"Decolonizing Reality:" The Absence of Divine Election in Gloria Anzaldúa's Process of Shamanic Initiation

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> Decolonizing reality consists of unlearning consensual "reality," of seeing through reality's roles and descriptions by what Don Juan calls acts of not-doing... I use cultural figures to intervene in, make change, and thus heal colonialism's wounds. I delve into my own mythical heritage and spiritual traditions, such as curanderismo and Toltec nagualism, and link them to … spiritual activism … and the role of … nepantleras.[1]

This article complicates Gloria Anzaldúa's claim of being a *chamana*—shamaness—who heals colonialism's wounds by decolonizing reality. Her shamanic experiences have been taken as paradigmatic among scholars, from different fields, since the publication of her generative book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), as well as the culmination of her life's work, *Light in the Dark/Luz En Lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* (2015).[2] Yet,

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[1] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz En Lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* (Durham and London: Duke University Press Books, 2015), 44.

[2] Pearl Maria Barros, "Transforming Suffering: Insights From the Work of Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2016); Kakali Bhattacharya, "Autohistoria-Teoría: Merging Self, Culture, Community, Spirit, and Theory," *Journal of Autoethnography* 1, no. 2 (2020): 198–202; Analouise Keating, "Editor's Introduction: Re-Envisioning Coyolxauhqui, Decolonizing Reality Anzaldúa's Twenty-First-Century Imperative," in *Light in the Dark/Luz En Lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, by Gloria E. Anzaldúa (Durhamn: Duke University Press, 2015); Sara Ishii, "'Creative Acts of Vision': Connecting Art and Theory through Gloria Anzaldúa's Archived Sketches," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 57, no. 2 (2023): 94–111; Terrance Macmullan, "The American Redoubt and the Coyolxauqui Imperative: Dismembering America through Whiteness, Remembering America with Gloria Anzaldúa," *Cross Currents* 71, no. 2 (2021): 175–95; Sofía Ruiz-Alfaro, "Nos/Otras Las Chamanas: Metáfora y Curación En Gloria Anzaldúa y Chavela Vargas," *Aztlán* 41, no. 2 (2016): 65–85; Caitlin Simmons, "Light in the Dark/Luz En Lo Oscuro: Gloria Anzaldúa's Response to 9/11," *Melus* 46, no. 3 (2022): 117–39;

divine election, a cross-cultural element present in the shamanic initiation of ancient and contemporary magico-religious healers in México, is absent from the shamanic initiatory process she describes. I argue that Anzaldúa's "decolonial" process of shamanic initiation is better understood, not as being derived from Mexican spiritual traditions, but as part of the neo-*nagual* legacy of Carlos Castañeda. An anthropologist who claimed to be an apprentice to don Juan Matus, an Indigenous man of knowledge, Castañeda was later discovered by scholars to have invented the fictional Yaqui shaman described in his writings. As I will show, Castañeda was a shape-shifter, a *nagual*, but not in the Mesoamerican sense of a ritual specialist who "transforms" into an animal, or an animal spirit helper. Rather, he was a *nagual* in a political sense, he transformed himself from an anthropologist to a shaman in his quest for spiritual power. In the process he "wrote about shamanisms in such a way to make Westerners want to be shamans."[3] To further demonstrate the connection between Castañeda's spiritual legacy and Anzaldúa's later spirituality, I contrast her initiation with that of México's famous *curandero*, el Niño Fidencio (1898-1938). In Fidencio's case, not only is divine election present, but there is also a Catholic dimension to his initiation and healing work. The symbolic, cultural, political, and spiritual borders between what is and isn't colonial are, in the end, far more complex than what Anzaldúa represented in her writings.[4]

Christopher D. Tirres, "Spiritual Activism and Praxis: Gloria Anzaldúa's Mature Spirituality," *Pluralist (Champaign, Ill.)* 14, no. 1 (2019): 119–40.

[3] Robert J. Wallis, *Shamans/Neo-Shamans: Ecstasy, Alternative Archaeologies and Contemporary Pagans* (London: Routledge, 2003), 39.

[4] The Puerto Rican decolonial scholar Ramón Grosfoguel has continuously noted that the meaning of "decolonial" varies according to the author who is using the term, as well as the time and location in which the author is situated. This paper does not question the significant contributions of decolonial scholars in different fields. It also does not argue that Anzaldúa is not a decolonial scholar. (For her definition of decoloniality see the epigraph.) Instead, my critique is limited to her decolonial process of shamanic initiation. My main interest is to demonstrate that this process does not equate to the initiation process of shamans in Mexican spiritual traditions.

Fig. 1 Gloria Anzaldúa (1942-2004). Poet, philosopher, and queer Chicana feminist credited with groundbreaking theoretical contributions in her book, *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987).[5]

As I studied for my general exam on "Shamanic Journeys in the Mesoamerican Religious Tradition" last year, I went back to revisit a few red flags I had noticed when I first read *Light in the Dark* in 2018. It interested me, for example, to take a closer look at Anzaldúa's uncritical use of the already debunked works of the "fake shaman" Carlos Castañeda. It was when a friend told me that criticizing Anzaldúa's artistic method got her into trouble with some of her colleagues in the master's program at Harvard Divinity School (HDS), that I felt compelled to write something about Anzaldúa's formulation of shamanism as deeply Mesoamerican. My friend summarized her experience in the following words: "I'm tired of people using Anzaldúa's 'decolonial' work

[5] For an overview of these scholarly praises in the context of the study of religion see Davíd Carrasco and Robert Lint Sagarena, "The Religious Vision of Gloria Anzaldúa*: Borderlands/La Frontera* as a Shamanic Space," in *Mexican American Religions: Spirituality, Activism, and Culture*, ed. Gastón Espinosa and Mario T. García (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); "Foto Courtesy of Luz Aguirre" in Alexandra Barraza, "Feminist Theorist Thursdays: Gloria Anzaldúa," 2017, https://femmagazine.com/feminist-theorist-thursdays-gloria-anzaldua/.

to dismiss me as *la pobre Indita colonzida*—the poor little Indian woman who is colonized just because she is also Catholic." "Sounds like you were really hurt," I told my friend, attempting to make her feel seen while validating her experience and emotions. I do not come from a Nahua (Aztec) community like her but growing up in northern rural México had also made me feel completely out of place at HDS at some points. I came to realize that in addition to listening to my friend, maybe I could also support her by writing a piece examining Anzaldúa's shamanic journeys. What I seek to complicate in this article, however, is not Anzaldúa's spiritual experiences. Rather, I am concerned with the fact that by calling herself a *curandera* and *chamana*, she equates her shamanic initiation process to someone like el Niño Fidencio's, whose healing powers are contingent upon his divine election by Jesus Christ, the deity who initiated him. I first turn to briefly discussing the different meanings of the terms *curandera* and shaman in the Mexican context.

