Fleshing the Spirit

Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women’s Lives

Edited by ELISA FACIO AND IRENE LARA
Anatomy of Learning

Yauhtli, Peyotzin, Tobacco, and Maguey

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The word has spread in the village. A partera is coming. My maestra, doña Filomena Cedillo Parra, comes to the village where I am staying with one of the tatas (elders) who is her compadre de medicina. These elders who have trained me represent that male-female balance so prevalent among traditional Indigenous peoples of Mexico. Each has provided me with a spectrum of knowledge regarding Nahua medicine, regarding birth, ceremony, limpias, plantas, and walking in balance and toward justice. Doña Filo has come to train another woman and me in midwifery because at the time of our instruction in 2005, there were no pregnant women in her own Nahua village. When I tell el tata don Aurelio Ramírez Cazarez, he says they will announce it on the village speakerphone near the church to spread the word, que viene una partera.

The elders know exactly which women are pregnant, a total of four. Notably, there is no practicing partera, or midwife, in the village, a place known for its traditional medicine. The last living professional partera—the much-respected doña Vicenta—had stopped catching babies. Doña Filo says she has come to teach us so that all this traditional birthing knowledge is not “taken to the grave” with her.

Doña Filo is a Nahua midwife. In June 2000, I met her in Brownsville, Texas, at the kalpulli (an Indigenous form of communal organization) where we would participate in a ceremony rarely witnessed in a lifetime, a Mexican Indian ceremony in which elders came from Mexico to recognize the ceremonial dance circle Grupo Coatlque, Mesa de la Virgen de la Luz. We reunited in a training on Mexican Traditional Medicine (MTM) at Nahuatl University in 2001. Doña Filo would become my teacher and elder in traditional birthing. From her I learned how to work with maguey medicine and purifying light. She taught me the power of el ombligo y como juntar el pulso, how to read the body’s energy through the navel, and moon teachings of la luna llena.

As we await the women, we spend our days making tinctures and pomades, and mixing hot and “fresh” natured herbs (bejuco de ajo and axihuitl) to create a warm salve that is not too hot for pregnant women, who are considere already in a “hot” state. Sometimes the women do not come to see us until ten-thirty at night, because that is when they can get there, but we are ready for them. And I learn to palpate the womb and listen to the heartbeat with a fetoscope or with my hands; I also learn various recetas (remedies) for scarred fallopian tubes (manrubio), to relax the uterus or to expel the placenta (ruda and chocolate), or, for extreme situations, zaapatli—the famous chihuapatli—in western botanical nomenclature Montanoa tomentosa Cerv., which was recorded in the Florentine Codex (Sahagún 1950–1982). She also teaches more techniques using the rebozo, a shawl, which is an instrument and a technology of MTM. Doña Filo and the tata discuss one woman who does not come because she is feeling too sick, even though the walk is short. The tata says that is one way the placenta se enfria, or gets cold, from the body not moving around enough. We partake in ceremonies, such as the temazkalli, or Mexican medicinal sweat lodge, and limpias, or purification rítes. And at night with pan y café, the elders, the children of los primeros Zapatistas, recount stories about Zapata and other cultural heroes of Morelos. I have been fortunate in my life to have been taught for two decades by this generation.

Long before I decided to pursue a doctorate, my journey to understand las plantas would lead me to many recetas and to medicinas such as peyotzin, yauhtli, maguey, tobacco, and el poder de las flores, the healing power of flowers in purification rítes. To Indigenous people, the plants are medicines. These four plantas, or medicines—in fact, ceremonial plants—organize this story of how I learned their power and application. These plants are my guides in understanding fertility, pregnancy and labor, and general imbalances whether physical or spiritual. Plant knowledge is so important for Nahua cultures that we literally “plant” who we are, our ombligos (umbilical stubs), placenta, and names.

I first learned of “name planting” ceremonies from Andrés Ségura, the late elder of the Conchero Aztec ceremonial tradition, in 1991, when I was researching a book on spiritual social change (Gonzales 2003). Having documented various name planting ceremonies in Mexico and the United States, I knew these were practices in the present tense. Little did I know that my own “olla estaba fria” (my “pot” was cold). And as I stood over pots of burning
romero, a warming plant, to “warm my pot,” or was given other recetas in women’s circles, or as ceremonies were performed for my womb, women shared their knowledge of fertility and birthing with me.

Through this ecological story of my practical and ceremonial relationship with traditional medicine, I place myself within the hidden and encoded Indigeneity of the Americas. As a journalist who chronicled Indigenous memory for two decades, I have lived the reemergence of Indigenous knowledge among Native peoples and Indian-rooted cultures in Mexico and the United States. This medicine story is among the “hidden texts” of which Florescano writes, hidden knowledge that remained silent and underground or dressed in Christian cloth in order to survive (Florescano 1994).

Midwife Angelita Borbón calls this medicinal knowledge a hidden medical system. I received instruction through this hidden medical system from the oral tradition, often obscured from the world of scholars, which I present here as an anatomy of learning among my peoples. This instruction led me to explore how the values in the codices and chronicles on birthing continue today and are part of a larger matrix of Indigenous medicine. I have received permission from the elders to write about this. My anatomy of learning is “data gathering” in Native science, where direct experience is valued over abstract understanding. This is an ecology of birthing and Indigenous medicine as I have grown to understand it within my own personal and collective context. Cajete connects such ecological knowledge to Native science: “Unless the cultural/ecological context of relationship is understood, one cannot sufficiently comprehend a particular Indigenous technology. Without its context, the ideas of the people or the environment in which those ideas have arisen, the science of a people remains mysterious” (2000, 207).

These stories are held in stones, plants, or the eye of springs; they are unfolded in a medicine bundle, our elders’ stories, or a “fertility place” (ibid., 125, 207) where we go to ask for a child. These practices are more than “folk medicine.” I remember among the last teachings Segura imparted when my family saw him in 1996 was that the ceremonies and medicinal knowledge were scientific. Others have imparted similar ideas, noting they can be both scientific and spiritual.

In keeping with doña Enriqueta Contreras’s guidance—both in oral tradition and now documented in Guerra Falcón (2009)—as a midwife we share the same story and one body with the earth. I include here stories and narratives, recetas, and rites that I learned about birthing as I, a childless woman, wanted to understand how to get pregnant and how to help pregnant women. As an herbalist and promotora tradicional, I was often asked to do limpias in the community and to prepare women for birth. This, coupled with my journey to learn traditional medicine, exposed me to numerous teachings, cere-

monies, and pláticas (talks) with elders and traditional knowledge bearers from Indigenous people across the Americas who helped me fill my “blanket” with various approaches to women’s health. (Traditionally among Native peoples, we may lay a blanket as a place to make offerings.)

