kills the hare and thus solves the problem of the forest growing back to its original state, or in which God punishes the hare for doing so (Gossen 1989:365;382-383;420-421;423-424).

[145] Two striking exceptions to the hare´s regeneration of the forest may be mentioned. They come from the Huastecan Nahua narrators in Stiles (1985:112) and Barón Larios (1994:129). In the first tale, a hare keeps cutting down the growing corn plants of a peasant, whereupon it informs the man about the coming flood. The second tale also mentions a factually destructive hare, which demolished the gullies where the peasant planted his crop. Even if the course of action in these tales diverges from the conventional contents, they follow the same pattern: either by overthrowing plants which are meant to grow or regenerating vegetation which is meant to be cut, the hare nullifies the peasant´s work.

[146] As said in the first chapter, non-indigenous persons are often called *koyotl* (coyote). In a society where indigenous peoples are historically exploited by "coyotes", the cycle of tales about the hare and the coyote could perhaps be understood as a perceptual devictimization: the cunning victim (the hare) becomes the tale´s villain and deceives its attacker (the coyote) in order to not be eradicated (cf. de Pury-Toumi 1997:101). Tales in which the tables are turned and the underdog invariably wins over a dominant being must be warmly welcomed by Huastecan Nahuas, especially when this dominant being and the non-indigenous aggressor are literally equated. People have great sympathy for the rodent who, time and again, manages to get a temporary rest from the otherwise oppressing relation, and manages to keep on living despite adverse circumstances.

[147] Though it is always risky to link an animal´s conduct to some of its symbolic features, Burkhart (1986) makes some remarks about the hare that are worthy of note. The hare´s way of hopping to and fro resembles the erratic motion or lack of coordination that can be seen in a drunken man's walk; its constant walk to find food parallels the constant search for food of (semi) nomadic hunters and gatherers that the Aztecs once were. Eager to demonstrate the profound change they underwent as a tribe, becoming settled farmers and institutionalizing moral codes, Aztecs gave ethical significance to an orderly straight walk in order to contrast with both the drunkards´ abject behavior --held to be one of the most immoral-- and the transhumant habits of a non-sedentary group. As an expression of these contrasts, the hare became associated to drunkenness, *pulque* (see following note) and the nomadic tribes.

[148] This establishes another association between the hare and *pulque*, a liquor made of maguey. The *pulque* deities were called *centzon totochtin* (lit. "four hundred hares", the numeral signifying an uncountable number, suggesting the liquor´s abundant varieties); Mayahuel, the female *pulque* deity, can be recognized in the pictographic documents by her lunar nose ornament (for example, *Codex Borgia* 1993: plate 12, 16, 57).

[149] The link between the hare and the moon is present in all variants of the Nahua deluge tale, though not always in the same form. For example, in Maya's version (1979/80), the hare jumps down from the moon to do its job in the forest. The text further says the animal gives the peasant the moon´s secret message. The hare is a messenger between the moon and man. Its message is related to time: the rodent announces the end of times.

[150] In a few Nahua versions, a parrot accompanies the hare on top of the craft. It is said the bird acquired its dwarfish size and short peak after having been squashed when the craft struck heaven (Barón Larios 1994:108; *Seis versiones* 1982:27-31; Stiles 1985:117-118).

[151] Nahuas from the Huastecan part of Veracruz believe their present world is the scene of the fifth mankind. The first man was made of clay and was destroyed by *tekuanime* or wild animals. The second humans, made of paper, were annihilated by hurricanes, and were followed by persons made of ceddar wood. When these were wiped out by fire, the fourth mankind was created; the deities amassed him of tuber dough. This generation was killed in a flood (Gómez Martínez 1999).

[152] In an earlier publication of this tale, Stiles translated *kali* (lit. house) as a houseboat (1978:11). But very few versions --all published in Spanish only-- use the Spanish term *arca* (*Seis versiones*... 1982:8; Taggart 1983:192). It is therefore possible that the Nahuatl original employs a different term, perhaps *kaxa* or

kuakali, which is translated in these texts to the noun ark. A final deviation stems from Barón (1994:172-173), who uses the term *barca*, a small boat, in his written version in Spanish.