Curandera, or female curer, is a general term with colonial origins.[6] In a strict historical sense, it refers to healers who lack institutional, or professional, training. They lack a *título*, a degree, to practice medicine that has been legally authorized by the crown or the state. During the colonial period, legislation on the practice of medicine was intended to discredit and delegitimize Indigenous healers. Practicing medicine without a medical degree amounted to committing fraud, and in a deeper sense to committing a crime. The *curandera* was therefore a charlatan and a criminal in the eyes of the Spanish authorities. In *Enfermedad y Maléficio* (*Illness and Sorcery,* 1989), ethnologist and historian Noemí Quezada argues that Indigenous healing practices were criminalized by the Board of the Protomedicato (1527–1831), the

[6] *Curandero* refers to a male curer. I use *curandero* and *curandera* interchangeably to refer to these healers regardless of gender.

supreme colonial authority that regulated medical practitioners in New Spain. Quezada shows that it was the Holy Office of the Inquisition—an institution in charge of moral and religious norms—that persecuted, judged, and punished those who illegally practiced medicine through magico-religious means. This was a brutal measure. The use of magic—the ability to operate simultaneously at the imperceptible and perceptible planes of reality—had been institutionalized in Mesoamerica before the Spanish Conquest of the Aztec Empire.[7]

Distinguished Mesoamericanist Alfredo López Austin documents forty different types of magic specialists in the Nahua world prior to the arrival of the Spaniards.[8] Magicians, he explains, knew how to send their souls (*tonalli*) to the divine regions—to perform a "*viaje extatico*" or ecstatic journey—with the goal of acquiring knowledge and power for healing an illness. Through the ritual use of sacred plants, for example, Indigenous healers entered a state of ecstasy to divine, heal, and communicate with the deities. Recognized as the most important component in native medicinal practice, magic was flagged as superstitious by Spanish Catholic authorities, hence, their suppression of the magical dimension of healing. During the colonial period, as in pre-Hispanic times, magico-religious healers were the representatives of the gods that elected them. The ultimate goal of suppressing Indigenous magic, therefore, was the extermination of *curanderas*, their pre-Hispanic magico-religious practices, their ritual implements, and their "idols" that were identified with the Devil. Yet, the ancient gods hadn't quite said their last word. They refused to be destroyed.

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[7] See Alfredo López Austin, "Cuarenta Clases De Magos Del Mundo Náhuatl," *Estudios De Cultura Náhuatl*, 7 (1967): 87; Alfredo López Austin and Luis Millones, *Dioses Del Norte, Dioses Del Sur: Religiones y Cosmovisión En Mesoamérica y Los Andes*, 1. (México, D.F: Ediciones Era, 2008), 127-128.

[8] López Austin, "Cuarenta Clases De Magos."

Quezada argues that, hoping to go unnoticed, *curanderos* adapted to the persecution of colonial authorities by incorporating the Catholic deity and saints into their religious practices. Today, the general term *curandera* still refers to healers who are described as traditional because they usually lack the *título*. Just as in the pre-Hispanic period, there is still a diversity of specialists, such as bonesetters, midwives, herbalists, massagers, diviners, and *naguales*. A major distinction is still drawn, however, between *curanderas* whose apprenticeship is exclusively empirical—passed down from one generation to another and learned through observation and experimentation—and *curanderas* whose apprenticeship is characterized by a magico-religious dimension, with their medicinal knowledge and healing powers revealed in a dream or through the ingestion of sacred plants. They are chosen and initiated by the sacred. These magico-religious healers claim, as they did five hundred years ago, to have been elected by Jesus Christ, the Virgin, the saints, or Mesoamerican gods.

In his now controversial cross-cultural groundbreaking book, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (1951), historian of religions Mircea Eliade defined the shaman as the great master of ecstasy. The shaman is a sacred specialist who enters a trance state and separates his soul from his body to journey into other planes of reality where the gods or spirits are found. Through ecstasy, he transcends the profane—material—human condition at will. By comparing patterns of shamanic initiation, Eliade showed that divine election, undergoing ordeals, illness or psychic crisis, ecstatic instruction (initiatory dreams), and symbolic death (dismemberment) and resurrection were all elements in the structure of such religious phenomena, despite regional variations. Eliade demonstrated that “the shaman was neither a madman nor a charlatan, as other

scholars had regarded him," but a technician of the sacred.[9] Within this comparative framework, the shaman is a human being chosen by the gods or spirits themselves to be initiated into the secrets of the healing art.[10]

Building on the work of Eliade, distinguished historian of religions Mercedes de la Garza defines the shaman as a master of dreams and ecstasy who possesses *el don*—the divine gift of healing. In her nearly exhaustive work on ancient and contemporary Nahua and Maya shamanic practices, *Sueño y Éxtasis: Visión Chamánica de Los Nahuas y Los Mayas* (*Dreams and Ecstasy: Shamanic Vision of the Nahua and the Maya,* 2012), de la Garza argues that shamans in the Mesoamerican religious tradition are ritual specialists who have been elected and initiated by the sacred. That is, they are part of a contemporary Indigenous religious complex that has been mixing with Christianity since the arrival of the Spaniards and includes Mesoamerican beliefs and practices that date all the way back to the beginning of Indigenous sedentary life as *maíz* cultivators around 2500 BC. [11] Given the multiplicity of Nahua and Maya names for these ritual specialists, and the shared similarities with the Tungus *samans*, she chooses to call them

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[9] Wendy Doniger, "Foreword to the 2004 Edition," in *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, by Mircea Eliade, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004 [1951]), xiii.