Over the years I have bundled this knowledge with the ancient picturebook tradition of my ancestors, reading the books as medicinal texts from the gaze of a promotora. I work with many codices and numerous symbols of the great weaver, spider women, trees of life, and knots of wild herbs and serpents that form ombligos and twisted cords, where star beings and energetic practices emerge. In all of these formulas, I found life processes expressed in the medicinal knowledge of today in my world: medicinal practices around the navel as an energetic center, rebozos hanging as physical celestial cords to help bring down a baby, tree-crosses in our ceremonies.

In Mexico, my elders speak of mistica as a certain quality of knowledge that is experienced and emerges from experience. Mistica occurs when knowledge, mastery, or skill and mystery are joined. I am trained in the practices of Mexican Indigenous medicine. This system of knowledge is a helix threaded by science and spirituality. I cannot, and choose not to, expansively describe what I have experienced when I work with the energies and powers of life. They are so profound that words cannot wrap around them. This is why so many Native peoples speak of the life powers as the Great Mystery, the Great Spirit(s), the Formers, the Life Makers, That Which Is Near and Close, and All That We Live For (to name a few) to convey our cosmo-logics, or deep foundations for making sense of the sacred processes of Life that our minds cannot fully understand or express.

Indigenous natural law(s) stress generosity, mutuality, and interdependence. Natural law is expressed in the cyclical nature of the four seasons, the physical processes of cellular regeneration, and the cycles of life-death and regeneration. Natural laws and Indigenous science are based on spiritual and ceremonial protocols with all life forms. They are agreements to live by that are expressed in our respectful interactions of prayers and ceremonies—prayers left for the waters, prayers carried in smoke, or the offerings of sacrifice left by our very bodies, as well as our human struggle to empty our hearts of aires, or “winds,” in the form of envy, revenge, grief, judgment, resentment, and mockery. In accordance with natural law, the Moon asserts her influence over the tides of the ocean and the human body, over blood and amniotic fluids. As Mohawk midwife Katsi Cook (1992) notes, Grandmother Moon gives women their reproductive “authority.” Similarly, astral forces such as Grandmother Moon and the Morning Star are part of the “authoritative knowledge” of Red Medicine. These authorities work in conjunction with the authority of elders and their lived experiences to establish ceremony as part of “authoritative
knowledge” in birth. These protocols and sacred authorities form the original instructions of many Indigenous peoples; they establish teachings on how to conduct ourselves.

I have the first doctorate in my family, but I am not the first doctor. My great-grandparents were curanderos, yerberos, bone setters, and parteras. I like to reconfigure my letters. For me, my PhD means “promotora of herbal doctoring,” “promotora of huevo (egg) doctoring,” and “promotora of huaraiche doctoring,” in honor of all the elders I have had to keep with up and down montes, pasto, and jungle as they easily maneuvered the terrain in huaraiches. They are the barefoot doctors of the Americas, healing bones and breaking fevers and sustos. The huaraiche doctors are médicos Indígenas, doctors in their own right—“root doctors” like my great-grandma Concha. Someday, after I have apprenticed for three decades, I may be able to say my PhD stands for “partera and huaraiche doctor.”

I am the daughter of Kickapoo, Comanche, and Macchua peoples, raised in the Mexican/Xicana communities. In my early life, I was raised by my grandparents, who considered themselves “Indios.” My maternal grandfather said we were Kickapoo, Comanche, and “Aztec.” According to my grandpa, my American Indian relatives went into Old Mexico for refuge from the Indian Wars and married the Nahual-speaking peoples of Guanajuato and Zacatecas. On my father’s side, we are also Kickapoo, and the descendants of the Mexican and Indian peoples who were in the landbase now known as Texas before it was a state or part of the country of Mexico. I descend from three generations of curanderos, parteras, and people “who know herbs,” as my Uncle Joe said. My great-grandmother Concha was a tall, stout woman born in San Antonio in the mid-1800s, and a midwife who was fluent in both Spanish and English. I also have had the fortune of learning traditional medicine from the Nahua tatas and nanas (our words for grandfathers/grandmothers or male/female elders) of Morelos, Mexico, who are my elders. Based on their ceremonial calendars, my madrina is Meyahuel, the spirit of the maguey and a guardian of the yerbas and healing.

In many ways, it is the mistica of the plantas, las matas, or the plant world that led me to birthing as an expression of Native science. Plants are part of human history. The plantas have been calling me for many years now, speaking to me in dreams or catching my spirit on a path. Plants have guided me in crucial times in my life, saving me from a life as a housebound invalid when I contracted an autoimmune disorder in 1989.

In “The Millennium of the Feminine,” a brown paper that I wrote for the Women’s Theological Center in 1993, I shared some of my experiences in self-healing: “So part of healing female energy requires bringing the medicine from within our suffering. As Paulo Freire said, it is our suffering that allows us to understand our life and the treasure of our dignity, our humanity. And so in my reconstruction of my life, I began the cycle of creation” (2000, 3). This is the process of our natural laws: origination, transformation, regeneration, return. I gained a deeper understanding of herbs then, as I relied on plantas, prayer, ceremonia, and various elders (Grandpa Ray, don Faustino, las nanas Zapatistas) to heal. I learned herbalism and how to work energy to heal myself, and by 1997, at the end of my recovery, I was under my own herbal self-care. I have worked with yerbas since the 1980s, first for my self-healing, and now as a community yerbera and promotora tradicional. Plants are part of our oldest “body memory” and reveal a profound story about the human condition. Snake Woman, or Cihuacoatl, who was invoked in birth by Mexico midwives, is also called Quilaztlitli, which is sometimes translated as “abundant herb.” My self-determination encompasses the natural world’s sovereignty. Without their right to continue and thrive, I would not exist. The weave of platted grasses reminds us of the will of life to continue.