[153] Tének deluge versions of the Huasteca area deal with this pollution in a metaphorical way: the defiling of the firmament turned the sky, once white, into the currently blue one (*Relatos huastecos* 1994; van 't Hooft and Cerda 2003:94).

[154] Taggart's version (1983:192-194), in which the vultures fly back to heaven, and the version registered by Gómez Martínez (1999), in which the buzzard and parrot confess their fault to God in heaven, are the only exceptions on this point in Nahua narrative.

[155] Food is thus an element that prevents man´s existence in its pre-diluvian form. The pre-colonial version in the *Codex Vaticano A* elaborates on this issue; it is mentioned that after the flood, the female deity of the fireplace and the home called Chantico is changed into a dog for having made an offering to the deities after eating a roasted fish, that is, without observing the norm of fasting. It is this "insolence" that offended the deities and led them to impose a curse on her: she "would be a dog, which is the hungriest animal of all" (Anders and Jansen 1996b:183). The direct contrast between Noah's and Chantico's offer becomes clear. Whereas Noah' offer opens the way for further life in happiness, Chantico's cuts off her future existence in a human form. In the current tale, even though the cooking of the animals is not interpreted as an offer, preparing and eating them becomes a fatal act for God's messengers, just like it did for Chantico.

[156] Cf. Horcasitas (1988), who summarizes sixty-three Mesoamerican deluge stories, in which a majority of tales says the people are killed or converted into animals. Only in twelve versions --none of them Nahua-- do the survivors remain alive.

[157] León-Portilla says pre-colonial accounts have people from past creations consume other inferior types of corn (1993:106-108), as mentioned, for example, in the Codex Vaticano A (1996).

[158] A brief exposition of the multiple processes taking place from the sixteenth century onwards, in the Huejutla zone of the Huasteca, can be consulted in Schryer (1990:75-86).

[159] Instead, this concept has been retained in current Huave and Huichol thought, which corresponds with the plot of their tales on the flood (see, for example, Ramírez 2000:57 and Furst 1997).

Chapter 4

[160] The translation of Nahuatl *tetetstik* as turbid suggests a perception of water as murky and unsettled.

[161] From Spanish *tocar* (to be due, to be one's turn).

[162] In Nahuatl, numbers are counted only to ten or, at times, twenty. From twenty on the Spanish numbering system and names are employed. Thus, it is not rare to see Don Gregorio say one hundred with its Spanish name. The use of Spanish *años* (years) instead of Nahuatl *xiuitl* emphasizes the length of the period mentioned.

[163] With the introduction of the Spaniard´s calendrical system, indigenous peoples faced a new concept of time measurement that was quite different from their own. Although Huastecan Nahuas adopted this new system, some changes in terminology occurred. Except for words like *tonal* (day) and *metstli* (month) that were already present before the Conquest, people developed their own way to name the hour (*kauitl*), minute (*kauiktsi*) and second (*pilkauiktsi*), although they did not much refer to it. Yet, there are no Nahuatl equivalents for the naming of each day of the week or month of the year.

[164] Spanish loan for old man, used in diminutive form as a sign of respect (in Nahuatl *ueuentsi*).

[165] One deduces here that it was the grandfather who told his grandson tales when the latter was a boy, a date that will be confirmed later on in the performance.

[166] *Mochiua* is a reflexive form of the verb *chiua*, to make or do something, but in its reflexive form has the additional meaning of to occur, to come about (-FK). In this study, the verb´s translations are rather free.

[167] *Poliui* is an intransitive verb which means to be lost, to lack, to miss (-NS). It stems from the transitive verb *poloua*, which is defined as to destroy, to eradicate, to lose (-NS).

[168] The ravine was too deep to get out of.

[169] *Motlananki* is the past reflexive form of *tlanana* (to raise up, -NS), suggesting how the village came into action and spread the news.