[10] Scholars have criticized Eliade's definition of the shaman because of his emphasis on ecstasy. They argue that it is at the expense of the shaman's social function. Historian of religions Roberto González Martínez, for instance, points to the "neuropsychological model" derived from Eliade's work on shamanism ("Crítica al modelo neuropsicológico:" 2003). This model reduces ecstasy to "an altered state of consciousness" that may be achieved independently of a community. It allows scholars such as Michael Harner to completely decontextualize shamanic experiences, making it easier to appropriate Indigenous practices. In Harner's "core shamanism," it is no longer required to be elected by the spirits or deities to become a shaman; divine election, suffering, symbolic death and resurrection are no longer constitutive to the initiation process. Within this neuropsychological framework, anyone who is willing to take and pay for one of his workshops may become a master of ecstasy, or to become, as some may call themselves, a "neo-shaman." Given his influence on Anzaldúa's work, my emphasis on this article is on Castañeda instead of Harner.

[11] Mercedes de la Garza, *Sueño y Éxtasis: Visión Chamánica de Los Nahuas y Los Mayas* (México, D.F: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México : Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2012); Alfredo López Austin, *Tamoanchan Y Tlalocan* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994); Alfredo López Austin, *Breve Historia De La Tradición Religiosa Mesoamericana* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, 2002).

shamans. Following de la Garza's work, in this essay I use the terms *curandera*, magico-religious healer, and shaman interchangeably. I will contrast these ritual specialists with Anzaldúa's *nepantlera-chamana*, who is initiated without divine election.

In her posthumous book, *Light in the Dark*, Gloria Anzaldúa contends she was initiated as a *chamana* through the "Coyolxauhqui process," a painful and creative process she uses to heal colonialism's wounds. She reconceptualizes her influential notion of the *herida abierta*—open wound—a split in her psyche and her body, as a kind of *susto*, a kind of an illness where the soul is fragmented, and abandons the body, due to a frightening experience. Anzaldúa argues that the shattering of self is manifested as trauma: a state of dissociation in which she is torn apart into pieces that have gone missing.[12] These pieces, fragments of self, are originally dispersed or lost due to "woundings, traumas, racisms, acts of violation," and other abuses of colonial origins.[13] In order to heal colonial wounds by decolonizing reality, Anzaldúa turns to Aztec symbols that pre-date the arrival of Catholicism in the Nahua world. She reconfigures the symbol of the dismembered moon goddess, Coyolxauhqui, a divine female warrior vanquished in battle by her brother, the solar deity Huitzilopochtli.[14] The defeated and dismembered goddess

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[12] Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 1.

[13] Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*. Anzaldúa confuses trauma with traumatic events. She uses the terms interchangeably. However, there is a fundamental distinction between the two: "trauma is not what happens *to* you but what happens inside you" (Gabor Maté and Daniel Maté, *The Myth of Normal : Trauma, Illness, & Healing in a Toxic Culture* [New York: Penguin Random House, 2022], 20). In other words, events may be *trauma-tic*, but they are not the trauma itself.

[14] The Song of Huitzilopochtli, or Myth of Coatepec, narrates the origin myth of the solar deity of the Aztecs. To summarize very briefly, Coatlicue—Lady of the Serpent Skirt— miraculously becomes pregnant with Huitzilopochtli, Hummingbird on the Left, while sweeping the temple at Coatepec—Serpent Mountain. Coyolxauhqui, Painted Bells, and her 400 brothers (the stars), the Centzon Huitznahua, learn about the pregnancy and become infuriated. Feeling insulted and dishonored by Coatlicue's pregnancy, the 400 Warriors of the South follow Coyolxauhqui's lead to kill their mother. Coatlicue hears the news and is saddened and terrified, but Huitzilopochtli consoles her from the womb, assuring her he knows what to do. When Coyolxauhqui and the 400 arrive at the top of the mountain, Coatlicue gives birth to a fully grown and fully armed Huitzilopochtli. Armed with his Xiuhcoatl, the most powerful Aztec weapon, Huitzilopochtli dismembers his sister. Cut to pieces, her head and

comes to exemplify "women as conquered bodies," as well as the cultural and linguistic subjugation of Mexicans in the United States.[15] In Anzaldúa's creative imagination, Coyolxauhqui becomes a symbol for the *susto* she is experiencing.

Yet Coyolxauhqui, as represented in her myth and colossal sculpture, is more than a symbol for Anzaldúa's illness. She also represents wholeness: a healing image. "She represents fragmentation, imperfection, incompleteness, and unfulfilled promises, as well as integration, completeness, and wholeness."[16] The arduous journey to go from fragmentation to wholeness is what Anzaldúa calls the "Coyolxauhqui process." It is a psychic and creative process of tearing apart and putting back together the dismembered pieces that were shattered and dispersed by violent acts.[17] She describes herself as a *curandera* who "calls back" the missing pieces to achieve spiritual integration. She summons back, partly through her writings, the scattered energies and emphasizes the process of healing herself. In "putting Coyolxauhqui back together," Anzaldúa transforms herself by making meaning out of suffering and restoring the life force to

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her body roll down the hill. Then he drives the 400 siblings away until they are all destroyed. For more details and interpretations see Davíd Carrasco, *City of Sacrifice: The Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999); Davíd Carrasco, *The Aztecs: A Very Short Introduction*, First (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Karl Taube, *Aztec and Maya Myths* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997).

[15] In "Gendered Deities and the Survival of Culture" (*History of Religions* 36, no. 4 [May 1997]: 333–56), feminist anthropologist June Nash argues that the conflict between Huitzilopochtli and Coyolxauhqui represents a sexual antagonism between gendered warrior deities. That is, the conflict is not just a battle between diurnal and nocturnal cosmological forces. Building on her earlier work, "The Aztecs and the Ideology of Male Dominance" (*Signs* 4, no. 2 [Winter 1978]: 349–62), Nash thus interprets the Huitzilopochtli origin myth as part of an Aztec ideology of male dominance that validated their conquests. In contrast, in her studies of Aztec culture, anthropologist Inga Clendinnen has noted that the great battle between Huitzilopochtli and Coyolxauhqui was "between siblings, not sexual antagonists. Indeed, the notion of the 'war between the sexes' and the identification of the sexual act with violence or combat so pervasive in our world appears alien to Mexica thinking" (*Aztecs: An Interpretation*, Reissue [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014], 239).

[16] Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 50.

[17] Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 50.

the body. Once fragmented, she now becomes whole. She concludes that through this painful journey of symbolic death and rebirth, she has initiated herself, an artist, as a *chamana*.

