

**Oapan Nawa Folktales: Links to the pre-Hispanic Past in a  
Contemporary Indian Community of Mexico**

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
The School of Arts & Sciences in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2010

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

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University of Pittsburgh, 2010

This is a study of folktales, referred to by the people as cuentos (stories), from the town of San Agustín Oapan in the state of Guerrero, Mexico. The study takes a close look at the function of folktales in the contemporary Indian community and how it compares to the function of myths in the pre-Hispanic past, explains why there was a decline from mythology to folklore, why the folktales are syncretic entities, and why there are similarities and differences found among them; including in their themes.

It also looks to understand why the same folktales are not told among different families, examines the linguistic framing and performance of the folktales, determines their cultural relevance to the contemporary Indian community, and explains what they say about the indigenous way of life in Mexico.

Folktales from six different Oapanec families were collected in Oapan Nawa and Spanish, translated into English, and examined. Oapan folktales are unique because they are not shared between families, but do contain

common themes. Some of the folktales illustrate, through their overlapping themes, characteristics of European fables which are a direct reflection of contact with the Spaniards and their religion (Catholicism), while maintaining certain aspects of the pre-Hispanic mythological tradition.

The goal of the study was to determine what if any specific links, cultural or religious, the contemporary Oapanec folktales have to pre-Hispanic Mexica-Tenochca mythology from before and up to the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

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## PREFACE

The Mexica-Tenochca (commonly referred to as the Aztec) of pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica are one of the most well known ancient civilizations in the world. Whether or not the contemporary Nawa (the language of the Mexica) speaking Indians of Mexico think of themselves as descendants of the Mexica, they share a commonality with them in that they speak languages from the same family, share many of the same cultural traits, practice much of the same agriculture, and in many cases have similar religious and ritualistic traditions.

There are over one million Nawa speaking Indians living in Mexico today, and they are a very important part of the cultural and ethnic diversity that make the country so unique. Regardless of whether non-indigenous Mexicans see them as a link to their ancestors, they *are* Mexico and should be treated with respect and dignity. Through this work, I hope to express the importance of preserving indigenous languages and cultures in Mexico.

For many years I have been fascinated by pre-Hispanic civilizations, particularly the Mexica. They were my first source of inspiration to pursue graduate studies in both Linguistics and Anthropology. The first major

literary work that I came across, which determined my path as a scholar of Mesoamerican studies, was Sahagún's *General History of the things of New Spain* (commonly referred to as the *Florentine Codex*). After reading much of this Codex in English, I decided to study linguistics so that I could read and transcribe it myself in Nawa; after having been given the good advice that in academia "one should never trust someone else's translation".

Throughout the years, I became interested in not only the history and languages of Mesoamerica, but also with the culture and religion. Furthermore, I was intrigued by how many pre-Hispanic concepts, beliefs, and ideas are incorporated into everyday life in contemporary Mexico. It amazes me how Mexicans see a *rabbit* on the face of the moon, or talk about the *Leyenda de la Llorona* (Legend of the Wailing Woman), and don't realize that they date back to pre-Hispanic times, and ancient Mexica mythology.

My hope is that this work will be of value not only to anthropologists, but also to anyone who is interested in learning more about the rich history that Mexico has to offer from the pre-Hispanic past, and how much more we have to learn from the indigenous peoples of Mexico in the future.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This study grew out of years of fieldwork among the people of San Agustín Oapan, a Nawa speaking community, from Guerrero, Mexico. I first began working with them about 10 years ago, and have a very personal and warm association with them as they have accepted and trusted me with their stories over the years.

It is my great pleasure to express my appreciation and give thanks to some of the people and organizations who made it possible for me to finish this study. First and foremost, I would like to thank all of my informants from Oapan. Without their willingness to tell me their stories, help me to translate texts, and understand certain nuances of their intricate language this study would not have not possible.

I would like to thank the University of Pittsburgh, Department of Anthropology, who generously provided me with two research grants which enabled me to finish the fieldwork for this project in Mexico between 2008 and 2009.

Many colleagues and advisors provided me with wise guidance and support throughout the years. Jonathan Amith, whom I admire for his knowledge and work on Oapan Nawa, was kind enough to give me access to his information on the Oapan Nawa language which was a tremendous aid in the correct translations of the texts. James M. Taggart provided me with encouragement to pursue this study. Joseph Alter gave many insightful comments and was a source of encouragement and support while I was writing up my work. I am thankful to Andrew Strathern for his feedback on my manuscript. I specifically value his collaboration on the areas of this study dealing with ritual, the supernatural, and folklore in general. Furthermore, I greatly appreciate his backing my work, and supporting me as an anthropologist.

Terrence Kaufman, whom I consider my mentor and friend, was always there to be of assistance to me, especially in the areas of my work dealing with linguistics. His breadth of knowledge of "all things Mesoamerican" was and always will be valuable to me on so many levels.

Hugo Nutini provided ample guidance and encouragement to me over the years. Our many conversations about Mesoamerican social structure and religion were very helpful to my work. He read many earlier drafts of this manuscript and made useful suggestions that were incorporated into the revisions.

I especially want to thank my family for believing in my abilities as a scholar and cheering me on to complete this project. In particular, I want to thank my parents, Donald and Antonia Michel, who have seen me through thick and thin for the past ten years and can now finally breathe a sigh of relief that I am officially "*done*".

Enough cannot be said to thank my husband Luis Guerrero. He assisted me in so many aspects of this work, from accompanying me to the field yearly to collect data to enduring long nights as I was up writing for hours. He has been here with me for every moment of this project and has seen me through all the ups and downs that came along with it. His constant support, especially at times when I thought about giving up, is the reason I was able to see this work through to the end. It is to Luis that I gratefully dedicate this book.

J. E. M.

**in san kwel achitzinkan tlaltikpak**

“earth is the region of the [fleeting] moment”

Ayocuan Cuetzpaltzin, Mexica poet and wiseman,  
*Cantares Mexicanos, fol. 10.*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This is a study of folktales, referred to by the people as cuentos (stories), from the town of San Agustín Oapan in the state of Guerrero, Mexico. The study takes a close look at the function of folktales in the contemporary Indian community and how it compares to the function of myths in the pre-Hispanic past, explains why there was a decline from mythology to folklore, why the folktales are syncretic entities, and why there are similarities and differences found among them; including in their themes. It also looks to understand why the same folktales are not told among different families, examines the linguistic framing and performance of the folktales, determines their cultural relevance to the contemporary Indian community, and explains what they say about the indigenous way of life in Mexico.

An interesting fact about the folktales is that different families within the same community choose not to share their folktales outside of their family. This is noteworthy, especially since it is not uncommon for people living within the same community to have parallel stories. Based on the data collected in this study, there appear to be no similar or parallel stories

found within the Oapan community. Therefore, my initial goal to compare the themes of similar folktales from different informants was not a possibility, so I looked for reasons why there would not be similar folktales among the different Oapanec families.