[170] The Nahua measurement system is a mixture of old measures, such as the Nahuatl *mapeli* (two arm-lengths), used in the following tale by Don Pedro, or the Spanish *almud* (pronounced *almo*), *litro* (Nahuatl

litru) or *cuartillo* (in Nahuatl *kuartiya*), which represent the Mexican standard. Nahua etnolinguists attempted to change the last three foreign terms into the Nahuatl *tlatamachiua* (lit. something measured) but failed, for the term causes confusion as to the measure´s real volume.

[171] The Nahuatl *aixkomokuetlantinemi* is composed of the following elements *atl* (water), *-ixko-* (on top of), *-mo-* (reflexive), *kuetlani* (to move, to tremble), *-ti-* (-conjunction-), and *nemi* (to go around), and which is translated rather freely. The second narrator shall use the same verb when describing the water creature´s movement (line 326).

[172] *Cholos* is the conjugation in future form of *choloa* (to flee, to run swiftly -FK), which is used in daily speech in imperative form so as to make someone go away, like for example animals entering the house.

[173] *Kimauisojke* (from *mauisoua*, to admire, -NS) suggests a contemplation of something or someone.

[174] Despite the relatively frequent use Don Gregorio makes of Spanish words, it is not strange to find a Spanish term when referring to a Catholic ritual. In Nahuatl the verb *tiochiua* (from *teochiua*, lit. "to make godly", to absolve or bless someone, -AM) refers to the act of blessing, which is done by sprinkling holy water on an object or a person.

[175] Tonalixko is one of the communities in the municipality that have disappeared because of a fusion with other settlements.

[176] The *ueuetlakame* (lit. old men) are a group of elders but is also the name of the council made up of elderly males who discuss and decide on local problems. In some communities, this council plays a role, in addition to the *vesino´s* daily meeting; in others it has disappeared.

[177] The narrator probably refers to his informant from the village of Acanoa. However, Huastecan Nahua etnolinguist Refugio Miranda San Román (pers. com.) remarked that the expression is also used as a kind of fill-in.

[178] At this point in the performance, the narrator´s wife interrupted announcing she had prepared us something to eat. Don Pedro waved her away and then continued.

[179] Don Pedro refers to the line of people that reaches his house.

[180] *Pamitl*, which in precolonial times meant to be a flag or a banner (-RS), is now used as a furrow (-NS). In this tale´s context, however, it is translated as a line or queue.

[181] *Ijkuenia* signifies to withdraw, to move from one place to another (-FK).

[182] *Tlajtoli* refers literally to a word, speech, a statement or language (-FK).

[183] *Kiuikake*, from *-ki-* (object), *uika* (to take along, to transport), and *-ke* (past perf. pl.). The plural use of this verb indicates that thunder and lightning moved the animal.

[184] *Temajmati* from *-te-*, someone, and *majmaujtia* (to get frightened, to frighten or threaten someone, -FK), manifesting that the animal was threatening or frightening.

[185] The narrator is referring again to the old man who told him about the events.

[186] According to Stiles (1980:44), *teixtli* means a hill or a rise. The noun is understood, however, as something rocky or stoney that is raised, like a big rock or a cliff.

[187] Don Gregorio lives nearer to the place where the *xili* emerged than to the water snake´s ravine. His focus on the water snake might have been influenced by the fact that, at that time, I lived in the village where the water snake is said to have appeared, and that he believed I would be more interested in the latter creature.

[188] *Teipa* (next) and, to a lesser extent, *noponi* (then) and *uajkino* (thus) are also much employed as words of hesitation. Their utterance gives the narrator time to reflect on what he has said before, or formulate the things he is about to say without breaking up the performance´s rhythm. In these cases, there is no semantic meaning attached to their use.

[189] This version is also the only one that includes an exact date about the tale´s time setting, which usually remains unsaid. It is mentioned that the events "*kipiya komo sesenta años*", they happened some sixty years ago (van 't Hooft and Cerda 2003:164).