Fig. 2 Coyolxauhqui Stone. The giant monolith was originally placed at the foot of the stairway that led up to the top of the *Templo Mayor* (Great Temple)—ceremonial center and heart of the Aztec *axis mundi* in the city of Tenochtitlan. The shrine of the Aztec solar god, Huitzilopochtli, was placed at the top of the Great Temple next to the shrine of Tlaloc, the rain god the Aztecs incorporated from the Toltecs. [18]

[18] The Coyolxauhqui Stone was accidentally found by electrical workers in downtown México City on February 21, 1978. Photo taken from David Carrasco and Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, *Moctezuma's Mexico: Visions of the Aztec World* (Denver: University Press of Colorado, 2003).

During the Coyolxauhqui process, Anzaldúa mixes the cross-cultural shamanic pattern of initiatory dismemberment with a metaphorical *limpia*.[19] A cleansing, or *limpia*, is a ritual *curanderas* perform to cure *susto*. During the curing act, ritual specialists call back the spirit of the person, which is understood to have been lost during a frightening event. In part of Mesoamerica and in the Texas-México borderlands, this ritual is commonly performed using a material object, for example, a pepper tree or rosemary branches, an egg, a lime, or an alum stone may be used. Or, as in the case of the ritual specialists taught by el Niño Fidencio, the person may hold crucifix in one hand and a container with burning *copal* incense in the other. The ritual specialist deals with imperceptible energies that she manipulates using these objects. She rubs the person at specific body points with one of the objects, while typically incorporating an Our Father and Hail Marys in the overall prayer. The spirit of the person is called back three times while tapping the object at the crown of the head, where it is believed the energy that has been lost originally resides. To this end, the *limpia* restores balance—health—to the person by recovering the life energy or spirit that has been lost. In this ritual sense, the *limpia* is a religious act performed by a specialist of the sacred. As such, it differs from Anzaldúa's individualistic and artistic process of symbolic spiritual transformation.

Anzaldúa seems to use her journal as a substitute for the ritual object. Through writing, she performs a symbolic *limpia* on herself. Thus, she asserts herself to be a *curandera* with the shamanic powers to diagnose illness, "figure out what is wrong"; divine, "foretell future and current events"; shape-shift or transmute, "my consciousness flows into la víbora (a snake)"; connect with a guardian spirit, her "nagual"; and "establish new connections" inaccessible to others. Through her shamanic journeys, she has acquired hidden knowledge to bring back to the

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[19] Dismemberment was identified as a shamanic theme/pattern by Mircea Eliade in *Shamanism* (1951).

community. Specifically, she claims to now have the *conocimiento*—insight—to heal others by initiating them as *chamanas*. Anzaldúa is particularly drawn to the privileged cultural position of "nepantleras," liminal people—spiritual-artist-activists who specialize in being mediators of in-between spaces. As she lays out the steps of the Coyolxauhqui process, Anzaldúa shows the ordeals *nepantleras* must undergo if they want to become whole.[20] Overcoming such ordeals will not only transform them but initiate them as well. They will heal themselves and emerge as *chamanas* who consequently will also heal the community—presumably, through shamanic initiation. They will "help us mediate these transitions (new ways or relating to people and surroundings), help us make the crossings, and guide us through the transformation process."[21] Anzaldúa thus argues that the *nepantlera-chamana* has a crucial role to play as a spiritual activist, who like the moon goddess, is meant to be the light in the darkness. To that end, there will be a "new tribalism" of *chamanas* that will heal the world.

Overall, it is the state of fragmentation of Anzaldúa's self-psyche-soul, her *susto*, that functions as the starting point for the initiatory ordeal. Grounded in the field of history of religions, my analysis is not meant to doubt the validity of Anzaldúa's spiritual experiences. If, for example, she asserts seeing the goddess Coatlicue in her dreams, or through psychic processes, I take that assertion seriously. I am not interested in denying her claims about the manifestation of the sacred. Such claims have already been problematized. For instance, in her seminal article, "Who is the Indian in Aztlan?" (2001), Indigenous studies scholar María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo criticizes Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* for appropriating pre-Hispanic Aztec

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[20] Recognize and acknowledge the open wound or *susto*; intend to heal; dismemberment and disintegration; imagine the ways to achieve wholeness while navigating *nepantla*; and achieve integration through embodied political and spiritual acts while creating a new assemblage/identity (*Light in the Dark*, 90).

[21] Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 50.

symbols at the expense of contemporary, and autonomous, Indigenous people. In a more recent essay, "What Does Mestizaje Name?" (2021), Saldaña-Portillo recognizes that she missed the significance of the losses articulated in *Borderlands*: the loss of land, language, relationships, and belonging. Yet, she remains bothered by an "ongoing Chicanx extraction and *appropriation* of Native American sacred practices."[22] Overall, she concludes that even though Aztlan—the Aztec mythical place of origin—has been a powerful political tool used by Chicanos to articulate and fight against their subjugation in the US, Anzaldúa's *new mestiza*—early *nepantlera*—cannot "suture" the different positionalities of Mexicans, Chicanos/as, Anglos, and Indigenous peoples. In other words, Saldaña-Portillo suggests that Anzaldúa's *nepantlera* cannot heal the open wound of the US-México borderlands; (new) *mestizaje* cannot suture lost indigeneity.[23]

By arguing that Anzaldúa *appropriated* Aztec female deities for political ends, however, Saldaña-Portillo implicitly denies that a *hierophany*, a manifestation of the sacred, took place during the course of Anzaldúa's life. In other words, Saldaña-Portillo is insinuating that the Aztec female deities did not show themselves to Anzaldúa and therefore that they are inventions of her creative appropriating imagination. Although her critiques are important, Saldaña-Portillo's implied postmodernist stance regarding the autonomy of the sacred is alarming to the

[22] María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo and Simón Ventura Trujillo, "'Introduction: What Does Mestizaje Name?'" *Aztlán* 46, no. 2 (2021): 157; The authors build on the work of Nez Perce/Tejana scholar Inés Hernández-Ávila, "A Creative Meditation on the Aesthetics of Mestizaje: The Promise of Kinstillatory Relations," *Aztlán* 46, no. 2 (2021): 221–33.