Most other aspects of social life and interaction in Oapan are shared and/or have a common origin. The people of the community themselves, regardless of family, share a common cosmology and way of life. The worldview of the Oapan, like many other Mesoamerican Indians, places an emphasis on dualism. Some other commonalities such as concepts about time and space, religion, labor, coming of age, marriage, and family are also incorporated into their folktales. Some dualistic factors of space for the Oapan Nawa include core/periphery and up/down (north/south); some such features of time include day/night and present/past. Other elements of dualism include light/dark and hot/cold. There are also social opposites including human/animal, god/devil, Oapan/outsider (Mexican, non-Indian), and men/women.

There are central themes to the folktales which illustrate the model of core-periphery. In Oapan stories, an individual usually moves from the core (his village, home etc.) to the periphery (forest, cave, river, shore etc.) where he encounters danger and/or adventure. When an individual in a story ventures outside of the core, he encounters what is outside of *his* realm of time and space. Most of these encounters include meeting up with

talking animals or creatures. The periphery is also where the individual encounters spirits, shape shifters, naguals, and other sinister beings. Witches are also found in this area, and are particularly sinister as they possess the ability to change form into certain creatures of bad omen which for the Oapan are animals such as birds and dogs. Although the folktales being told by different families are not parallel, they embody the same worldview including dualism, and the conception of time and space that is part of the community as a whole.

From the standpoint of cultural analysis, each folktale collected will be examined for the aforementioned elements of time and space, as well as for social images. What I found was that the motifs in the folktales of different families were similar, and that they contained similar elements pertaining to time, space, and social organization which are important to the community as a whole. I also examined the motifs in the folktales for their significance to the community as a whole and found that the motifs reflect the indigenous way of life in the Oapan community.

The folktales gathered for this study are from four different families within the community, and the story-tellers have varying age ranging within a very small time gap. This was intentional to see if the age of the informants was a factor in the style/type of story or the number of stories that were provided. Both men and women were utilized in order to examine whether gender played a role in the types of folktales collected. The

folktales collected from woman were less complex in nature and were more like “words of wisdom” or advice; while the stories told by men, although all different, were told in the same style and linguistic framing. The only case of a narrative told by a female that was similar in style and linguistic framing to those of the males was collected from a younger female who identified the folktale as being one that was told to her by her grandfather.

The folktales were collected in Oapan Nawa and were recorded into a tape recorder by the informants. As do most folktales, the Oapan stories provide interesting perspectives on the people themselves and their experiences with each other and the community. The way in which folktales are told is through repetition by word of mouth from one person to another. The Oapan do not change the content of the folktales that are recounted. Great care is taken to ensure that the original version of the story is what is being retold or repeated and is not altered in any major way. Naturally there are slight variations depending on the person, as no one individual will be able to word for word recount the same story unless they were reading it verbatim. However, these slight variations have nothing to do with the overall content of the story or the theme that comes across in it. These variations are stylistic in nature, but do not undermine the theme or message of the folktale.

Initially, I expected that I would come across folktales that were very similar to the pre-Hispanic Mexica/Tenochca mythology found in codices

such as the Florentine and Chimalpopoca. It seemed plausible that these prototypes would be evident in the Oapan stories, but this was not the case. There were however some similarities to the Mexica/Tenochca and Spanish prototypical stories of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Some information common to Mesoamerica and pre-Hispanic Mesoamerican traditions in general was found. This will be discussed later, but some of these commonalities between the Mexica/Tenochca myths and Oapan folktales included certain animals such as small birds, dogs, eagles, fish, and rabbits; insects such as ants; colors and food staples such as corn.

## 1.1 FOLKTALES VS. MYTHS

Folktales and myths are a part of every culture in the world. Although they may differ from society to society and country to country, they all share the common theme of telling the histories, beliefs, traditions, and socio-cultural practice of the people. Myths concern us not only for the part they play in all primitive, illiterate, tribal or non-urban cultures, which makes them one of the main objects of anthropological interest because of men's endearing insistence on carrying quasi-mythical modes of thought, expression, and communication into a supposedly scientific age (Kirk 1970: 2).

Both folktales and myths may be related orally or written down. Interestingly, when they are related orally, they are referred to as stories, but when they happen to have written down, they are described as literary works. When handed down (transmitted) orally by the people, from generation to generation, there are occasionally changes that occur. This is not necessarily to the detriment of the story as the items that change rarely effect the overall content and theme of the original version. These differences in the mythologies and folklore of civilizations that were written down are less common. However, documentation does not necessarily indicate that they are any more accurate in their content than that of those passed down verbally. Often, written works are not documented by the

natives themselves. This may be due to lack of a formal writing system or illiteracy of the people. At times, even in a literate society, the mythology or folklore is recorded in a sacred script only known by priests and scribes or in the elite populations' language. In these instances, although preserved in written form, they are inaccessible to the masses. These factors can and have led to the alteration of the information given verbally by informants usually without their knowledge. In the case of subjugated populations, information collected and recorded by the conquering people must be looked at skeptically for fallacies of content.

In order to conduct any formal study of folktales and myths, it is first necessary to define what will be referred to as a folktale and what will be called a myth. There are many definitions of myth from various sources. Consequently, this makes the study of mythology all the more detailed and specific to the definition that each individual scholar has chosen to adopt as their own. For example, Stith Thompson, a well known folklorist, has written in *The Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend*, under 'folktale', that:

"There is little agreement in the use of the term myth. But it certainly can be regarded as one branch of the folktale. It concerns the world as it was in some past age before the present conditions were established. It treats creations and origins, and therefore maybe identical with creation and origin legends. When it handles adventures of the gods, it may well be identical with the fairy tale. Many divergent theories as to

the nature of the myth have been held in the past. All of them contain a grain of truth, but none give entire satisfaction.”  
(Kirk 1970: 36)

As illustrated in the foregoing quotation, one area of contention among scholars is whether myths have their basis in history and reality or not. Anthropologist Alfredo López Austin, who has studied in detail the mythology and folklore of Mesoamerica has written:

“If daily life was the medium in which myth developed, then reciprocally, myth became a tool and a guide for daily life. Myth does not explicitly describe or prescribe. It does not show clearly the laws of the cosmos. It is a form of synthetic expression of the occupations and preoccupations of humans in daily contact with their neighbors and with nature. As an instrument, myth teaches, imposes, or supports reasons, and justifies behaviors. In short, it is much more than a narrative. It is an institution of enormous utility that combines beliefs with practical knowledge.” (López Austin 1996: 22)

Many scholars find very few distinctions between myths and folktales. For several reasons, it is important to examine the differences between definitions in order to see just how broadly this term is actually used. The following are definitions of myth from several sources.

A myth:

1. “A traditional narrative that is used as a designation of reality”  
(Thury and Devinney 2009: 3).
2. “Stories that deal primarily with the major gods. These stories mainly involve the gods’ relationships and interactions with each other, and they also deal with human beings’ relationships and interactions with the major

gods. Many of these stories reveal an interest in defining human existence in connection to that of the divine" (Cyrino 2008: 3).

3. "A legend or folktale; a fictitious tale; something that is untrue or only partly true (Webster's Standard Dictionary 2006).
4. "A traditional story concerning the early history of a people or explaining a natural or social phenomenon, typically involving the supernatural; a widely held but false belief; a fictitious person or thing" (Compact Oxford English Dictionary 2009).