[190] On a speculative note several possibilities come to mind. As far as Tulancingo is concerned, if the unprecise "time of the elders" is to be interpreted as a date prior to 1923, the year in which Huejutla became a dioceses, then Don Pedro is historically correct and no bishop would have been found any nearer than Tulancingo. In colonial times, Tulancingo was an important passageway of commercial transport from the southern Huasteca to Mexico City (Escobar 1995). Unfortunately, nothing is known about Tulancingo´s pre-colonial role as a Tula, which means a place of the forefathers and of cultural wisdom, through which it would have acquired symbolic significance as a cultural model based on ancestor cult. Tamazunchale, a town in the Huastecan part of the state of San Luis Potosí, is known as a directional reference (the one taken by the bus to Guadalajara where most migrants work), which might refer to the north as a cardinal point, or, perhaps, hint at an increasing relevance of migration trends. As a mixed mestizo-Nahua town, Tamazunchale has never played an important economic or symbolic role for the people of Xochiatipan. Don Gregorio's statement, therefore, seems literally out of place. He himself

notes this too, as he repeatedly mentions that the priest did not come from Tulancingo, which suggests he knows the place he has indicated is not the one most often mentioned.

[191] It must be noted that there exists a second, diverging explanation of the origin of the name Acanoa. A few people say it dates from very ancient times, from the time of the flood, when the waters were receding and the survivors had to go about in canoes from hilltop to hilltop, since the rest of the land was still covered with water. The name *acanoa* (lit. "water canoe", the voice *canoa* having been borrowed from Antillean) would thus refer to the means of transport of the new era´s first humans, locating their existence in the immediate surroundings.

[192] It should be understood that thunder, lightning and rain make the snake go up to the sky again.

[193] Spiro (1987:26-27, 96) summarizes various indigenous tales in which a snake's actions flood the world, as for example in Mixe, Zoque and Tzotzil narrative. Mixes believe a downpour is, in reality, a huge serpent (Miller 1955:206). Zoques tell about a giant snake with seven heads called Tzahuatzan, which is related to storms and travels on clouds through the air, forming lakes each time it falls on earth (Cordry and Cordry, cited in Spiro 1987:73).

[194] The verbs that apply to the water creatures and their entrance on the scene are *uala* (to come), *monextia* (to reveal oneself/someone/something, -FK), *kisa* (to come out, to emerge, to conclude or finish, -FK), and *mochiua* (to occur, to come about, -FK, to result). Of these verbs, *uala* is the most neutral, indicating an unspecified movement from someplace else towards the speaker. *Monextia* suggests a sudden, unexpected appearance. *Kisa* is seen as a less surprising form of arrival, implicating an outward movement such as coming out of a house, a cave, or the water; in a second meaning it refers to an event´s ultimate result: the way things turned out. This latter meaning is shared with *mochiua*, a way of describing the course and denouement of events rather than a peculiar distantial movement or form of entry. None of these verbs address the directional origin of the arrival or appearance. Direction is only implicated by the narrators who use the verb *uetsi*, to fall, as a reference to the coming of the water creature. This verb, in turn, is only mentioned in relation to the water creature believed to be a snake.

[195] An interjection indicating the recollection of an event or tale.

[196] The concept of a sea united with the sky dates from pre-colonial times. The Aztecs viewed the sea and sky as one: the sea, surrounding the earth, extended outward and upward until it merged with the sky. The sea was known as "Sky Waters" or, according to Sahagún, *teoatl* (lit. godly water), a term he translates as "marvellous water in its depth and in greatness" (1989:800). The notion of rainwater coming out of the sea explains the fact that after hurricanes there are always a lot of fish in the river, which were not there before. Huastecan Nahuas think these fish are lifted out of the sea by the clouds as these fill themselves with water, and that these clouds take the fish along on their way. When the clouds drop their waters in the form of heavy rains, they also drop the fish. The Tének recall a similar but more extraordinary anecdote about thousands of fish, tortoises and other water species that fell from heaven in a downpour with lightning bolts (Priego 1999:65-66).

[197] In one unrecorded account it was even mentioned that the fish had been a whale, which connotes, above all, the water creature´s extremely large size.