[23] María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, "Who's the Indian in Aztlán? Re-Writing Mestizaje, Indianism, and Chicanismo from the Lacandón" In *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader* [New York: Duke University Press, 2020], 413); In "Who's the Indian in Aztlán?" Saldaña-Portillo demonstrates that the model of *mestizaje* theorized by Mexican philosopher Jose Vasconcelos in *La Raza Cosmica* (1925) glorifies and appropriates an Indigenous past while presuming contemporary Indigenous people as dead. She argues that, by building on Vasconcelos's model, Anzaldúa incorporates this ideological prejudice: the erasure of living Indigenous cultures. The Aztlan that Chicanos/as lay an ancestral claim to, therefore, she argues, erases contemporary "Indians" and appropriates their past instead of engaging with them as autonomous people. For further discussion on Anzaldúa's engagement with Saldana-Portillo's 2001 critique see Analouise Keating, "Editor's Introduction," in *Light in the Dark*, 218n80.

historian of religions. As the scholar of Greek religion and archaeologist Kimberley C. Patton has demonstrated, postmodern thought takes for granted the presupposition that the sacred is a social construct.[24] In "Juggling Torches: Why We Still Need Comparative Religion," Patton argues that such a postmodern stance dismisses the sacred as a constructed tool to advance political and thus hierarchical interests. She warns us about the danger of a reductionist approach to religious phenomena: "To discount religious phenomena as a politically coded pretext (a disguise to advance and to maintain power and domination), is to arrogantly disenfranchise those we purport to understand."[25] Thus, what I complicate in this article is not Anzaldúa's spiritual experiences but the fact that she equates her shamanic initiation process to that of divinely elected magico-religious healers of the Texas-México borderlands and of ancient Mesoamerica. An examination of the neo-*nagual* legacy of Carlos Castañeda will demonstrate that Anzaldúa's shamanic initiation has more in common, ironically, with the consensual—colonial—realities she was trying to unlearn than with the Indigenous ways of knowing she claimed to inherit.

In *The Beauty of the Primitive: Shamanism and Western Imagination*, historian Andrei A. Znamenski gives us a sense of who Carlos Castañeda was: someone willing to appropriate, and manipulate, whatever knowledge was popular at the time in his quest for spiritual power and public influence. Castañeda, as a graduate student at the University of California, Los Angeles, initially invented "don Juan Matus" to get an A for a paper on Indigenous use of hallucinogenic plants. Later it would turn out that he had also fabricated his own authentic source of shamanic power. Don Juan was, supposedly, an Indigenous man of knowledge Castañeda met at a

[24] Kimberley C. Patton, "Juggling Torches: Why We Still Need Comparative Religion," in *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, ed. Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

[25] Patton, "Juggling Torches," 168.

Greyhound station in Nogales, Arizona.[26] Castañeda portrayed him as a carrier of wisdom of the ancient Toltecs, the creative artistic geniuses the Aztecs looked up to and imitated as their empire rose to power in the Valley of México. Castañeda eventually claimed he had apprenticed to this Yaqui "brujo" in the Arizona-Sonoran desertic borderlands during the 1960s.[27] Who better to initiate him into the shamanic world of non-ordinary reality? And don Juan did, via mind altering plants. For the peyote spirit favored Castañeda:

> 'I think Mescalito has almost accepted you,' don Juan said. Why do you say he has almost *accepted* me, don Juan? 'He did not kill you, or even harm you. He gave you a good fright (*susto*), but not a really bad one. If he had not accepted you at all, he would have appeared to you as monstrous and full of wrath. Some people have learned the meaning of horror upon encountering him and not being accepted by him.'[28]

Fictional anthropological accounts like the passage above would make Castañeda a celebrity. He turned his graduate paper into a master's thesis, and ultimately, into his bestselling book *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (1968). In this work, he introduced his readers to the world of non-ordinary reality while subtly priming them to later accept him as a shaman. Once an apprentice, Castañeda would eventually emerge as the successor of don Juan Matus. As a sign of the public recognition of his initiation, he became known as *el Nagual* among his followers, a term that in the Mesoamerican context refers to a ritual specialist who, at will, changes his human shape into an animal.[29] It also refers to the alter

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[26] Andrei A. Znamenski, *The Beauty of the Primitive: Shamanism and Western Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 189.

[27] Znamenski, *The Beauty of the Primitive*, 189.

[28] Carlos Castaneda, *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1996), 71.

[29] Roberto Martínez González, "El Neonahualismo y Otras Evoluciones Contemporáneas," *Alteridades* 16, no. 31 (2006): 107.

ego or double (sometimes called "spirit animal") that is intimately linked to a person.[30] For Castañeda's apprentices, however, *nagual* is principally understood to be the shaman inheritor of the ancient Toltec cosmological wisdom, which was passed down to their spiritual teacher through don Juan Matus.[31] Today, in the United States as well as in Britain, his followers still aspire to be "Toltec warriors" and *nagaules*.[32]

Historian of religions, Roberto González Martínez, notes that *nahualli*, *nahual*, or *nagual*, has been a favorite topic after the Mexican revolution. During the postrevolutionary period (1921–1950), Aztec symbols started to be glorified for the ideological construction of a national *mestizo* identity.[33] Following the state's promotion of nationalistic art, Mexican and foreign authors became attracted to "Indigenous exoticness," and turned to the *nahualli* as inspiration for the creation of works across different artistic genres.[34] Among the examples González Martínez identifies are realist painter David Alfaro Siqueiros (*El nagual*); choreographer Javier Dzul (Nahual-Way); photographer Ana Leiva (*Nahual*); writer Carlos Samayoa Chinchilla (*El brujo de Chitzajay*); and rock band Friends of Mezcalito (*Nagual* music).[35] These examples range from

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[30] Martínez González, "El Neonahualismo," 108.

[31] According to archeologist Robert J. Wallis, the authenticity of "don Juan" was debunked by scholars Richard de Mille in *Castaneda's Journey: The Power and the Allegory* (California: Capra Press, 1976) and Daniel Noel in *Seeing Castaneda: Reactions to the "Don Juan" writings of Carlos Castaneda* (New York: Putnam, 1976); See the work of anthropologist Jay Courtney Fikes, *Carlos Castaneda, Academic Opportunism and the Psychedelic Sixties* (Victoria, B.C.: Millenia Press, 1993) for the impact of Castañeda's books on the lives of Indigenous peoples.

[32] Robert J. Wallis, *Shamans/Neo-Shamans: Ecstasy, Alternative Archaeologies and Contemporary Pagans* (London: Routledge, 2003), 39.

[33] Martínez González, "El Neonahualismo," 115.

[34] Martínez González, "El Neonahualismo," 115.