Each of the definitions provided is different. Several of them used terms such as "traditional" and "fictitious", while others avoided these terms all together. Some referred to the myths as "stories", while others used them synonymously with "legend" and "folktale". If according to the above definitions, a myth can be defined as a 'folktale', do we need a separate definition for folktale?

One way to avoid this problem in years past, was to assign myths and folktales to different social classes. This leads to another question. How is folktale defined? E.W. Count encouraged the notion of the 'myth-tale' arguing that the whole concept of the folktale, including its name, was a 19<sup>th</sup> century invention (Diamond 1960: 596). In addition, there are also numerous definitions for folktale. I will provide them from the same sources aforementioned.

### A folktale:

1. "A fairy tale; stories that give meaning to patterns of action practiced in the society that tells them; related to rituals" (Thury and Devinney 2009: 495).
2. "A term that describes popular tales of adventure with the primary purpose of entertainment. They generally star a clever, down-to-earth hero whose ingenious schemes save the day. They contain elements of magic, mystery, and the grotesque. The term *fairytale* is often used interchangeably with *folktale*. Elements of folktales can be interwoven into the narratives of myth..." (Cyrino 2008: 4).
3. "A characteristically anonymous, timeless, and placeless tale circulated orally among people" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2009)
4. "a traditional story originally transmitted orally" (Oxford English Dictionary 2009).

As seen in the preceding definitions, folktales are defined with words such as "fairy tale" and "orally", and as illustrated by the definitions provided, they are all still different from one another. Other definitions of folktales and myths pull in words such as *legend*, *saga*, and *fable* which in turn all have various definitions.

Myth, folktale, legend, story, fable, saga, fairy tale? Do any of these words have their own meaning or are their definitions always intertwined and sometimes used as synonyms for one another? This helps to illustrate the complex nature of the formal study of mythology and folklore. If it is impossible for scholars to agree upon the definitions of what characterizes each of these, how can any one analysis of a myth or folktale be either

accurate or inaccurate? Do these definitions all allow for individual interpretation by the scholar?

One scholar who questioned the terminology used in the study of mythology was Geoffrey Stephen Kirk. Kirk was a British classical scholar known for his books on Ancient Greek literature and mythology. He held the chair of classics at Yale before settling in at Cambridge where he retired in 1982 as Regius Professor of Greek (one of the oldest and most prestigious of the professorships at the University of Cambridge). His lectures, from the University of California, Berkley where he was Sather professor of classical literature, were published as *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions* (1970). This book offered a critical review of recent approaches to the study of myths, especially the structuralist theories of Claude Lévi-Strauss.

Kirk believed that there should not be a complete abolition of the concept of the folktale as a "distinctive species", at least of myth, and possibly as a kind of tale which, despite overlaps, deserves for methodological purposes a separate name (Kirk 1970: 37). I fully agree with this and will also adopt the definition of folktales set up by Kirk, independently of their association with any type of society or level of culture as: "Traditional tales, of no firmly established form, in which supernatural elements are subsidiary; they are not primarily concerned with 'serious' subjects or the reflection of deep problems and preoccupations; and their first appeal lies in the narrative interest" (Kirk 1970: 37).

If we consider that myths are more 'serious' and folktales are more 'entertaining', this gives at least some dividing lines between the two for distinction. Historically when we look at myths they deal with mans greater questions of why things are the way they are, a civilization's worries and problems, and the pantheon of gods within the culture. Myths generally involve these gods and take place in the realms of these gods that are neither tangible nor established as taking place in any one time. They also deal more with the fanciful and the elite rather than the everyday and the common.

Folktales tend to be of a more common place and time, deal with the concepts of everyday life and deal with the everyday people. Kirk believes, as Ruth Benedict and Franz Boas do, that there can, however be movement from folktale into myth. Kirk states that it is not that entire folktales are somehow upgraded into myths by the discovery of some serious or fantastic quality; rather folktale motifs (minimal episodic elements like solving a riddle, or the wearing of something that ensures a power, or narrative devices, like the performance of a similar action several times) tend to be used in the progressive elaboration of myths (Kirk 1970: 40).

Folktales, as previously mentioned are of a more common folk ideology, tend to be simple and reflect the culture and daily life of the people. They play off of the routine tasks of the people and then add a

component of magic or fantasy, at times through a motif, that add more danger and/or adventure to the story.

I agree that there must be room for marked differences between folktales and myths although at their core they may share certain salient features. As Kirk notes, "No binary categorization of traditional tales is likely to be satisfactory; but it emerges that the distinction into sacred and secular tales (the former being called 'myths' and the latter classes as mere entertainment or 'oral literature') is more misleading and less helpful than that into myths, both sacred and secular, and folktales" (1970).

The similarities between myths and folktales may seem few and unclear to say the least, however the one common feature is that they must be told from man to man to survive. Both genres are to different degrees controlled by the laws of story-telling, which operate more prominently in folktales than in myths (Kirk 1970: 41). While it appears that folktales are thought of as more a "verbal" spoken form of prose, myths tend to fall more into the area of "literature" and the "poetic" written word. However, in traditional cultures they are not written.

## 1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Folklore and myth interpretation is very complex and involves a variety of techniques which lead it to be considered a highly debatable topic among not only anthropologists, but art-historians and ethno-historians, linguists, and sociologists. G.S. Kirk said that, "it is hard to get people to understand the relevance of myths as anything other than poetic or symbolic tales" (Kirk 1970).

I believe that in order to understand a myth's value necessitates an anthropological, historic, analytical, linguistic, and philosophical approach. The study of myths and rituals is quite interdisciplinary and those who partake in this task are generally well rounded in these areas. Kirk also felt that the study of myth is interdisciplinary, and found that the anthropological approach brought a fresh vitality to the study of classical religion and myths (Kirk 1970). Kirk finds that while myths are usually associated with religion or some kind of belief in the supernatural, others are not, and fall under the category of legends or folktales. There is also a ritual aspect involved in the telling of the myth in a society. For me, this is something that is of importance to any study of this nature.

In some cases, ritual is born out of myth and/or there are certain rituals associated with certain myths. Mesoamerica demonstrates a long history of this type of behavior especially in pre-Columbian times. Myths

and rituals were documented by Spanish and Indian informants such as those of Bernardino de Sahagún and Diego Durán. There were many special rituals associated with ancient myths in Central Mexico particularly by the Mexica-Tenochca (Aztec).

Samuel Henry Hooke, an English scholar who studied comparative religion, argued that myth and ritual (the thing said and the thing done) were inseparable in early civilizations. Again, in the case of Mesoamerica, we see that at times it is hard to parse the myth and the history from the specific rituals that were practiced.

Kirk has written that "...The myth is a system of word symbols, whereas ritual is a system of object and act symbols. Both are symbolic processes for dealing with the same type of situation in the same affective mode; they are independent because they both satisfy a group of identical or closely related needs of individuals. Myth and ritual are found to be the response to mans need for regularity. Ritual is a repetitive activity symbolizing the needs of a society and mythology is the rationalization of those same needs..." (Kirk 1970: 24)

Claude Lévi-Strauss had a profound impact on the theory of myth. Two of Lévi-Straus's books that I find of particular interest include *Myth and Meaning: Cracking the Code of Culture* (1978), and *Anthropology and Myth* (1984). In *Myth and Meaning*, he states that "mythological stories are, or seem to be arbitrary, meaningless, and absurd, yet nevertheless they

appear all over the world" (Lévi-Strauss 1978: 11-12). His use of structuralism as a method for interpreting myths looks for the contradictions within the myths themselves in order to better understand them.