[198] The reflexive *moteka* ("to lie down", "to stretch out", "to settle") is associated with *-motekayan*, the place where the downpour unloads and falls (-FK), and refers directly to the water creature as related to cloudbursts.

[199] Nahuatl personal pronouns do not distinguish between male, female or neutral subjects and are only used when one wants to emphasize the subject. The pronoun "it" was chosen to reflect the notion earlier referred to when the narrator described the water being as a fish.

[200] The verb *mojkueni* is constructed from *-mo-* (reflexive) and *ijkuenia* (to move s.t. from one place to another, -FK), which means that the mermaid left on her own account without something or someone moving her, as in the case of the water creatures Don Pedro talked about.

[201] According to Cordry (1980), visual proof of the existence of a pre-colonial concept of the mermaid can be found in an image of the *Codex Chorti Maya* from Guatemala.

[202] This idea seems to be regionally shared, cfr. a Totonac tale in Ichon (1990:134-136) and a Tepehua tale in Williams García (1972:82-83).

[203] Poza Rica is a town in the state of Veracruz, on the Southern border of the Huasteca area. Some ten or twenty years ago people from the area went to Poza Rica and its surroundings to find temporal jobs.

[204] Concerning the creature´s magnitude, it shoud be noted that the mermaid does not have to have extraordinary proportions to be catalogued as an anomalous being. Her size is never an issue in Huastecan Nahua oral narrative.

[205] *Kiski* is the past form of the verb *kisa*, which can mean to come out, to emerge, to conclude, to finish (-FK), or to depart, to leave (-NS).

[206] This way, Sain John's attributes come close to the ones ascribed to the pre-colonial rain deity: *"Este dios llamado Tláloc Tlamacazqui era el dios de las lluvias. Tenían que él daba las lluvias para que regasen la tierra, mediante la cual lluvia se criaban todas las yerbas, árboles y frutas y mantenimientos. También tenían que él enviaba el granizo y los relámpagos y rayos, y las tempestades del agua, y los peligros de los ríos y de la mar. En llamarse Tláloc Tlamacazqui quiere decir que es dios que habita en el paraíso terrenal, y que da a los hombres los mantenimientos necesarios para la vida corporal"* (Sahagún 1989:38). Several studies, however, relate Saint John to the precolonial deity Nanahuatzin, the festering one, who turned into the sun (see, for example, Díaz Hernández 1945; Stiles 1983; Toumi 1997). This association seems to be substantiated through oral narrative as well: in a Huastecan Nahua tale about the origin of fire and corn in the sacred hill, Saint John says he cannot walk as his feet hurt too much, and they are infested with bleeding ampoules (van 't Hooft and Cerda 2003:149).

[207] De Pury-Toumi (1997:107) points at a temporal aspect of Saint John, who operates during the summer solstice, a hazardous period for people with a cyclical view of time. By ascribing unreliable and irresponsible characteristics to the saint, he represents this critical period.

[208] Totonacs tell about how they tricked Saint John with *refino* (liquor) and tied him down in the middle of the sea in order to not to be flooded. From there, and upon hearing that his saint´s day has already passed, the saint decides to throw only a small party, which does not unleash a flood but only a soft and fertilizing rain (Ichon 1990:128-132). In a Tepehua tale, Saint John is deceived after breaking up the Postejtli (see below) and he falls on his head, which explains why he became a little dumb and is easily tricked when he asks about his Saint's day (Williams García 1972:77).

[209] For the municipality of Xochiatipan, in which not all communities honor Saint John's day, the celebration is described by Romualdo Hernández (1982:147-148). People congratulate Saint John who is represented by a picture that is attached to the wall of the local well. Flower adornments are offered. Candles, *veladoras* and rockets are lightened and traditional music played with violin and guitar is performed. People start to dance near the well and consume *tlapepecholi*, a type of big tamale. On the church altar all kinds of vegetables are placed (green chili, watermelon, melon, *chalauite*, and mango), so Saint John might view them, since he is the one who produces the food by making it rain. On this day, many people bathe themselves and drink from the water of the adorned well. It is said their bath water will eliminate laziness and restore the body's health.