[35] Martínez González, "El Neonahualismo," 108.

artists who demonstrate some knowledge about nahualism to artists whose abstract creations have nothing apparent to do with the actual topic.[36]

In the 1960s and 1970s, González Martínez highlights, the *nagual* started to be re-signified as an alternative spiritual teacher during the countercultural movements. This was a time when Westerners in urban contexts appropriated Mesoamerican symbols, beliefs, and practices to incorporate them into their own culture.[37] Here is where Carlos Castañeda appears as a central figure. In "El neonahualismo y otras evoluciones contemporáneas" (Neonahualism and Other Contemporary Evolutions), González Martínez argues that Castañeda manipulated Indigenous beliefs to invent a new spirituality, "neonahualism." It became a model for Westerners to use Indigenous terms in their quest to transform themselves while breaking away from what Castañeda called ordinary reality. Once demonized and persecuted as a "brujo," or sorcerer, by *conquistadores* and evangelizers alike, the *nagual* was now a mystical key to an "alternative" way of knowing and being to dominant Western ways of life.

González Martínez focuses on the Sixth Sun Foundation as the principal group that exemplifies the neo-*nagual* spiritual legacy of Castañeda. He shows that this foundation portrays itself as a carrier of the scientific, mystical, and artistic knowledge of the Toltecs. Don Miguel Ruiz, for example, is presented as a spiritual guide with a *nagual* lineage that has supposedly preserved the ancient knowledge of the Toltecs. Nevertheless, González Martínez notes, the objectives and discourse of don Miguel Ruiz and other neo-*nagaules* differ from those of Castañeda's. "Whereas Castañeda speaks of a strange and inaccessible world for the uninitiated, in the best seller *The Four Agreements*, don Miguel Ruiz speaks of wisdom that is simple, quick

[36] Martínez González, "El Neonahualismo," 108–109.

[37] Martínez González, "El Neonahualismo," 107.

to access, and open to the whole world."[38] Overall, González Martínez sees neonahualism as an artistic assemblage of beliefs and practices that come from different cultural contexts.[39] He concludes that, ultimately, it is not an Indigenous cosmovision that drives neo-*naguales*, but the quest to find an alternative spirituality that fills the void left by "traditional religions" in a postmodern world.[40] "Contrary to traditional religions, Mesoamerican as well as Western, in the neo-*nagual* movements there are no divinities, there is not wholly other, there is only personal and individual salvation."[41]

Yet, seeking personal transformation and spiritual liberation through Indigenous ways of knowing isn't free of harm. In his book*, Shamans/Neo-Shamans: Ecstasy, Alternative Archaeologies and Contemporary Pagans*, archeologist Robert J. Wallis warns us about the dangers of uncritically accepting the alternate reality of a "fake shaman."[42] Its consequences lie beyond the academy. The risk is ignoring and forgetting the exploitation of Indigenous peoples as the result of Castañeda's fictional work. Willis argues that Castañeda encouraged readers to seek alternative ways of knowing while they disrupted the community lives and depleted the resources of Indigenous peoples, such as the peyote for the *Huichol* and sacred mushrooms for the Mazatec. María Sabina, the great Mazatec shamaness, lamented the loss of power the sacred mushrooms underwent as Westerners got involved: "Before Wasson, I felt that the saint children elevated me. I don't feel like that anymore. … From the moment the foreigners arrived, the saint

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[38] Martínez González, "El Neonahualismo," 113.

[39] Martínez González, "El Neonahualismo," 115.

[40] He situates such alternative as one of many individualistic options in the context of a capitalistic society.

[41] Martínez González, "El Neonahualismo," 113.

[42] Wallis, *Shamans/Neo-Shamans*, 39–44.

children lost their purity. They lost their force; the foreigners spoiled them. From now on they won't be any good. There's no remedy for it."[43] In sum, as anthropologist Evgenia Fotiou puts it when discussing her work on Shamanic Tourism of Ayahuasca, the danger lies in erasing Indigenous peoples' plights and injustices committed against them.[44]

Fig. 3 María Sabina. Wise Woman—*Chota Chjine*—from Huautla de Jiménez, a poor, small and remote town in the mountains of Oaxaca (southern México). Speaking about her divine election Sabina said, "I am the daughter of God ('the Christ') elected to be wise. On the altar I have in my house is the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe… I also have Saint Mark, Saint Martin Horseman, and Saint Magdalene. They help me to cure and to speak."[45]

[43] Alvaro Estrada, *María Sabina: Her Life and Chants*, ed. Jerome Rothenberg, trans. Henry Munn (Santa Barbara: Ross-Erikson Inc, Publishers, 1981), 20. New York banker and researcher Gordon Wasson was the first Westerner to participate in a *velada*, a night vigil, led by María Sabina. During this healing ceremony in 1955, Wasson ingested the sacred mushrooms. He later published an article, "Magic Mushroom" (1957), in *Life* magazine narrating his experiences and thus revealing the millennial secrets of the Mazatec shamanic tradition to the Western world. Despite changing Sabina's name and hiding the real location of the town, the article led to foreigners invading Huautla de Jiménez in search of God. They disrupted the daily lives of the locals and profaned sacred mushrooms by failing to respect Mazatec customs and rituals (Estrada, 205–6).

[44] See for example Evgenia Fotiou, "Shamanic Tourism: Lessons for the 21st Century," *ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America* XX, no. 2 (2021); Evgenia Fotiou, *Horizons 2018: EVGENIA FOTIOU, PH.D. "Reflecting on the Globalization of Ayahuasca,"* 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZchIvYwTEE.

[45] Alvaro Estrada, *MARÍA SABINA*, 56; Image taken from Nicolás Echevarría, "María Sabina, Mujer Espíritu," (1978).

While González Martínez considers Castañeda the creator of a new spirituality, Wallis credits him with introducing a radical shift in the way shamanisms were approached in the West: "Castaneda's work… encouraged Westerners to become shamans themselves."[46] I would add that constitutive of the introduction of Castañeda's radical shift was the elimination of divine election as part of the shamanic initiation process. A political shape-shifter who quickly adapted to changing intellectual perspectives, Castañeda conveniently discarded sacred plants as they went out of fashion for the public in the United States.[47] Znamenski notes that in *Tales of Power* (1974), when the psychedelic revolution was in decline, Castañeda let his readers know that hallucinogens were no longer needed to break the walls of ordinary perception.[48] With the sacred plants gone so were the deities and spirits one encounters by ingesting them in a ritual context. The absence of divine election in neo-nagualism would eventually allow non-Indigenous US citizens like Anzaldúa to be initiated as a "chamana" within a presumed Mesoamerican spiritual tradition. Such absence, in turn, allows us to situate the Coyolxauhqui process as derived from Castañeda's neo-*nagual* spirituality rather than Anzaldúa's "own mythical heritage."[49] That is, it

[46] Wallis, *Shamans/Neo-Shamans*, 39.