In the case of some myths, they may actually teach the opposite of whatever the message is that they appear to convey. Kirk questions this and whether it is indeed the purpose of all myths to construct a model by which contradictions in which men's view of the world can be mediated (Kirk 1970: 78).

The linguistic analogy used by Lévi-Strauss can be confusing in its application to myth. The function of language is to convey content, not to convey its grammatical and syntactical structure, therefore Kirk believes it is wrong to imply as Lévi-Strauss does that the meaning of myth is conveyed by its own structure, corresponding with syntax in language. Kirk believes that if the myth-language analysis is valid, then myths, like language, will convey messages distinct from their own structure. For this reason, many scholars disagree with the Lévi-Strauss approach.

Kirk further asserts that, "in practice Lévi-Strauss, although he formally maintains that the content of myth is irrelevant, does often rely on specific content for his ultimate interpretation. It would be preferable to say that the message conveyed by a myth is a product of its overt contents and the relations between them: not merely a structure, but a structure of particular materials, and one that is partly determined by them"

(Kirk 1970: 43). Kirk believes that myths differ greatly in their morphology and social function and that Lévi-Strauss is wrong to imply that all myths in all cultures have a similar function.

Kirk also examines many of Lévi-Strauss' theories and questions whether or not structuralism is either significant or useful in the study of myth and if the structure that Lévi-Strauss says can be found in all myths is really valid. However, he says that the structuralist approach to myth, even if it cannot constitute the kind of scientific approach that Levi-Strauss claims for it, is always worth adopting in addition to other approaches (Kirk 1970: 78).

George Dumézil was a French comparative philologist who pointed out that, "myths are of at least two types. The first are drawn from authentic events and actions and are presented in more or less stylized fashion, duly embellished and set forth as an example to emulate. In marked contrast to them, the second are literary fictions designed to stress basic concepts and translated into concrete form by the actions of certain imaginary beings..." (Dumézil 1970).

Catherine Bell, a scholar of religious and ritual studies, adopts a view that myths suggest all human beings share the powerful socialization imposed by the sacred and the appreciation of ritual formulated forced all theorists to account for the social dimensions or religion in some way (Bell 1997: 22).

A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, an English social anthropologist who developed the theory of Structural Functionalism, felt that the whole idea of considering phenomena like myths or cult-practices in isolation from the social complex as a whole has seemed, to anthropologists, a waste of time (Kirk 1970: 4).

Religion may be the link to myth and ritual. Religion, in my opinion, is far more complex than myth and must always be interpreted. It is impossible to study myth without talking about religion since nearly all myths contain religious ideas, even if they are deeply embedded.

Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist, saw ritual as the means by which individuals were brought together as a collective group and formulated a coherent sociological approach that focused on religion as involving social institutions (Bell 1997: 24).

Do the circumstances when a myth is told (the ritual of telling the myth) tell us anything about the society or the people telling the myth? Does the ritual of telling the myth change at all? Existing versions of myths are often altered due to social changes within a society and are reenacted during a specific ritual. There is also the idea of primitive myth vs. primitive ritual.

Applying the knowledge of comparative anthropology to the study of myth and religion: the idea that the motives of custom and myth in primitive societies could illuminate those of more developed cultures, including that of the ancient Greeks, became the driving force for many scholar's work.

Scottish anthropologist James George Frazer exemplified the special shortcomings of the comparative method when applied to social institutions and systems of beliefs. He felt such complexes may present certain aspects which resemble each other, while their essential core remains completely distinct.

Functionalism emphasizes that society is functioning as a closed system and there is generally no development. With reference to myths, the functionalist approach is concerned with what ritual can accomplish socially, and in turn, how it effects or changes the social group. This could be seen when in a society, altering a myth or altering a ritual associated with a particular myth indicates that the social structure is changing.

Speaking is a social action that can be interpreted many different ways. This is especially true if the interpretation depends on understanding the context in which the speech act is being performed. Bronislaw Malinowski, a Polish born British anthropologist who conducted linguistic fieldwork, maintained that one should learn the native language to effectively conduct research, and be able to partake in and understand everyday conversations with the people. To him, the main goal of ethnographic research was to, "grasp the native's point of view, his relations to life, to realize *his* vision of *his* world" (Malinowski 1922: 25).

Although current anthropological methods maintain those of Malinowski to be outdated or archaic, his overall views on the domain of myth are still referenced and at times still authoritative in the field of anthropology. Malinowski maintained that myths were serious and told on special if not ceremonial occasions and that folktales were told for entertainment purposes. Performance plays an important role in the analysis of any speech act, including folktales.

The concept of performance was derived from the work of various scholars including Noam Chomsky, Ferdinand de Saussure, Dell Hymes, and Roman Jakobson to name a few. Chomsky's distinction between competence and performance was made in his theoretical work *Theory of Syntax* (1965) which examines the system as a whole rather than the particularities of the speakers. Saussure's work which contrasts *langue* and *parole* (1959) looked at the language of the particular user of the system.

Competence is the native speakers' conscious and unconscious knowledge of their language and the rules which govern the interpretation of the language. Performance refers to the actual use of the language and is based on competence, attention, perception, and memory. Competence is the knowledge of a language that an ideal speaker has and performance is the implementation of that knowledge in acts of speaking (Duranti 1997: 14). How interlocutors speak in different contexts such as general conversations or the telling of folk-tales is important to linguistic

analysis. For this reason, taking the idea of performance to the next level is necessary.

Jakobson's and Hymes's approach to performance was different from Chomsky and Saussure as they looked at it within the arts (poetry, prose, folklore etc.), and paid particular attention to the ways that speech acts were executed in these areas.

Jakobson (1960) called *attention* to the form of the message "poetic function" of the speech act. Hymes called performance "something creative, realized, achieved" (Hymes 1981:81). Performance is something found in various speech activities including singing and story telling. Charles Briggs writes of performance, "It is for instance found in verbal debates, story telling, singing, and other speech activities in which what speakers say is evaluated according to aesthetic canons, that is, for the beauty of their phrasing or delivery, or according to the effect it has on an audience, namely for their ability to "move" the audience" (Briggs 1988).

## **2.0 MEXICO AS A SOURCE OF FOLKTALES AND MYTHS**

## 2.1 MESOAMERICA

Mexico is a country that is rich in cultural tradition and boasts a vast amount of folklore and mythology from many indigenous groups. There are common characteristics found in Mesoamerican culture and religion and for this reason, many of the folktales and myths of Mesoamerican peoples contain similarities from area to area. Some of these similarities stem from a set of characteristics that culturally define being Mesoamerican.

Paul Kirchoff, a leader in the advancement of Mesoamerican studies (1900-1972), defined the cultural area by the the presence of a long and detailed list of specific cultural traits that were practiced by the people. These specific traits set the Mesoamericans apart from the other cultural areas of the world, and particularly from those in northern Mexico, the United States, and South America.