Tlazolteotl’s Escoba

Growing up, I have vague memories of my grandmother’s escoba, or broom, for limpias. She would pray over it and use it in purifying “sweeping” of the body, and then use the huevo. Some escobas are made of plants and herbs, showing a continuity of acts and instruments with ceremonial brooms depicted in various codices. She also had prayers for the water—which she and my relatives have used to cure drug addiction and alcoholism. As my mother recalls, “She prayed over everything.” My earliest memory as a child was watching my grandma pray to the four winds at night. I realize now this was my traditional formation. Later, as I began in earnest to study la medicina (traditional medicine), first for my own healing and later as a promotora and apprentice herbalist, the elders in my family began to share family protection rites and precise ways in which my great-grandpa prayed to the four winds, as well as the medicines he used to “feed the spirits,” with me. Like many other families considered “Mexican,” our family held Indigenous knowledge privately and expressed it in our lifeways maintained through traditional healing knowledge.

For my grandparents who identified with their nations, being Mexican was “another kind of ‘Indian.’” I learned recetas about my granny’s “turtle medicine”; my other granny’s ventosas (cupping); recetas for colds, for frío in the body and what to do “si la sangre caliente,” or if the blood gets hot in a child from mal ojo; and how a troubled marriage can lead to the blood “going cold”
and cause illness. I learned one of my grandpa’s recetas for how to clear mal energia, or negative energy—small recipes and practices that were the staple of any family with a connection to the energies and the natural world. I carry tobacco prayers for rain, my grandparents’ different ways to call the four winds, and how to cut and gather plants based on sacred directions and celestial positions, all of which is my personal legacy of being in relationship with my family and original relations.

While in ceremony with other Indigenous peoples, I experienced actions that were familiar to me. As I wondered when—and how—my father’s family lost our Kickapoo tobacco that Mama Mencha grew, as I reckoned with the legacy of pain because my maternal Kickapoo great-grandmother was stolen from her people, I also tried to make sense of resonating experiences between my familial knowledge and other tribal people’s medicine ways. I also found clarity in the distinctions.

As I deepened my relationship with the medicines, every instruction from an elder, every ceremony, my dreams, my experiences in nature, all became instructions in how to understand Indigenous medicinal ways. Sometimes, the teachings came as I helped tend the fire or clean the altar or place of offerings. All the while, I was also learning from traditional elders, ceremonial leaders, grannies, and curanderas at women’s gatherings, workshops, Indigenous gatherings, and courses in Mexico and receiving teachings from my elders in the United States. I did not grow up traditionally, learning to do the ancient medicine as my relatives did their work. But I was treated with herbs and the huevo and lived within the atmosphere of their “doings.” I have had to return to Indigenous relatives to learn these ways deeply. I am not a curandera or a ceremonial leader. I am a self-healer, an apprentice yerbera (herbalist), traditional birth attendant, and a promotora. Now that I have a doctorate, I follow Doctor Mario Rojas’s model of a promotora-investigadora, which I learned in 2005 while taking some training from him on integrating traditional medicine because I wanted to experience how traditional medicine was adapting to new environments.

During my communal learning in the mid-1990s, I was part of a women’s collective and kalpulli in Albuquerque (Kalpulli Izkalli), in which we began to recover and transmit the teachings of traditional medicine within our families. Several of the women had been apprentices for decades yet never named themselves curanderas, because they wanted to uphold the traditional ways through which such designations transpire—by being named by your elders or your communities. Sometimes because detribalized people have lost communal structures, there is a sense of the need to name oneself. Yet I recall the advice of one of my aunts, who would acknowledge herself only as the curandera of her vast extended family; a curandera does not name her-

self publicly, for it makes her powers vulnerable to various levels of attack. In my own family, my grandmother holds memories of being labeled the offspring of el brujo, or the witch, because my great-grandfather was an extremely sought-after curandero. As we will see later, this tension of the curandera-bruja in many Mexican families is a legacy of the persecution of female healers.

I remember asking a ceremonial leader once for a limpia, and she responded that she could give me one or she could teach me how to do my own. Like a lot of women, I did not think I had the right or permission to do one, for that was the domain of elders. But as we gathered in our women’s circle, we gave ourselves permission to heal ourselves. While we reclaimed the right to do this, we also asked for permission from our various elders, who guided us throughout the process. We were in our thirties to our fifties, and we knew better than to think we knew enough on our own, even though some of us had decades of experience. Some of the women had inherited el don, or the gift of healing, from their elders or were born with the power to doctor. As a result, we created what we believe to be the first promotora program on Mexican/Indigenous traditional medicine in the United States, in 1998.

As part of our vision, we adopted a phrase from the ceremonial leader Sylvia Ledesma: “Curandera de yo misma.” Curandera of myself. We knew it had not been that long since our teachings and ways had stopped being practiced, and some never did cease. As I became a promotora of traditional medicine, I saw how people, when gathered in a circle, would invariably remember a recipe or even ritual knowledge and old cosmological knowledge associating ecological phenomena with health and illness. From that experience, I concluded we could not have a resurgence of traditional medicine or curanderismo until we first revitalized curando, or healing our own bodies and those of our families. That family medicine is the foundation that allowed the teachings to continue in the first place. As Ledesma says, “healing is part of our self-governance.”

I was contemplating how the plants are part of self-determination, establishing sacred relationships with life, when I found this passage by Cajete: “Plant cultivation was one of the primary reasons for the development of accurate calendars” (2000, 237). It reminded me of how Mesoamerican ceremonial calendars are based on the agricultural cycle and the cycles in the natural world. During the “sweeping of the roads” ceremonial period of purification, the midwives danced with bundles of herbs, marigolds, and tobacco. I thought of Malinalli, an herb or grass twisted like a double helix, which is a day sign on the calendar. I thought of Cihuatocatl’s twisted hair, and again of Quilaztli. These twisted braids are energetic trenzas that connect what is
above with what is below in energetic and physical umbilical cords of life. Hundreds of years later, we medicine keepers of the kalpulli dance with brooms and these same herbs during the same ceremonial count.

I remember traditional teachers advising us that to understand Indigenous medicine, we must study the calendars. While learning Nahua, I dreamed of Nahua symbols in a cave. A man was pointing them out to me.Florescano calls the calendar system a device that “set historical memory into motion” (1994: 58, 103). In Mesoamerican traditions, the past is living and remembered in the human activities of planting, hunting, and gathering of foods and medicines. I felt that something was being transmitted to me, though I did not know what. A Mayan medicine man once told me I would be an “autoridad de las plantas,” someone who would defend and know the plants deeply.