[47] Znamenski, *The Beauty of the Primitive*, 199.

[48] Znamenski, *The Beauty of the Primitive*. Additionally, Znamenski shows that Castañeda conveniently appropriated postmodernist and feminist stances into his spirituality depending on what happened to be the most popular discourse in social and intellectual climates.

[49] Anzaldúa equates Carlos Castañeda's alternative epistemology, *nagualismo,* with "Mesoamerican magic supernaturalism" when defining shamanic journeying (*Light in the Dark*, 32). She adds, "Nagualismo's basic assumptions (worldview) are shapeshifting (the ability to become an animal or thing) and traveling to other realities. These journeys require a different kind of 'seeing': the ability to perceive the world in a different way, the perpetual experience of what Carlos Castaneda calls 'nonordinary' reality."

was *not* part of the ancient Mesoamerican shamanic practices she intended to connect with by "respectfully borrowing" the symbol of a pre-colonial Aztec moon goddess.[50]

Additionally, the Coyolxauhqui process isn't consistent with contemporary shamanic practices of *mestizo* or Indigenous *curanderos*, where the Catholic dimension of divine election has been consistently present for the past five hundred years. I turn to the shamanic initiation of México's famous *mestizo curandero*, el Niño Fidencio, to demonstrate this point. In contrast to Anzaldúa's US-centric spirituality, where she and her *chamanas* are assumed to be "world citizens" (US citizens) who legally cross borders with unlimited mobility to heal national and global wounds, Fidencio emerges in a context of extreme poverty in the aftermath of turmoil and destruction during the post-revolutionary years of the 1920s. Originally from Guanajuato (central México), his prestige and fame as a *curandero* appear once he migrates to Espinazo, Nuevo León, a desert railroad town surrounded by mountains. Its destitution is amplified when one considers the peripheral character of the northern territory, where the absence of medical and religious institutions in rural life created an acute sense of abandonment by the state and the Catholic Church alike.[51] This is the background in which magico-religious healers had been flourishing in the US-México borderlands since the 1880s.[52]

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[50] In *Shamans/Neo-Shamans,* Wallis contends that neo-shamans of the twentieth century include a variety of artists. Among them is the modern Russian painter, Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944), who regarded the artist as a shaman (26). Anzaldúa's conception of the artist as *chamana*, therefore, is not new. Neither is her conception of the artist as a wounded-healer. Sculpture and performance artist Joseph Beuys (1921–86), Wallis explains, regarded his experience in a plane crash as an initiatory experience of death and rebirth. "Beuys's words 'show your wound' exposed the view that vulnerability is the secret of being an artist, the term would perhaps be alluding to the indigenous shaman as a 'wounded healer'" (27). In this artistic spiritual sense, Anzaldua's Coyolxauhqui process is also influenced by neo-shamanic conceptions of healing.

[51] Claudia Agostoni, "Medical Offerings, Healers, and Public Opinion: El Niño Fidencio in Post-Revolutionary Mexico," *Anuario Colombiano De Historia Social Y De La Cultura* 45, no. 1 (2018): 223.

[52] Agostoni, "Medical Offerings," 223.

Devotion to Catholic ritual and his surprising gifts—mind reading and divining the future—distinguished Fidencio in his early childhood.[53] His unusual behavior caused ridicule and torment by other boys.[54] The exception seemed to be Enrique López de la Fuente, who looked after him and found him a job with his family when Fidencio was orphaned as a child. Despite their friendship, Fidencio was regularly beaten and exploited.[55] He left school with minimal literacy at the age of ten, to then migrate with the López de la Fuente family during the most violent years of the revolution.[56] He worked for them as laborer, cook, and midwife in several states until they eventually settled in the *hacienda* of Espinazo in the early 1920s.[57] It was in this desolate place that Fidencio wandered off alone into the desert and was drawn to its native plants.[58] Without any medical or empirical training, he began gaining a reputation as the healer of the region for curing the sick and the injured using only water, herbs, and prayer.[59] Despite his growing prestige, Enrique continued to discipline him through beatings. The economic and physical abuse finally threw a desperate Fidencio into a crisis in the mid-1920s,

[53] Carlos Monsiváis, "The Boy Fidencio and the Roads to Ecstasy," in *Mexican Postcards* (London: Verso, 2000), 120.

[54] Frank Graziano, "Niño Fidencio," *in Cultures of Devotion: Folk Saints of Spanish America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[55] Monsiváis, "The Boy Fidencio."

[56] Antonio Noé Zavaleta, *El Niño Fidencio and the Fidencistas: Folk Religion in the U.S.-Mexican Borderland* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2016).

[57] Agostoni, "Medical Offerings."

[58] Zavaleta, *El Niño Fidencio.*

[59] José Maria Villarreal, "The Devotion to a Living Santo and His Religious Healing: An Interdisciplinary Study of El Niño Fidencio and His Religious Movement" (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 2015), 35; Zavaleta, *El Niño Fidencio,* 67.

culminating in a decisive breakthrough when he broke down in tears beneath a pepper tree.[60] In that desert solitude and state of despair, he was initiated by the sacred.