[210] The narrator refers to a village called Pastorilla in the Veracruzan municipality of Chicontepec, which, for certain communities in the Hidalgo portion of the Huasteca, lies on route to the hill.

[211] The municipality of Chicontepec (lit. "the place of Seven Hills") is situated fairly near Xochiatipan. Through the years, people from Xochiatipan have built up at least as much contact with the *cabecera* of Chicontepec as with the regional commercial center of Huejutla in their own state. Not only did the church of the municipality Xochiatipan formerly belong to the Chicontepec vicariate (Hernández Cuéllar 1982:31), but the place also was as a regional commercial center until road construction in other parts of the Huasteca isolated the town a few decades ago. Furthermore, one should not underestimate the influence of marriages from people of Veracruz and families within the municipality, as was mentioned in Chapter 1. These factors demonstrate how the Postejtli could have become so central in Huastecan Nahua oral tradition in Xochiatipan.

[212] Other places are already sacred, such as the hill Postejtli or the well located near the village of Atlalco (see Chapter 5). I have not heard of them losing their sacredness, although, through differentiation in society, not all people hold them to be sacred. People who claim the well in Atlalco is not sacred do not attribute this feature to other wells either. They simply do not believe anymore in the sacredness of any well or spring.

[213] Montemayor says that the theme of a man entering the space of the guardian spirits and putting on their capes is recurrent in Tének, Chontal, Mixe and Chinantec oral tradition (1999:62). In southern Veracruz, it is common among Zoque-Popolucas and Nahuas as well (*Agua...* 1985:26-38;50-54).

[214] Mazatec tales relate how, at the beginning of time, lightning bolts constrain an inundation caused by the first water that originated in a hill (Boege 1988:106). In a similar manner to what was expressed here in the discussion on the water creatures, it is said that lightning bolts, associated with heat and fire, are most apt to balance the excess of humidity (Boege 1988:119). In a noteworthy analysis, Taggart (1983) observes that lightning bolts are regarded as the *tonal* (companion spirit) of the Nahuas as a collectivity, and that they are represented as guardians of Nahua communities. In one of the tales he recorded, the protective role of lightning bolts is illustrated. Accompanied by heavy rains and thunderstorms, lightning bolts chase away the monster that is inundating the village and is devouring children and animals.

Chapter 5

[215] I asked Bonifacio to entitle his tale; this is what he came up with. For details on the performance context in which this tale was told, see Chapter 2.

[216] The verb *tsopinia* (to prick or puncture something or someone -FK) suggests the use of a *tlamintli* or spear, whereas the earlier verb used, *tlajtlama* (to fish), connotes the use of nets or one's hands. Fishing with a spear is not common anymore, and the young narrator might not know the correct Nahuatl term for this way of trapping fish, which is why he uses the current *tlajtlama* as a general indication that includes all fishing.

[217] *Kinitski* stems from the verb *itskia*, to catch, grab, grasp, snatch (-NS).

[218] *Aijtik* is composed of *atl* (water) and *-ijtik* (locative suffix meaning inside or within) and signifies "inside the water". During the translation session, Bonifacio clarified that he intended it to be "far into the water".

[219] *Kiitato* (lit. "he went to see") contains the directional suffix *-to-*, which refers to an action in the past that involved a movement away from the speaker and is understood to be, at the same time, the result of an action.

[220] *Oui* is an adjective signifying difficult, and the saying *asta ika oui* (lit. "till with difficulty") is used when referring to an act that implied some effort and time. Bonifacio translates it as "after a while".

[221] *Nikiluis*, from *ni-* (first person subject prefix), *iluia* (to say) and *-s* (singular future suffix), which makes "I will say". The free interpretation of this verb construction comes from Bonifacio.