Hidden Knowledge Speaks Up

In Mexico and among many cultures, “traditional medicine” is used to refer to a series of medicinal and healing practices that have been maintained over time:

Traditional medicine in Mesoamerica is based upon knowledge and practices that originate from systems of thought and worldviews that are different from those of the West. This knowledge and these practices both derive from and provide the rationale for the daily activities of professional healers. These professionals vary in their characteristics from culture to culture, but throughout the ancient lands of Mesoamerica they are known as curanderos. The word “curandero” does not have a precise meaning. It refers to an individual’s role as a healer while at the same time implying that this individual is not a medical doctor in the Western sense. A curandero is a person who cures, or who tries to cure, in accord with the ancient pre-Hispanic indigenous pattern, adding knowledge that has accrued for nearly five centuries since the Spanish Conquest. (Viesca Treviño 2001, 47)

Viesca Treviño and Noemi Quezada (2000) note that the “magical” aspects of curanderismo were emphasized in colonial writings. In fact, they were recorded because the dominant group wanted to eliminate what the Indigenous syncretic medical practices favored most (Viesca Treviño 2001). While MTM incorporated African and Spanish elements into its medicinal practices, it did not stop being Indigenous medicine. Some of it became more mestizo or Christianized, but its roots and trunk remained Indigenous.

The curandero is the product of the Conquest; indigenous medical specialists such as the Nahua ticitl, the Huastec ilax, the Tzeltal h’ilol, and Tzotil h’ilol, the Mayan h-men, the ah cut of the Pokom, and its Quiché equivalent, the ah cun, became diluted and homogenized. All of these pre-Hispanic healers gradually became curanderos, with a single Spanish term serving to overshadow cultural differences among them. Previous to the Conquest, all of these healers had been doctors in the complete sense of the term: specialists who solved the health problems of their own people through activities ranging from attending to relations with the sacred to the preparation of medicines (Viesca Treviño 2001, 47–48).

Indigenous medicine is always adapting to its circumstances. Indigenous people took European grains and turned them into flour tortillas and fry bread; tobacco tins became part of the regalia of the Anishinabe jingle dress. Ruda (ru) and rosemary were adopted when Native plants were discouraged by the oppressors because of their ceremonial uses (such as the herb estafiate), yet estafiate continues to be used today, and ruda and rosemary are primary healing plants, even considered plantas maestras, or principal plants, by Indigenous healers. They synchronized their preexisting knowledge with the European and African influences of hot and cold, ancestor prayers, and various treatments for emotional disturbances. Many traditional healers say that Indigenous medicine and curanderismo develop from what is useful and accessible. As I began to learn both natural medicine and Indigenous medicine, the advice I got from several of my elders was to know my foundation—what teachings grounded me as an Indigenous woman.

Today, traditional medicine in Mexico is still vibrant and undergoing change. Some Indigenous elders use a pendulum for diagnosis; dousing has appeared in cultures around the world but is especially popular today in alternative medicine. Other elders have adopted Bach flower remedies, a natural extension of their vast knowledge of the curative, ritual, and ceremonial uses of fresh flowers. They have not stopped doing Indigenous medicine because of these complementary practices. They are Indigenous people grounded in their relationship with the natural world.

Peyote, a medicine from Mexico, led to the formation of the Native American Church north of the border, yet curiously, Mexicans and Mexican Indians are often prohibited from using this potent medicine because they cannot prove they are Indian, despite the fact that many in Texas are the descendants of Chichimeca tribes and other Native peoples with an ancestral connection to this medicine. This is, in good part, the consequence of being discursively and legally defined out of the Native American category, often at the whim of the United States. Such changing markers displace original peoples from the
historical consciousness in the following portion of a prayer. Among pre-
Columbian peoples, peyote was greeted with the memory of its origins: “án
tichiuhemeco,” or “you who live in the country of the Chichimecos” (Aguirre

MTM has not lost its vast knowledge of herbs, nutrition, or the energetic
practices that are often combined as part of the treatment in the forms of
limpia or ceremonies. A relationship with the four elements of life and the
land persists. The practices of limpia, medicinal baths, and herbalism repre-
sent a landed relationship and often a particular relationship with land. In
California, pirul may be used as a planta maestra, while in another place it
may be gobernadora that is used. The plants also migrate with us as we move
through the lands. I have had to adjust my limpia to different landscapes,
using, for instance, more evergreens and cedar when I moved to Wisconsin’s
“tundra” for graduate school.

**Plantas Calientes**

“Vamos a calentar tu olla,” said my friend Helga García Garza as we walked
to the temazcal to warm my pot at her family’s kalpulli near Brownsville,
Texas. “Vamos a calentar tu temazkalli.” Her familia de danzantes, or ceremo-
nial dancers, had learned from Ségura, and she and her husband, José Garza,
are knowledge keepers of Indigenous medicine and ceremony. From Martha
Ramírez-Oropesa, a cofounder of NahuaTL University, I would learn that la
olla, the woman’s uterus, is symbolized in the codices as a U-shaped pot on
the moon. We would also participate in a 2002 ceremony led by Nahua curan-
deras at the “pyramid of the flowers.” There, I was first exposed to the offerings
of the women with their “pots,” or bellies, filled with a baby at Xochitecatl (a
few years before I would read about this place in books, I knew women were
still going there to pray for babies).

At a gathering of Otomi in Denver, Colorado, an Otomi woman who did
traditional medicine told me that as a result of being raped in 1984, my
matriz “volvió niña.” My uterus had become like a girl’s, and therefore cold.
The hot-cold principle of traditional medicine in Mexico is an ancient one,
predating the Spanish introduction of its own hot-cold paradigm into
MTM (López Austin 1988). Treatments using the four elements of life are
often determined by this hot-cold paradigm. They can vary from teas to
baños, or herbal baths, to massages with salves made with oils and herbs
with specific hot/cold/neutral qualities, to eating or avoiding foods that are
hot or cold in nature, and to using the temazkal. Hernández Sáenz and
Foster record this paradigm in colonial medicinal knowledge of “cold in
the womb” (2001, 44).

Cultures dense with symbols develop healing systems based on the opac-
ity of symbols and cosmology that help to explain this hot-cold world-view.
One of the shared symbols among many Mesoamerican cultures that still
thrive today is the concept of the dual Creator, understood in Aztec/Mexica
culture as Ometeotl: Ome—two; and teotl—sacred stone. This duality is
constantly expressed in life as movement, which is created by the tension
between the balancing of opposites: male-female; salt-sweet; acid-alkaline;
day-night; solar-lunar; above-below; hot-cold. This is an energetic princi-
ple. Other Native cultures, such as Laguna Pueblo, also have male-female
creators that speak to their cosmological understanding of balance. Thus, to
have a name for Creator(s) that recognizes this duality indicates that this
philosophical code is an organizing principle and the originating Indige-
nous source for this continuing healing framework. A prime example in
Nahua medicinal thought is the pre-Columbian expression of sickness as
“in ehecatl, in temoztli,” referring to cold, wind, and water as sources of ill-
ness and the signaling cosmic dualities: “This was a simple way of naming
the two halves of the world from which most of man’s illnesses came” (López
Austin 1988, 275).