He was overtaken in a mystical vision, where a bearded man approached Fidencio to reveal a secret. His mental chaos ended as a Jesus Christ–like figure disclosed the origins of his powers. He had been granted a divine gift, *el don*, and the time had come for Fidencio to fulfill his destiny: to heal those whose very being hurts, "the suffering poor"—*los pobres que sufren por un dolor*. But accepting the gift would require living a life of self-sacrifice. The gift was conditional upon his chastity. And if he was to heal in the name of God, he must reciprocate *el don* and carry out his divine mission without charge. As Fidencio surrendered to the sacred and agreed to perform the task he had been chosen for, he was reborn as a magico-religious healer.[61]

No longer a novice, Fidencio was now in full control of his powers, including ecstasy: the ancient technique where the shaman separates the spirit from the body at will to visit the ill and communicate with the gods. He was seen in other parts of the world where he never physically travelled.[62] He was a master of dreams, *sabía soñar*, attending the sick while asleep.[63] His understanding of medicinal plants had also been completed. He now could create his own ointments with plants native to the soil. Fidencio possessed the knowledge to invent and

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[60] Graziano, "Niño Fidencio"; Zavaleta, *El Niño Fidencio.*

[61] In her book, *Shamanic Initiations: Trance and Dreams in Becoming a Shama*n, anthropologist Antonella Fagettii argues that shamanic initiation is a gradual process, a series of events the novice undergoes as she is transformed into a shaman by the deities who elected her (*Iniciaciones Chamánicas: El Trance Y Los Sueños En El Devenir Del Chamán* [México, DF: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2015]). This article builds on Fagetti's work by conceptualizing Fidencio's initiation as a shamanic process that includes divine election, early manifestations of *el don*, initiatory crisis or suffering trials, revelation and acceptance of *el don*, symbolic death and rebirth, and mastery of techniques of ecstasy.

[62] Graziano, "Niño Fidencio"; Zavaleta, *El Niño Fidencio.*

[63] Fernando Garza Quirós, *El Niño Fidencio y El Fidencismo*, Tercera (México, D.F.: EDICIONES OASIS, S.A., 1974), 30.

implement heterodox and unconventional healing methods.[64] Those with speech disabilities spoke when he threw them into a cage to be shocked by a toothless and clawless puma. The paralyzed walked after they were abruptly flung by him in a swing. He restored sight to the blind by massaging their eyes with mud and cured the mentally ill by extracting all their teeth with pliers. Fidencio moved with surgical precision, rapidly diagnosing illness by just looking at the patient. His signature move was to painlessly remove tumors without anesthesia—simply using a piece of glass disinfected with alcohol. He healed without ceasing. For all intents and purposes, he became a miracle worker for those who witnessed his wonders.

Fig. 4. "El Niño Guadalupano." In this image Fidencio integrates Catholic and Mexican symbols, as well as male and female figures: the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Virgin of Guadalupe. He was known as "el Niño" for his child-like voice and soul, as well as his playful demeanor—hence the image's title, "The Guadalupano Child."[65]

[64] Monsiváis, "The Boy Fidencio"; Zavaleta, *El Niño Fidencio.*

[65] Photo taken from Antonio Zavaleta, "El Niño Fidencio 1925-1938 Photos," 2023, https://drtonyzavaleta.com.

At the height of his popularity in 1928, after a presidential visit by Plutarco Elias Calles, Fidencio attracted more than thirty thousand people coming from both sides of the Texas-México border.[66] They camped out waiting to be seen by the thaumaturge, to have a chance to touch him, or to be hit by one of the fruits he threw to the crowds during his collective healings. [67] He would continue to heal the poor for ten more years—that is, until 1938 when, according to popular history, Fidencio was assassinated by institutional medical authorities.[68] But he refused to let the state have the last word. Within hours after his death, he began manifesting his "spirit" through *materias*, ritual specialists who are literally called "matter" because their bodies serve as a material recipient, a *cajita*, that temporarily contains his spirit for healing ceremonies to take place. To manifest the presence of the deceased *curandero*, the *materia* must "bajar," bring down, Fidencio's spirit by entering a trance, an altered state of consciousness ritually achieved in a communal context through the power of the rosary.[69] Communities known as *misiones* form around the *materias* to continue Fidencio's divine task. And through these *misiones*, Fidencio keeps healing "the vanquished whose sickness is poverty."[70] In sum, Catholic beliefs, symbols, and practices are constitutive of the life and legacy of el Niño Fidencio. And yet, as historian of

[66] Agostoni, "Medical Offerings," 230–31; Monsiváis, "The Boy Fidencio."

[67] Graziano, "Niño Fidencio."

[68] Graziano, "Niño Fidencio"; Villarreal, "The Devotion to a Living Santo."

[69]For more details see Alfredo García Garza, "El Niño Fidencio: Healing Power of the Afflicted," *ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America* 20, no. 2 (2021), https://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/el-nino-fidencio-healing-power-of-the-afflicted/; Davíd Carrasco, "Cuando Dios y Usted Quiere: Latina/o Studies Between Religious Powers and Social Thought," in *A Companion to Latino/a Studies*, ed. Juan Flores and Renato Rosaldo (London: John Wiley & Sons, 2007); Davíd Carrasco, "The Mexican Angels in the Attic" *ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America* 20, no. 2 (2021), https://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/the-mexican-angels-in-the-attic/.

[70] Monsiváis, "The Boy Fidencio," 125.

religions Davíd Carrasco notes, Fidencio's religious practices are not sufficiently explained by a Catholic cosmovision either.[71]

To conclude, the initiation of Fidencio, his healing years as a miracle worker, and his ritual legacy in the work of *materias*, show the complexity of a religious phenomenon where strict and fixed divisions between what is and isn't colonial are hard to define. The shamanic element of divine election is part of the initiations of Fidencio and María Sabina, which is also constituted by a Catholic dimension that further manifests itself through the presence of "God the Christ," la Guadalupana, and the saints in their ritual healing. In contrast, divine election is absent in Anzaldúa's Coyolxauhqui process. Appropriating, or respectfully borrowing, Mesoamerican beliefs, symbols, and practices do not automatically turn one into a shaman, no matter how creatively these are re-imagined and re-signified. Anzaldúa's shamanic process of initiation is thus better understood as part of the neo-*nagual* legacy of Carlos Castañeda. Overall, by complicating the Coyolxauhqui process, this paper invites students and scholars of religion to be more critical of how "Indigenous ways of knowing" are used by non-Indigenous writers.[72] That is, it is an invitation and a reminder to take a closer look at the content, method, sources, application, and impact of these authors' works. I write in the hope that Anzaldúa's work won't be used to dismiss people like my friend as colonized simply for praying to a Catholic God.

[71] Carrasco, "Cuando Dios y Usted Quiere," 68–69.

[72] For a critique on Xicanx/o/a Indigeneity from an Indigenous author see Nimipu (Nez Perce)/Tejana scholar Inés Hernández-Ávila, "A Creative Meditation on the Aesthetics of Mestizaje: The Promise of Kinstillatory Relations," *Aztlán* 46, no. 2 (2021): 221–33.

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