[222] *Kitlanito* derives from *-ki-* (third person singular object prefix), *tlani* (to earn, to win, -NS; to win something, to defeat someone at gambling, -FK), and *-to-* (past directional suffix), which means literally that someone went to win over someone else. Bonifacio's translation is more figurative and refers to the process of convincing someone. *Tlatlanki* is composed by the same verb, but refers to a non-living object (*-tla*, third person object prefix). Its past form (*-ki*, third person singular preterit suffix) does not connote a process but an act´s completion. This way, *tlatlanki* means "he/she won it"; "it" referring to the discussion, as to Bonifacio.

[223] *Moyejyekouitiya* is the reflexive form of *yejyekoua* (to measure s.t, -NS; to experience s.t, to test, sample, taste s.t, -FK). Bonifacio's interpretation as "to agree upon" is observed.

[224] The Nahuatl *apan*, here translated by the speaker as a well, may also refer to a river or any other freshwater reservoir, as well as to Apan, the water world.

[225] The noun *xinola* refers to a woman who is not of indigenous origin, mostly a mestizo.

[226] The speaker in this case is the protagonist. The narrator refers to a moment following the events told, when the swimmer finally had gotten out of the water and could tell what had happened to him. Indirectly, this might be taken as a way to assess truth, even though the narrator says he does not believe in the reality of the event told. This foresight breaks the plot of the true tale, and takes away its tension. However, due to the context of the narration it is not necessary to keep this tension, as the audience already knows the outcome of the events. It would never be possible for a narrator to give another twist to the true tale on that specific point. He would not be considered a good narrator or he would be telling a different story if he told it another way.

[227] Even if in this example the swimmer is not the main culprit, the penalization falls on him for being part of a general problem -infidelity- that destabilizes his family and increases his abuse of the water world.

[228] *Tetlamaski*, from *-te-* (object prefix denoting a living being), *tlamana* (to offer s.t, -AM), and *-ski* (unconditional suffix).

[229] *Xitletlajpalo* and *tetlajpaloski* have as their stem *tlajpaloua*, to greet someone. Molina enlists *tla[j]paloloni* (s.t. or s.o. worthy of reverence or greeting, -AM), which connotes the potentially ceremonial character of this kind of greeting. Nahuas from the state of Morelos designate as a "greeting" the first part of their petition for rain, in which they announce their presence and present the reason for their attendance (Barrios 1949:68).

[230] *Nechinama*, composed by *-nech-* (first person object prefix) and *inama* (to charge, -NS; to demand the debt of a creditor, -AM), suggests the existence of a debt due to former favors.

[231] *Ma nitetlamakati ne atitla*, whose verb consists of *ni-* (first person subject prefix), *-te-* (third person object prefix denoting a living being), *tlamaka* (to feed) and *-ti-* (directional suffix), "so that I may go and feed someone to the water".

[232] *Nitlauikak*, from *ni-* (first person subject prefix), *tlauika* (to owe s.t. to s.o., -NS) and *-k* (past tense suffix), indicates the existence of a *tlauikalistli*, a debt (-FK).

[233] Cf. a Mixe tale, in which the protagonist is told to advise the people of his village to sacrifice food and build a church so as to make up for the loss of so many fish. If they don't obey, the rivers, wells and springs shall dry up (*El Dios...* 1982).

[234] Correspondingly, Tepehuas call her male counterpart Sireno (male mermaid), using the suffix -o to express his male sex in contrast with the female Sirena (Williams García 1972: 35-37).

[235] *Kiajsik*, from *-ki-* (third person object prefix), *ajsi* (to reach, to arrive) and *-k* (third person singular past suffix), lit. "a brother-in-law arrived to him", is meant to signify that he became a brother-in-law upon his sister's wedding. *Ajsi* is customarily used as an intransitive verb and may hint at an unusual matrilocal marriage system in which the husband joins the family of his wife.

[236] *Kintekipanoyaya*, from *-kin-* (third person plural object prefix), *tekipanoa* (to work, serve, work as a day-laborer, -RS), and *-yaya* (plural past suffix). The verb refers to a way of working in order to make a living, usually when one is hired by someone else. In a broader sense, it means to make a living, to sustain.