By examining the hot-cold paradigm, one can also see a system of Indige-
nous medicine that involves an integrated approach to healing and wellness.
Aspects of the four elements are employed based on their physical and ener-
geric properties and prescribed to balance the hot-cold state of the body. The
four elements are applied internally or externally to purify and balance the
state of life, depending on the nature of the imbalance. The four elements
are used based on their unique nature. For instance, the properties of earth
have an absorbing function. Tierra, or earth, itself is cooling and would be
employed when a person needs something absorbed, as opposed to being
fortified by fire. When I teach students about this property, I instruct them
to place their palms facing the earth. Most will detect the gravitational pull of
the earth. The elements of earth include food, herbs, flowers, and minerals
that contain the hot-cold principle.

As a child, my mothers (grandmothers and mother) would tell me not to
go descalza (barefoot) lest frío—cold—enter my body. To avert aires (airs),
I could not go out with wet hair on a cold morning or in the evening. When I
first started trying to get pregnant, the nanas would advise me not to eat cold
foods. Many traditional midwives speak of pregnancy as a hot state. Cosmín-
sky notes the Mayan belief that women carry more blood while pregnant,
and blood is hot in nature (2001). One traditional curing practice that I have
been taught is how to take care of a child who has gotten sick from being ex-
posed to too much heat from a pregnant woman. The nana (grandmother)
imidwives teach that when a woman gives birth she is very “open,” and cold
can enter. After delivery, a woman is in a cold state from the loss of blood and expulsion of the baby and therefore should consume hot teas and hot food. Elders have also taught me that it is not recommended to use scissors when cutting the umbilical cord, because scissors are cold in nature. Elders may use obsidian for cutting the cord, and Nicolás León, who gathered a trove of birthing knowledge of Mexico in the 1900s, recorded this same Indigenous practice to guard against cold entering the child (1910).

This is an example of how Indigenous knowledge makes sense by establishing caution and making use of what is available. Jordan has documented how sometimes using a vela, or candle, often a traditional instrument to cauterize the umbilical cord, is better than using technologies introduced by Western medicine (1997). In homes without electricity or running water, it can be difficult to sterilize metal objects, while a candle is readily available and can ensure a sterile implement. I have been taught by elders that traditional medicine evolves from what is nearby and makes sense.

When I was living in Mexico, I miscarried. I did not follow my mother’s prescriptions for postpartum care. I did not wear the faja, or cloth wrap, long enough to protect my uterus, the usual ritual time of twenty to forty days. Some women adhere to twenty, based on the Native ceremonial calendars, and others up to forty, based on the cuarentena. Some say the cuarentena is the Catholicized forty-day ritual period used not only for the faja and dieta (a prescribed diet) following birth, but for other healing practices involving repeated use or application for restoration. However, it is also considered a ritual time of two twenty-day cycles. (Mesoamerican ceremonial calendars employ a twenty-day period similar to the Gregorian calendar’s month.)

I walked around barefoot where cold and aires could enter my body. That, coupled with the sexual violation, caused the frío a madurar. Once coldness has matured, it is quite difficult to transform it. “Por eso te entró mucho, mucho frío,” doña Filo told me.

Yauhtli

I asked la nana Filo what kind of herbs or flowers to use in limpia or preparation of pregnant women. As an herbalist and promotora de medicina tradicional, I was often asked to do limpias and prepare women for birth. “Yauhtli,” she said. “Yauhtli loosens and releases.” When a woman has a difficult labor, the nana burns yauhtli. Popularly known as pericón or yerba anis, yauhtli is recorded in the Florentine Codex (Sahagún 1950–1982). Yauhtli, or iyautli, translates as “an offered-up thing” or incense (Ruiz de Alarcón 1984, 250).5

A few weeks after this apprentice period, I did a limpia and blessing for an expectant couple and the father’s mother to honor the “catching” of the baby by the entire family during their home birth. We used yauhtli, their eagle feather, and flowers, and the baby came that night.

One of my spirit sisters, Judy P., taught me how to bless a newborn baby with limpia de flores. Judy descends from Mayan and Mexican peoples. And though she came from the mountains of New Mexico, she taught me a ceremony using flowers very similar to that of the Nahuas as recorded by Huber and Sandstrom in postpartum rituals involving Huastec, Nahuas, Otomí, Tepelahua, and Totonac midwives regarding the afterbirth, blood, and amniotic fluid (2001).

Regarding Nahuat midwives from Ixhuatlán de Madero: “On the fourth day after birth either the midwife or a special ritual kinswoman [the axochiteonaj, or water-flower godmother] ritualistically cleanses the newborn child by bathing him in water in which herbs have been soaked” (Huber and Sandstrom 2001, 154). Though we were thousands of miles away, we were following similar principles. We were acting in the capacity of the axochiteonaj, the water-flower godmother. Other nanas and traditional teachers taught me the importance of flowers in limpias and baños, for children as well as adults. The importance of flowers in ceremonies is stressed across the Americas on gravesites and altars and the crosses of yauhtli that are made on September 28 in Morelos and left in milpas (cornfields) and crossroads. This coincides with “the sweeping of the roads” ceremonial time in the Mesoamerican calendars, when the fall winds come and fields are harvested and cleaned in preparation for the season’s turn toward repose.

The materia medica for herbs related to pregnancy and birthing is vast, though herbs tend to be discouraged to protect the child. I turn to three other herbs, some of which have more ritualistic usage and are recorded in the early colonial records of Sahagún and Ruiz de Alarcón. ’Come. Let it be you soon, priest, Nine-[times]-rock-slapped-one [i.e., the tobacco]. Let us shoo away from here the yellow palsy, the green palsy.’ With this she puts down the piejete [tobacco] and sets her pregnant one to giving birth. But if for the good outcome of the childbirth she intends to avail herself of fire and incensings, which commonly are with copal or with the herb called yauhtli—that is, amise—where she says in the incantation ‘nine-times beaten one.’…” (Ruiz de Alarcón 1984, 159).