Some of these traits included lake gardens (chinampas), cultivation of cacao, a certain type of digging stick, step pyramids, hieroglyphic writing systems, calendars of 18 months of 20 days plus 5 additional days, ball courts with rings, good and bad omen days, pyrite mirrors, stucco floors, cultivation of maguey, sandals with heels, grinding of corn softened with ashes or lime, and the flying game (juego del volador).

López Austin felt that there was no evidence in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica that the people themselves differentiated among religions and

that the similarities shared were due to societies being subjected to the same historical happenings. He believed that religion functioned as the part of Mesoamerican culture by which most different Mesoamerican peoples interacted, and that it served to bring different groups of people together because of religious commonalities (López Austin 1996: 35).

Obviously, the cases for religious similarities in post-conquest and colonial New Spain (Mexico) were much different. The diffusion of Catholicism and the acculturation of the people from the old religion to the new religion (Christianity) occurred at different rates. These new forms of religious practice differed greatly from the old polytheistic religion of Mesoamerica. Many of the old practices were lost in contact with Christian traditions and practices.

The new practices and traditions were a mixture of both religions. They became adaptive responses to specific social situations and arose from the need for a defense against colonial domination. They could not be truly identified with either of the currents from which they came, could not be recognized as religions registered in both traditions, and they belonged as much to the Mesoamerican as to the Christian tradition. (López Austin 1996: 36).

Mesoamerican religion by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century had become a syncretic entity and understanding the changes in religion are key to understanding the folklore and mythology of both the pre-Columbian Mesoamericans and the contemporary indigenous peoples of Mexico.

## 2.2 CONTEMPORARY INDIAN COMMUNITIES

One of the most interesting components of contemporary indigenous Mexican folklore and mythology are the links, or lack thereof, to the pre-Hispanic past. The social structure and the indigenous way of life have dramatically changed for the Indians of Mexico since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. What if any of their pre-Hispanic traditions do they hold on to? With the acculturation of Indian customs to a European way of life after the fall of the Mexica-Tenochca polity in 1521, most native religions began to reflect a blending of the old polytheism and Christianity and old world religious beliefs.

The form of verbal art known to the Mexican Indians as telling cuentos (stories or folktales) can be found in most Indian communities throughout Mexico. The ways in which the folktales are told, who tells them, when they are told, and why they are told, vary from one group to another and in some instances from family to family, but the underlying themes of the stories reflect life as the Indians exist in the contemporary world.

### 2.3 SAN AGUSTÍN OAPAN, GUERRERO

In this work, I look specifically at folktales collected from families from the community of San Agustín Oapan, Guerrero in Mexico. San Agustín Oapan is a small and remote Mexican village in the state of Guerrero that lies along the Rio Balsas and is populated by Nawa-speaking Indians. Since the 1960s most households have been involved in producing amate (bark paper) paintings, and ceramics, for subsistence.

Tyler Cowen has written on the town of Oapan the people in various works including an unpublished manuscript entitled *Amate for Sale: Indigenous Mexican Painters in Global Art Markets* (2003) and the book *Markets and Cultural Voices: Liberty vs. Power in the lives of Mexican Amate Painters* (2005). In addition, Jonathan Amith has also done extensive work in Oapan also dealing with the amate tradition, especially in his works entitled *The Mobius Strip* (2005) and *The Amate Tradition* (1995). Cowen describes the town as follows:

The pueblo is 500-600 meters above sea level, where the terrain is mountainous, extremely dry, has many canyons, large cactuses, some deciduous trees, and a large amount of scrub. The village has three to four thousand people in the rainy season, when the crops are planted, and many fewer otherwise. Oapan consists almost exclusively of private homes. The pueblo consists almost exclusively of private homes. San Agustín Oapan has no hotels, restaurants, or full size stores to speak of, though there are several one-room cantinas, a few outdoor commercial stalls, and several

homes that devote a few shelves of space to canned goods and local foodstuffs. The other large-scale structures are not commercial in nature. A large Catholic church in an open plaza marks the center of town, and divides the pueblo into two barrios (neighborhoods). On one side of the plaza is the comisario (town government) building, containing both town hall and two small jail cells. On the other side of the square is a bus stop with the name of the town painted on a small sign, and an elevated building, which visiting priests use to rest and to store their materials. It is built on top of a small pre-Columbian structure, many of whose stones remain visible underneath the more modern building.

The name of the village reflects its cross-cultural heritage. The first two words of the pueblo's name, San Agustín, date from the sixteenth century, when the Augustinian religious order homesteaded the religious loyalties of numerous Mexican villages. The third word, Oapan, predates the conquest, and means "where the green maize stalk abounds" in Nawa, the native language. The villagers often refer simply to *Oapan* rather than using the full name of the pueblo. (Cowen 2005: 11-12)

Those that live in San Agustín are Oapan Nawa speaking Indians. Oapan Nawa is a branch of the Yuta-Nawan (Uto-Aztecan) language family. Oapan Nawa differs from other varieties of Nawa in terms of its lexical items, grammar structure, and use of tone in place of certain syllables.

The main economic resource to the people is the production of papel amate (bark paper). In Mexico, it is used to paint artistic works on. Other artisan handicrafts are produced for commerce as well. Many Oapan Nawa Indians leave Guerrero to sell their handicrafts in other parts of Mexico

including Cancun, Acapulco, San Miguel de Allende, Guadalajara, and Guanajuato. In these other cities that are more urban and have active tourism (both from within the country and foreign countries) there is a greater chance to sell more.

## 2.4 INFORMANTS

The informants that I worked with for this project are all originally from Oapan, although some of them now live in the state of Guanajuato to work and make a living. I have worked with the same community of individuals for years and know that I am accepted into their community as someone who they trust. I have worked with various families over the years to collect information, and for this project I worked with members from six different families. In addition, the ages of the individuals I worked with ranged from late teens to 70's. The following table indicates the age, gender, and place of residence of my informants. I have chosen to use their initials rather than their full name in this work so as to protect their identity. In some instances only an approximate age was available due to the fact that some of them did not remember their exact age.

**Table 1. List of Informants**

| <b>Informant Name</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>AGE</b> | <b>Place of residence</b> |
|-----------------------|---------------|------------|---------------------------|
| J. S.                 | F             | 70's       | Oapan Guerrero            |
| J. R.                 | M             | 60's       | Oapan Guerrero            |
| F. J.                 | M             | 50's       | Oapan Guerrero            |
| I. M.                 | F             | 40's       | Gto, Guanajuato           |
| P. E.                 | F             | 33         | Gto, Guanajuato           |
| Z. F.                 | F             | 18         | Gto, Guanajuato           |

There is some specific information about the informants that should be noted: J. S., J. R., and I. M. are monolingual Nawa-speakers; F. J. speaks only some Spanish; while P. E. and Z. F. are bilingual in Spanish and Nawa. In addition, I. M., P. E., and Z. F. visit Oapan, Guerrero frequently, while J. S., J. R., and F. J. live in Oapan and make infrequent visits to Guanajuato.