[237] *Yeka* is an interjection stressing certain elements of discourse. It can also mean "for that reason, for this reason, therefore" (-NS).

[238] The text confirms here that Saint John is the rains´ guardian and explains the direction of the prevailing precipitation during that season.

[239] Other indigenous peoples in the Huasteca have similar concepts about the mermaid. Williams García describes the mermaid as Tepehuas conceive her, being the Reina del Agua (Lady of the Water), Muchacha del Agua (Girl of the Water), or Serena, a variant of the Spanish *sirena* (mermaid). In Tepehua she is called *xalapának xkán*, which means Person of the Water or Guardian of the Water (1972:82). Tepehuas offer her food; they dance in her honor and leave miniature clothes in certain springs where she is supposed to live. These clothes are meant to dress the mermaid, who depends on clothing given to her by humans. The mermaid is said to bring the rains that are necessary to produce the crops, and therefore she provides for fruits and grains. Nevertheless, she is also able to destroy the world by causing a flood. Tepehuas think offerings are necessary to please the mermaid and to prevent a disaster. Her role as a benefactor can be detected in tales like the one Williams García collected in which the mermaid gives a young man gourds producing gold (1972:84). She multiplies riches so that Tepehuas may live. Galinier mentions how the departure of the mermaid to lower and warmer areas along the coast caused a change in climate in area where the Otomí people lives; the once tropical area became cold and dry as the mermaid took all the water with her (1990:583). Ichon (1990:134; 136) informs how Totonacs hold the mermaid to be the Guardian or Lady of the Sea or *Dama de Sal* (Lady of Salt). She is considered a secondary figure who takes orders from Saint John, the Rain and Thunder spirit. Totonacs do not make offerings to her, and Ichon says that she fulfills a more important role among Nahuas. Totonac oral tradition recalls that she was, at first, a real woman who always cooked beans for her daughter and son-in-law. The beans were delicious, and the daughter never stopped asking her mother for the recipe, yet all her efforts were in vain. One day the daughter spied on her mother and found out that she salted the beans with the sweat of her armpit. Embarrassed by this uncovering, the mother throws herself into the sea. "Therefore the sea is salty. Salt is a woman" (Ichon 1990:136).

[240] Sahagún describes a few analogous rituals performed by the precolonial midwife in relation to the ritual bath (1989:414-416) and offering at the riverside to Chalchiuhtlicue, the water deity (1989:416-418). See also López Austin (1989:225, 228-229). Present-day descriptions of the Huastecan Nahua ritual bath may be found in Hernández Cuéllar (1982:59-64) and Raesfeld (2001:59-69). Both publications include transcriptions of the prayers. Rather short sketches of the *tepitsa* are to be found in Barón Larios (1994:20-24; 57-58), Gómez Martínez (2002:126-127), Miranda San Román (1982:111-112), and Williams García (1997:143-146). Gómez Martínez (2002:150) mentions how the midwife gives the baby its "name of affection" by which it is known in the community during the ritual.

[241] To Tepehuas, this impersonation is indisputable, as they narrate about a girl, to whom a crayfish appeared in a pool. The animal first turned into a fish, and then into a beautiful girl with long hair who presented herself as the Reina del Agua, the Lady of the Water (Williams García 1972: 82-83).

[242] Ideas of a person's tonal staying in the water are common in Nahua worldview. Nahuas of the state of Morelos say that when a person "upon which it flashes dies, *iespírito* [his spirit] goes with the other wind and water spirits to where we ask for water, for rain" (Barrios 1949:65).

[243] According to Gréco (1993:61), the verb *majmaua* from which the noun is derived should be understood as "to startle someone so as to make him go away". She gives as synonyms *motonalkaua* (lit. "to leave or abandon your tonal") and *itonalcholo* (lit. "his tonal has fled"), which refer to a physical separation of the tonal from one's body.

[244] A short but illustrative article about Huastecan Nahua concepts on disease, traditional medicine, and the role of the traditional curer may be consulted in Gréco (1993). Reyes Antonio (1982) and Sandstrom (1978) wrote more elaborate accounts.

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