When I have shared this passage from the 1600s in my discussion of the medicinal uses of tobacco, peyote, estafiate, and the maguy, some Native midwives have commented that among their tribal traditions in the north, they also employ tobacco or peyote when there is a difficult labor or to diagnose causes and actions. Ruiz de Alarcón (ibid.) recorded in his treatise that
in order to facilitate labor, women "pick up the piqiete in the hand and crush it, and then they move the hand with the piqiete over the belly of the pregnant woman, especially over the fetus." *iyel* is "tobacco" in Nahua; *pictietel* is "tiny tobacco." Andrews and Hassig, translators of the treatise, identify it as *Nicotiana rustica* and note that it is used to cure affections of the uterus.

When I shared that story with doña Fito, she commented, "Fijate que sí. You wouldn’t believe it, but it works. You just blow like this." And she showed how she puffs on the cigarette as an intervention to advance labor. Tobacco used in this physical and energetic manner is a technology of birthing because it is employed to move the labor, and therefore it is energy. Jordan speaks of how tools such as the rebozo massage to ease back pains, a birthing stool or hammock, or a rope for vertical birthing are more than "folk medicine." They are technologies of birthing. They also represent Native cosmology and a medical geography. The rope traditionally has been viewed as a connection to the cosmos, as in the Mayan worldview, or as an omblico that ties the woman to the cosmos, such as the ombligos or umbilical cords that tie female rulers to mountains and space in the codices.

Tobacco offerings, tobacco gourds, and tobacco flowers are recorded in the codices and on stone figurines, such as that of Xochipilli. Women are depicted selling tobacco in the *Florentine Codex* (Sahagún 1950–1982). Today, various medicinal practices using tobacco continue in Mexican Indigenous medicine. To introduce muscle energy, tobacco is burned near a baby. It is also used for burns, diarrhea, cuts, insect bites, and afflictions of the uterus, for incisions, headaches, inflammation of the spleen, toothaches, syphilis, snakebites, asthma, and dropsy, and to alleviate pain. It is used for protection or rubbed on the body for fatigue or as a form of prayer. Ruiz de Alarcón records a recipe for *tenexietel* (lime-tobacco) in a 1:10 ratio for *mal de frío* (illness caused by cold), or to be used with tomato for swollen throats and cysts (1984, 251). This energetic practice is an example of how Indigenous knowledge is a continuance today of the pre-Hispanic Indigenous patterns.

Again, midwives thousands of miles from each other know to use the plant toward the same ends. In our relationship with las plantas, we each grow to know it, in some ways uniquely. One person will use the same plant for something entirely different from another person, but they may also employ it for similar purposes. Through repeated use and experimenting with plants, peoples may also find similar uses thousands of miles away. These are examples of the correspondences that Indigenous peoples share with each other based on similar values, yet as distinct peoples. And there is also the sharing of knowledge via trade and cultural exchanges. The plants’ connection to humans is also creative. The plants convey to us certain truths of their powers and uses and should not be discounted in how distant peoples may arrive at similar knowledge. They are co-creators with humans. They have been the co-creators of my own health. I have coughed before a sacred fire as "la medicina"—peyote—healed me when I faced a life-threatening illness, or said prayers during ritual times based on my life cycle and the natural cycle of the moon.

In colonial Mexico, peyote medicine was so revered and useful, female midwives and healers were prosecuted by the Holy Office of the Inquisition for employing it, and colonial records document its widespread use among Indigenous peoples of Mexico. Despite religious persecution of its users, its medicinal and ritual use continues today among numerous Mexican Indians from Huichol and Tarahumara, Native peoples of the north, and detribalized Mexicans and "Chicanos indígenas" who use it medicinally in homes with families as part of prayers or in large ceremonies. Granaries use it medicinally in some places in northern Mexico and South Texas, growing plants on their porches or yards.

Quezada (2000) records midwives in Mexico who accused patients of adultery by resorting to peyote to determine the cause of difficult labor. The Inquisition reviewed the case of one mother who consulted peyote herself to see whether she was pregnant. Andrews and Hassig translate *peyotl* as "a thing that glimmers, grows" (Ruiz de Alarcón 1984, 251). Maximino Martínez notes that many Native cultures revere peyote as a Creator spirit and protector, wearing it for protection. Prayers to Señor Estatíe, the Nine-times-beaten-one (tobacco) and *yerba María* or peyote are recorded in Inquisition documents. Ruiz de Alarcón notes that copal resin and flowers were left as offerings to peyote. It is a practice that continues today (M. Martínez 1959a and 1959b).

Peyote is called by various Native names: *peyotl, icieri, piyolli piot, piule, peyori, peyot*, and *peyottin*, which I was taught means "heart that glimmers." It was banned by a 1620 edict of the Inquisition. For their peyote use to survive, Native peoples called it by encoded Christian names, and it became associated with Jesus and the Holy Trinity, as well as Nuestra Señora, Santa María, Santa Rosa María, Yerba Santa María, and Santa María el peyote. Aguirre Beltrán (1963) records how in Zacatecas it was called *Yerba María, San Nicolas, San Antonio, and Cristo crucificado*; in Saltillo it was called *señor don Pedro*; when it is called *Rosa María*, its masculine part is known as *Rosa San Nicolas* (reflecting the Native cosmology of male-female creative beings). The conquest records indicate how Indigenous peoples used sacred language and offered song and dance, much as is done today in many Indigenous communities of Mexico and the United States.

{iFazolcihuapilli}
Cenicac inichipochtli
Yaolquil itonatiuh
This prayer, loosely translated, calls on the “divine woman and bewitcher” who is “virgin for always” and presides over the night where a cactus is Creator. It is interesting to note that in this prayer Tlazolteotl is one of the divine female beings associated with stars and the night sky. These beings are also the women who die in childbirth and accompany the sun and another manifestation of Tlazolteotl, the female guardian of midwives, pregnant women, newborns—the Great Weaver and Parturient of Life. Other prayers recorded by the Holy Office further exemplify the cloaking of this medicine in the name of the Holy Spirit as the petitioner asks it “to take me out of the tribulation in which I find myself” (Quezada 2000, 50). The supplicants prayed:

Santa Rosa María, en el nombre del padre,  
Del Hijo y del Espíritu Santo,  
Por la virtud que Dios te ha dado,  
Te pido que me cure y saques del tribulación en que me hallo.  
(Quezada 2000, 50)

After saying these words the petitioners were to eat the medicine and, in keeping with the Inquisition, use this Christianized frame—if you have a virtue from God, heal me, but if your virtue is from the devil, I do not want to see or hear you. Some three hundred years later, Martínez notes this Huichol prayer recorded in 1924:

Quitacuezi cati coerguengau; Teahuari-Touzi Zapagui yemi tiruz Urámaca; quequurí nauaua, taramara atosame Quetzli-Nagüe, no ari huame, utranacu, usimahuacu, Ñasiguari, Huahquiri Ecatehuri Matzi, paricuta, muelleica huersica huercia huemari.