The majority of the folktales were collected from J. S., J. R., F. J., and I. M. Z. F. provided only one story that she knew from an uncle in Oapan. Z. F. and P. E. served mainly as translators from Oapan Nawa to Spanish. I was unable to do all of the translating myself as there is no written grammar or dictionary of Oapan Nawa. Although I have a very good working knowledge of Oapan Nawa, it was necessary to have translators to consult with on this project. The older individuals, who provided the bulk of the folktales, do not speak Spanish and therefore could not help translate their own stories.

### **3.0 DATA**

The following folktales were collected in Oapan Nawa and Spanish from informants. Translation and transcription of this type of material is at times difficult because of the obscurities that can arise from the language they are retold in.

Nawa is an ancient language which entered Mesoamerica from the north about 500CE (Michel 2005: 15). The ways in which ideas and concepts are expressed in ancient languages differ greatly from modern language, especially English. Ancient languages, expressed the world view and religion of the people in a vastly different way at times leaving the translator with odd and/or unclear information.

Dr. Angel María Garibay, who has worked extensively with Aztec sacred hymns and lyric poetry in Nawa has said:

“No translation of any text, what ever the language or culture, pretends to eliminate the problem of obscurity which is inherent in the work itself. Transcriptions which eliminate all obscurities are suspect. The differences in time, ways of thinking, and nuances of the language make it impossible to translate any text completely. The most any translator can hope for is not to be too disloyal to his text” (León-Portilla 1969: 61).

It should be noted that what is represented in the data are the literal translations of the folktales from Nawa to Spanish, and then Spanish to English. For this reason, some oddities in grammar will be reflected. I felt it best to not impose my own interpretation of what the informant was trying to convey and felt it best to leave the data in its original, (as it were) form.

### 3.1 GLOSSARY

The Spanish and Oapan Nawa terms included in this glossary are used within the text and are explained as they occur, but for the convenience of the reader I have compiled them together here.

**Brujería:** witchcraft, bad magic.

**Comal:** a type of griddle used to heat tortillas.

**Compadre:** ritual kinsman, and also a very good friend.

**Cuento:** Literally story or short story. Used by the Oapan, and other Mesoamerican Indians, for their folktales.

**Curandero:** Curer; generally one who cures with herbs, plants etc.

**Elotes:** roasting ears (of corn).

**Huerta:** an irrigated area used for cultivating fruit trees and vegetables.

**Ixtlamatl:** where people keep their corn.

**Limpiar:** literally to clean, also for the Oapan, and other Mesoamerican Indians, to clean of illness, bad omens, to cure. Usually this ritual practice is provided by a curer.

**Milpa:** a cultivated plot of land, most commonly of corn.

**Morralito:** haversack - canvas tote for carrying provisions

### 3.2 LIST OF FOLKTALES

#### **J. S.**

1. El Cuento de una mujer y un burro (The story of a woman and a donkey)
2. El Cuento de Juan y Carme (The story of Juan and Carme)

#### **J. R.**

1. El Cuento del Sapito (The story of the little toad)
2. El Cuento del Pollito (The story of the little chicken)
3. El Cuento del Puercoespín (The story of the porcupine)

#### **F. J.**

1. El Cuento del niño mentiroso (The story of the untruthful boy)

#### **I. M.**

1. El Cuento de los Elotes (The story of the roasting ears)
2. El Cuento de la Curandera (The story of the curer woman)
3. El Cuento de la Asirena (The story of the Mermaid [siren])
4. El Cuento de la gallinita y el perro (The story of the hen and the dog)
5. El Cuento de la telaraña roja (The story of the red spider-web)
6. Los Cuentos de la Brujería (The stories about witchcraft)
7. El Cuento del escorbio (The story of the gila monster )

#### **Z. F.**

1. El cuento del origen del maíz (The story of the origin of corn)

### 3.3 FOLKTALES

### **3.3.1 Folktales By: J. S.**

#### **3.3.1.1 El Cuento de una Mujer y un Burro.**

The Story of a Woman and a Donkey

May 26, 2009

Once there was a donkey that wanted to look for a wife. So he set off to the mountain to look for one. After he crossed the mountain, he arrived at a little town. He arrived and wanted to ask for the hand of a woman in marriage.

He asked one lady for her daughter's hand, but she denied him of his request. So, he went to the other end of town to try to look for another woman. He went off, asking and asking from one town to the next for a lady to give him their daughter.

He arrived at a town and asked a lady for her daughter. The lady said to him, "Are you going to marry my daughter?" The burro answered yes. So the lady accepted him to be the husband of her daughter. Then the donkey spoke with his father-in-law and mother-in-law. They decided to have a very big party to celebrate the matrimony between the donkey and their daughter.

They had a very big party for their daughter and the donkey and they were married that same day. However, the donkey was very mad. This was

because he knew that he would die after he was married with the woman. This was because he was an animal and she was a woman. Then he became very mad, and he started to break ceramic planters and pots, and anything else that was around there for him to break.

However, the woman didn't care that her new husband was a donkey. She met him as a donkey, as an animal, so she didn't mind. But, he was very mad and continued to break things. In that instant, the donkey turned into a man and the man did not die. But, there next to the man was the dead body of the donkey, there on the ground. The donkey's body was there on the ground where the woman would wash her clothes in the river. Then, a flower grew from the spot by the river where the body of the donkey was.

### **3.3.1.2 El Cuento de Juan y Carme**

The Story of Juan and Carme

May 25, 2009

There was a man and a woman who were named Juan and Carme. They also had a daughter that was named Carme. Carme, the mother, would send Juan her husband to the mountains in search of food for their daughter. Juan went and asked for help in obtaining food from his wife's friend (who was also named Carme). The friend Carme needed some help to feed her chickens, so Juan helped her. His wife had also advised him to take a machete or an axe so that he would be able to cut the weeds and trees in the mountain. She also advised him to use the tool to cut firewood. He would need to use this firewood in the mountain.

So, the gentleman went out towards the mountain and took the tool in order to clear out the weeds and trees. When he was finished clearing them, he had to plant maize there in the mountain in the area that he cleared (milpa). The friend of his wife did not give him the maize to plant, but rather she gave him maize powder. Juan planted the maize powder that his wife's friend Carme had given to him.

The powder grew. The gentleman returned to his house from the milpa in the mountain. He returned home. Later that day he sent his daughter out to the milpa in the mountain to see how much had grown from the powder he had planted. When she returned home from the milpa, the whole family ate together.

After they had eaten their meal together, Juan, Carme, and their daughter all went out to where the horses went to drink water. All three of them drank the water there and they turned into odd animals such as raccoons. This is what happened to the family after they drank the water from the horses.

### **3.3.2 Folktales By: J. R.**

#### **3.3.2.1 El Cuento del Sapito**

The Story of the Little Toad

May 2008

Well... there was this young man, well now he was getting bigger [older], he thought he should tell his mom that he wanted to fish. He said to his dad, "Dad, I think that I'm going to be a fisherman now". And he also told his mom that he wanted to fish for a living. His mom asked him if he had already really thought about this well. He told her yes. It was that now he was getting to be a little bigger [older] and it's better that "I get to fish [apply myself to fish]".

His mom says to him, "Well, ok... you see, if for real, you want to go, but who is going to be your companion?", his mom asked him. "Well, me alone", he answered her.