Ta-ta Cabalenco simuíname catagué erataguame. Ya anite ne te, neatama: Neamatzina huahtzatzi, Tátaba, cipitzra guie huro caique, tutujiaque, henemulleica tocari.

Huquiri enesenemalluri yunaiparan nenuleican nemallelureine tucari maneari.

Buenos días, mi Creador, siempre cuida de mi comida hasta hoy lo has hecho. No permitas que Tehuari-Touzi (Espíritu del mal) se apodere de mi alma. Que la madre nube me defienda del fuego por dondequiera que vaya! oh, tú, nube del norte, del sur, del este y del oeste, juntas para que con vuestro riego se fecunde la tierra que me da de comer!

Felicies vosotras, nubes que nacéis del mar y de los ríos, de los ríos que Cuetzi-Nagüe formó azotando las cuebras. (1999a, 472–73)

The prayer continues: “Oh, gran Ta-tata-Cabalenco (espíritu del bien) que ahuyentes los espíritus del mal, dame licencia de vivir siempre sano!” (M. Martínez 1999a, 472–73).

This prayer invokes various creators and clouds that are born from the ocean and rivers. These beings bless the corn and harvests that come from the providence of the peyote as a result of prayers offered to this sacred entity. I include these peyote prayers to contextualize the importance that the Inquisition placed on its eradication and why it continues today to be called the great creator and life sustainer and therefore continues to be utilized in fertility of the earth and humans and in birthing rites. Some elders told me to take peyote to get pregnant. One recipe called for taking it based on my moon cycle, followed by a massage from a sobadora. Among Indigenous people in northern Mexico it is known as the giver of life and fertility (Schulze et al. 2000, 144). Winter records this recipe for stopping menstrual hemorrhage: a bit of peyote is boiled with rosemary and pecan shell. Only after the water is boiled is a very small piece of peyote added. The decoction is used as a douche and is given every other day until recovery (1968, 111).

Today, peyote is used medicinally for heart problems, rheumatism, kidney stones, toothaches, digestive problems, dream healing, fertility, enemas, purging of illness, fevers, fractures, as an aphrodisiac, and for therapeutic uses, divination, and protection (ibid.; Kelly 1965). Some recipes call for it to be eaten with sugar or piloncillo. It may be worn, drunk in a tea, used as a douche or an enema, or burned. Some Indigenous midwives continue to employ it to fortify mother and midwife and as a painkiller. Despite colonized thinking that continues to suppress its living relationship with Indigenous peoples, peyote continues to be used in subterranean cultural practices. Chicanos and “undocumented” Indians unrecognized by the nation-state on either side of the
border refuse to relinquish their ancestral relationship with this powerful medicine that has medicinal and ritual uses, including in birthing and fertility. Schultes et al. record that its usage was still so prevalent in 1760 in San Antonio, Texas, that a priest published a list for converts that included the questions (which I translate here): “Have you eaten human flesh? Have you eaten the flesh of peyote?” (2000, 147). That these medicines are still used for medicinal and ritual purposes to affect physical aspects of healing, such as fertility and birth, indicates the resiliency of these traditions across time and dominance.

Maguey Grandmother: New Moon Dream, April 2002

Journal entry made while teaching a course on sacred geography at UCLA:

I am with hombres de medicina. Abuelos Mayas. I feel I know them, two or three. One tells me, “un espíritu te ha escupido.” (But I am protected.) I look on the ground and see a large square marble slab. He goes to my feet. I’m afraid to look. On my left foot is an emblem in green, 3-D, of Meyahuel, her tree. On right, is a glistening, silvery white spiderweb—spiderwoman. I can see Tlazolteotl’s silhouette in the web. Then I see a jeefe (ceremonial leader) from Amecameca. He is showing me an escultura de Quetzalcoatl. It is cut in vidrio, several layers of cut glass or quartz, cutting into the air. I can not make out what he is trying to show me because it is so silvery light and shining. Were they showing me my medicine, that they are inside me, on me? Showing me the way?

“Today is a good day. It is a full moon,” la nana Filo told me when I started my first lessons with her by being treated for infertility.

I came to Mexico knowing only her town. I was told to go see her early, as she rises before dawn to work. I arrived at five-thirty in the morning, asking for directions in her village as I went along. She has already gone to the market. Her land base is organized in the old way of the Nahua peoples, with relatives and children in their own homes, usually one or two rooms at most, where sleeping and much convivencia transpires. She has a separate cooking hut for her hearth, and her fuego, or fire, was one of the first things she proudly showed me when we met up again later. People who must depend on the fire for warmth and their food often have a deep knowledge of life science and how to use it for medicina. By life science, I mean a science of life or a scientific understanding that unfolds from your very existence depending on a direct relationship with the natural world.

She palpates my womb and uterus, showing me some teachings on the energetic role of the ombligo, or navel, and sharing recetas with me, different yerbas frío en el matriz, cysts, and tumors, and for cleaning out uterine congestion. She spends all the next day gathering pencas de maguey, roasting the maguey leaves and curing them with the full moon. I am not to bathe for the three days that I apply this ointment topically, and am to clean only lightly with a washcloth and not cold water, else I will inflame. It is a treatment of extremely hot nature. We speak of the moon, and I ask her if she blesses the babies; she does, presenting them to the celestial forces, but silently, since many of her clients are Christianized. Later, when I read the sixteenth-century birthing narratives recorded by Sahagún in which the midwife blesses the newborn, I think in some fashion this is still happening; midwives or ritual keepers are still doing this. We speak more of limpias and blessing ways. Over the years, she has shown me various recetas with the maguey. Maguey, or metl, treats infertility, the immune system, muscular ailments, and the kidneys. Miel de maguey (maguey honey) also is used for infertility, and for diabetes.

For instance, the nana says, if a woman is about to miscarry, she administers a drink made from nine picos, or tips of the maguey, a gold ring, and red thread. When tata Aurelio hears this, he interjects that the receta comes from the story of the Teopozteco, a cultural hero of nearby Teopoztlán. He tells us the story that night; it takes a good hour to tell, and I am falling asleep. So I ask her to retell it to me so that I can remember it. The part of the story relevant here follows.

There was a maiden who ate a piece of corn. She got pregnant and her parents abandoned her baby, leaving it on a maguey. A little worm pricked a hole so that the baby could nurse from the maguey milk. Then the ranitas (frogs) made him a mat from tule reeds, but first the little ants made him a cradle from ants so that he could warm up. Some ancianos, or elders, passed by and found him, and they took him to raise as their own. The abuela drank atole of amaranth to have mother’s milk, “y el niño colgó,” the baby latched on. Amaranth is from the same family as ajonjoli, or sesame, the nana notes. Earlier, doña Filo had said that amaranth helps with mother’s milk, as does ajonjoli. We can see how this story contains what Native peoples call original instructions, guidelines for food as medicine and how to live, as well as stories that reflect a sacred geography. Native intelligence is expressed in doña Filo’s understanding of the moon cycle and its influence on the maguey both as it grows and as the moon exerts pressure on its liquids, and as the liquids strengthen into a decoction while under its watch again. Sacred formulas constitute a distinct expression of Indigenous science, and ceremonies and rituals are included as part of the process of “causality.” From the Otomi
to the Totonac, midwives perform a sacred charge in the heavens, burning copal incense in the celestial realms and guiding as divine beings.

Sacred Directions

Tepixinola—woman rock—is a ceremonial site that el tata said we must journey to next. Later that day, we would go into the temazkal. Before, it had been too humid, and the wetness would have entered our bodies. He prepared the fire and the herbs for curar el frío. “Una partera sin un temazkal,” he tells us, “no es partera.” A midwife without a sweat lodge is not a midwife.

Journal entry: Tepixinola Aug. 18–04: Despertamos con el caracol. We awoke to the sound of the conch shell calling us for ceremony.

Doña Filo says my uterus has gone into place (after three of the tratamientos con la abuela Maguey). I took pink booties and roses as offerings. As we arrived to the “window,” our tata pointed out her stone rebozo on the ground. “Aquí empieza su rebozo.” There is the baby! A rock formed like a baby on its tummy with its rump up. Someone had taken its head. “And there, there is her skirt.” It was tall and thick like a womb that had borne many children. Tepixinola was full of herbs and plants. Doradilla and a maguey grew in its stones. Roberto saw a chuaparoa (hummingbird). A tlapacatl—possum—left some markings. “He left its offering,” joked doña Filo. “Whenever you see a dead tlapacatl on the road, cut his tail for when you need it.” (Possum tail is prepared to speed a labor and is recorded in Sahagún.) Long green braids of doradilla and other herbs hang like trenzas from her chichis, her braids and teats. The traditional offerings of mole in clay pots and toys and candles fill the shrine. We pray to the four directions holding colored candles for each of the cardinal points. I pray to Tepixinola and ask for a baby. Roberto tells her we have brought her an offering. My abuelas pray for us and for their own children. As we walk back, doña Filo gathers some of her favorite herbs, capitaneja and San Francisco. Along with axhuitl, she uses them for numerous ailments beyond fertility and birthing. As I look at Tepixinola, I see all the teachings there, grandmother maguay who has been healing me, several large thick spiderwebs—Tlazoletco’s weavings. I see trenzas like the ones I have promised to bring back from my baby. The medicine of tlapacatl and hummingbird, and its love medicine. And I have faith. In tratamientos, the properties of earth are physical and spiritual, and ceremonies move spirit and body. As above, so below. May that which is above and that which is below heal this middle

world, this earth plane in my body. And even if it does not bring me a baby, let it help me be like doña Filo, a “maker of mothers.”

I have often wondered why I am a carrier of culture in some way. I have been told by my elders that I am to be a “mother maker” like my great-grandmother. I am but an apprentice in these ways, primarily of the Mexican Indian teachings. Aside from the oral instructions I receive, part of my medicinal knowledge comes from the spirit world and in dreams. Often, I will find evidence of their truths in the physical world via books and teachings passed on to me, as I did on November 30, 2003, while researching Indigenous birthing.

Chevalier and Sánchez Bain record that the Nahuas of Veracruz have a practice of putting a newborn outside, leaving the child “in the yard immediately after birth as if it were unwanted.” Mothers who have lost other children are encouraged to do this to strengthen the child’s life force (2003, 68). Prior to reading Chevalier and Sánchez Bain, I had a dream that was beautiful and painful until I found this citation. And so I will share this dream as another form of evidence: in October 2003 I dreamed that I birthed a baby. I saw the entire birth, even felt it in my lower spine while I was dreaming. It was an easy birth. I did not need nurses. I decided to put my baby outside in the sunshine, but I left it out too long. When I returned, it was slowly dissolving into a golden droplet. I touched it, and with my finger I picked up its last drop of light. I inserted it in my womb. The divine midwives in the spirit world had sent a message.

Notes

1. Sometimes I waited for Ségura as he did his curaciones (healing work). One day, a young couple was waiting for him with their baby so that he could name him based on the ancient ceremonial calendars. The Florentine Codex, a thirteen-volume work that recorded Indigenous knowledge, speaks of the day keepers who read the ritual calendars and named children more than five hundred years ago (Sahagún 1950–1982). There are numerous glyphs in the codices that show the day keeper assigning a name.

2. Cajete also uses this term to explain Native science and knowledge.

3. As Cajete elaborates: “Plants present the life energy of the universe in their roots, stems, leaves, and flowers. In their tenacity for living in every location on earth, plants exemplify the operation of the natural laws of nature, of ‘life seeking life.’ At every turn, in every mode, and at every opportunity, plants seek to live their lives, and in their seeking, support all of life, including humans” (2008, 108).

4. Notably, many elders do not pronounce themselves curanderos, such as an elder who told me once, “Oh, no. I am not a curandera. I have been doing it only thirty-five years. My husband’s the curandero. He has been doing it fifty.” They have been named so by their communities.
5. *Tagetes lucida* Cav., of the Compositae family, is also known as *yerba anis*, *yerba de Santa María*, *pericon*, or sweet-scented marigold. It is a stimulant and an emmenagogue.

6. *Lophophora Williamsii* Lem. is of the Cactaceae family. It is a bluish-green plant with pale pink and white flowers. Famous for what western science terms its "hallucinogenic" properties, in particular when refined as mescaline, peyote grows in Queretaro, San Luis Potosí, Coahuila, Zacatecas, Chihuahua, and other places "del Norte," such as south Texas.

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