Now the boy went on that afternoon to the river, and started to put some stakes and to gather up bait, but he saw that this was not so easy. Well, he stayed there until he collected all the bait and put all the stakes.

Now he returned to his house, and he said to his mom that she will wake him up early the next day. The next day, she woke him up and the boy said his farewells to his mother and father.

He arrived to the river and he hadn't caught one fish. Well, there were several, but they were very, very small. He returned to his house and is saying to his mom that he hadn't caught anything but that he wasn't going to give up. That afternoon, again he went. He put the stakes and right next to them, the bait. He returned to his house.

The next day, his parents woke him up, and he went to the river, but once again he hadn't caught anything. He said, "I'm not going to give up. I'm going to come in order to keep (on) fishing this afternoon." He did the same. He left the stakes.

The next day, he found a little toad. Now he [the boy] said to him [the toad], "Oh, poor little animal". Now, he was at one side of a stone looking for shade. The boy says to him, "Oh little toad, you are going to die here in the middle of this hot sun, but don't you worry, I'm going to make you a little house".

The boy began to gather up little stones and twigs with which to make the house for the little toad. He started to make the house and when he finished, he said to the toad, "Oh my little toad friend, now I've made you your little house. You are going to stay here. Don't you go any where, so that nothing happens to you. Afterall, I have made you your little house in which you can be. I tomorrow will come once again. I am going to come to take care of you, no more are you going to go. It's that I don't have a

friend, and I want for you to be my friend, and I'm going to come to visit you everyday."

Now the boy, after talking to him (the toad) started to fish, but the little frog didn't answer him at all. The next day, the boy arrived at the river, and the first thing that he did was to talk to his friend the little toad.

He [the boy] said to him [the toad], "Little toad friend, are you there?" and this time they answered [he answered], "Yes, I'm here". The boy was surprised and asked, "Little toad, is it you that is answering me?" He [the boy] without knowing that he [the boy] was talking with God. The little toad said to him yes, and that he [the toad] was able to talk with him [the boy] for a little bit.

The little toad said to him, "Do you really believe that I am not able to talk? [you're kidding if you think I can't talk], yes, I am able [can]." And the boy asked, "What do you think of your little house?" [toad answers] "Well, it's very well, but better you go fish now because now you are going to catch many fish", said the little toad.

The boy did what his friend the little toad told him, and he [the toad] was right, this time he [the boy] caught many fish. He [the boy] said farewell to his friend and he [the boy] told him [the toad] that tomorrow they would see each other.

The little toad said yes and that he [the boy] come early tomorrow because the boy, from this day forward, he will fish very well. Ok, it's good,

the boy thought. This little toad loves me more than my dad does. I believe that I as well am going to love him a lot.

Now that afternoon, he put once again the stakes and he went to his house with many fish. This mom and dad got very happy now that at the end, he had fished something. The boy said to his mom that the following day she should wake him up very early. His mom told him that yes, that is alright.

The following morning he went off to the river the earliest [he had] and the first thing that he did was to speak with his friend. "Little toad friend, are you here?" The little toad answers him, "yes, yes I am here. You've now arrived?" "yes", the boy said to him. "Thank goodness, but now you better go to take out the stakes because there are fish on the fishing line and then right after you finish come and we'll chat", said the little toad.

The boy did that which he [the toad] told him to and in going to take out the fishing-line, he took out seven large fish. Then, the boy went down with his friend the little toad. The little toad said to him, "Isn't it true that you fished a lot?". The boy answers him yes. "Well, I told you that from now forward [this day forward], well, now you are going to fish a lot. Tell your mom that if you [plural] don't eat everything, you [plural] sell it in order to buy something and if you keep coming, it's always going to be like this" [said the toad].

So the boy went to his house and his mom said to him, "Did you catch a lot of fish son?" He answered his mother yes that he did. He said, "I brought you fish, if you want you can make a broth, and what ever is left over, you can sell, alright? Tomorrow I will go out to fish again."

That afternoon he returned to the river to put the stakes again. He arrived there with his friend, the little toad, and the toad said, "You've come back friend?" "Yes", said the boy. He told the toad he had come to put the stakes again. The toad told him that was good. The toad was pleased that he had caught seven fish and advised the boy to go and put the stakes and then to come back so that they could talk. So, when he was finished, the boy came back to his friend the little toad and they began to chat.

The toad said to the boy, "Well friend, I was thinking about something, but I don't think you're going to want to do it". "What is it?" , said the boy. The toad went on to explain to the boy that he was afraid that the house the boy had built for him was going to fall some day and he wanted the boy to construct him a new house, one that was larger and made out of concrete.

The toad told him that he would continue to help him by providing him with fish and that one of the fish that he catches, he had to go and sell to a very old woman that lived on the outskirts of the town. He said she would have to give him five pesos but that she shouldn't give them to him at once but rather little by little she would save them up for him to buy the concrete mix.

The next day early the boy went for the fish and to see his friend the little toad. He told the toad that this time he had caught eight fish. The last one was very large. This was the one that he would take to the old woman.

He went to her on the outskirts of town. He told the old woman that he wanted to sell fish to her. The woman was selecting some of the smaller fish but the boy said to her, "What they have told me was to give you this very large fish." The old woman said that that large fish would be very expensive. The boy then told her that no, it wouldn't be. He told her that instead she should give him the lime needed to make the plaster (to build the house). She said to him, "Ah, very well."

The boy told the woman that she shouldn't give him the lime until the third day and that he would keep bringing her fish until then. The woman was very surprised and thought to herself, "Well, who told this boy to do this, or who is giving him the advice to do this?" The boy returned to his house with his mother and told her that she didn't have to make him anything to eat, that instead she should just sell. This was because he was going to turn around and leave again very soon.

That afternoon the boy arrived again to the river and went to his friend the toad to tell him everything that had happened in the town. He told the toad he was going to do the same thing for three days with the old woman outside of town and that would fulfill his responsibilities to her to get the lime he needed to make the concrete house for the toad. The toad told him

that this was good and he was happy for that, but that he wanted to talk more because the toad was becoming worried for the boy, as he was becoming a young man now and the toad wanted him to get married.

The young man explained to the toad that he would like to get married but he didn't know how that would be possible because he didn't have any money to get married. The toad said to the young man, "Well, I was only mentioning it, but maybe you better just go out and fish."

When the young man was done fishing, he said goodbye to the toad. He arrived at his parent's house and he told them that the next day early he was going to leave and go out once again.

The next day he went back with his friend the toad and the toad told him to go and get the fish and reminded him that he had never failed the young man when it came to his fishing. The toad always got at least seven fish plus a few more for the old woman. The young man got the fish and went to give them to the old woman outside of town. He also took with him his fish and there were so many that he sold them. It turned out like this, many fish, for many days. The little toad kept telling the young man that he was always going to help him.

The young man's mother told him that he had been doing this so long and that he should be tired and rest. But the young man didn't want to rest because he knew he was doing this for his friend the little toad.

The next morning, he went for his fish and to sell them to the old woman. This was the day that she would have to now give him the lime he needed to build the concrete house for the little toad. That afternoon, he passed by the old woman's house. He got the lime and then he set off to see his friend the toad and to build him his new house.

The little toad was who looked for the place for his new house. Once he told the young man where, the young man began to build the house and was asking his friend the toad how he wanted it. He asked him what size, exactly how he wanted him to build it until he was done. It was very late at this time so the young man said goodbye to his friend and he went on his way to his house.

The next day, the young man went early, once again and collected the same fish as always. As always, seven fish, and some others to sell. His friend the toad said to him, "Well, I am very sad". The young man said to his friend, "Why are you sad? You wanted a new house and I have made you one, why are you so worried? What is the matter with you?" The toad said to him, "Ah, my friend, I think that I am going to die." The young man said to the toad, "How are you going to die when I just finished making you your new house! But, if you really think that you are going to die, it would be better if I stayed here with you!" The toad said to him, "No, it's better if you go and get married. I want you to get married before I die because I

want to see how the things are going between you and your wife before I die. I want to know that you are happy.”

The young man said that he would like that, but once again he didn't have the money to get married. The toad told him that he needed to start to now sell that fish to the old woman so that he could earn the money to buy a violin and that he would then start to play the violin. The young man didn't know how to play the violin thought. The toad said he would help the young man. He said that he should sell the fish to the old woman for five pesos until he gets to 40 pesos. The toad told him that with these 40 pesos, he would have to buy the violin and that is how much it would cost.

So the young man went home to his house and told his parents that he wasn't going to fish anymore and that it would be better like that. He was going to play the violin. His parents didn't say anything to him and he just left.

He arrived with the toad and the toad told him that once he had the 40 pesos to buy the violin, he would teach him how to play, but only two times and no more. Finally the day arrived that the young man had the money to buy the violin. He set off to take the woman that last fish he needed to and she would give him the money to buy the violin.

In the afternoon, he passed by the old woman's house to sell her that fish and to collect his money. He then went to buy the instrument. When he arrived where he would buy it, they showed him two different violins.

There was one that cost 40 pesos and another that cost 50 pesos. The young man bought the one that cost 40 pesos and went back to his friend the little toad, now with his violin.

So the toad taught the young man how to play the violin. The toad told him that now that he knew how to play the violin, he should play it so that the young ladies would be able to dance to the music. The toad told him that this type of dance was called *coronas*. The toad taught him how to play until the young man learned all he could learn.

Then the toad told him that he would teach him one other type that was called *el monarca*. The young man learned how to play very well. The young man then set off for his house after having learned to play the violin very well. He didn't take the violin to his house. He took it to the old woman's house that he sold the fish too. He hid it there at her house.

The next day, again he went to chat with his friend the toad. He told that toad that the fish that he had caught that day, he was going to give to the old woman, and not make her pay for it. He felt that she had helped him a lot and he should do this. So, this is what the young man did.

The next morning, he went again with his friend the toad and again they began to chat. The toad told him once again that he thought that he was going to die. The young man said to him, "Ah, my friend, you are always thinking this. It is better if I come here then and take care of you!" The toad once again told the young man that what would really be better is

if he would get married. He told the young man that in town there was a widow that that has three daughters and that one of these three daughters should be the one that he marries.

So the young man left and went into town. He got to town and he went out on the street and began to play his violin. The three daughters of the widowed woman came out and they began to dance. They like the dance so much that they went and told their mother that he should be the one that plays the music at a party they were going to have. Their mother said that she didn't know this young man and that she wanted to know him better before she would have him play for them at the party. So they said that he would come back.

The young man went back with his friend the toad. He told him everything that had happened in town with the widow and her three daughters. But, the toad already knew what had happened before the young man told him the story. In fact, he told him that when he was playing, there was another young man there that was very angry, annoyed, and envious and the toad told his friend to not be worried about that other young man. The toad told him that he would help him with the other young man. He also told him that that evening, he should go back to play outside the door of the widow's house. So he did this and the widow liked his music so much that she went to the young man's house to ask his parents permission to play at the party she was going to give. His parents said that

he was allowed. So every day leading up to the party, the young man went with the three daughters to rehearse for the party.

Later the toad told his friend that he should marry the youngest of the widow's three daughters. The young man said to the toad, "But how can that be if I have never even spoken with her about marriage?" The toad said to him, "Don't worry, all three of the daughters want to marry you, but you are going to pick the youngest one." The young man said that he would do that.

That afternoon, the young man that was envious and annoyed with the toad's friend, went to the widow's house and asked for the young man to teach him how to play the violin just like he was so the girls would come and dance. The toad told the young man that he should teach him because he knew that the other man wouldn't be able to play like his friend. So the envious man went out and bought a violin and came back to learn how to play because he play was to take revenge on the toad's friend. However, his enviousness and annoyance was so great that he learned and tried to play like the young man, it didn't matter because the widow had already become very sentimental with the toad's friend. Everything worked out exactly how the toad had said. As the toad had always told the young man, "I will always be there for you and will always help you."

Finally, it was the day of the party. The envious young man wanted to play but because of his enviousness and anger, once again, he couldn't.

Actually, he broke the strings on the violin because he was so angry. So the toad's friend was once again the only one that played music at the party.

This was once again, just as the toad had promised. Everything that he said would happen happened and everything always went well for the young man, his friend. This was when the young man realized that the little toad had been sent from God and it was really God that had been helping him that whole time.

### **3.3.2.2 El Cuento del Pollito**

The Story of the Chicken By Juvenal Ramirez

May 2008

One day a little chicken was out and found three seeds. He thought to himself that he should keep them. Then it began to rain so he went home. He thought that he was going to plant those seeds, but he had to figure out who was going to help him to plant the seeds. So he went out looking for someone to help him to sow the seeds. He thought maybe his friend Kalachi, a spider, would help him. So he went to visit his friend the spider. Kalachi said, "It's good that you came to visit me." He told him that he came to visit because he needed his help to plant the three seeds that he found.

Kalachi asked him when he was going to sow the seeds. He told him he wanted to do it tomorrow. Then Kalachi asked where and the chicken said in the land. Kalachi agreed.

The chicken then went to look for some more help. He went to visit his friend the rabbit. The rabbit told him, "It's good that you came to visit me." The chicken told him that he came to visit because he needed to ask for his help in planting the three seeds. The rabbit asked him when and he replied tomorrow. The rabbit asked him where and the chicken said out in the land. The rabbit then said that he would help, but he asked the chicken, "Who else is going to help us?" The chicken told him, "Kalachi is going to

help us." The rabbit replied, "That is good that Kalachi is going to go. I am going to eat him! He is my favorite food!"

So then the chicken went on to look for someone else to help him to plant the three seeds. He went to visit another friend, an animal called Chikoyewe. He would ask him to help with the planting of the three seeds. Chikoyewe said to the chicken, "It's good that you came to visit me." The chicken told him that he came to visit because he needed to ask for his help in planting the three seeds. Chikoyewe said that he would help. He asked the chicken when, and the chicken said tomorrow. He asked him where, and the chicken said in the land. Then he asked the chicken, "Who else is going to help us?" The chicken told him, "Kalachi and Rabbit are going to help us." Chikoyewe replied, "That is good that Rabbit is going to go. I am going to eat him! He is my favorite food!"

So the chicken went out looking for someone else to help. He went to visit his friend Tekwani. He would ask him to help with the planting of the three seeds. Tekwani said to the chicken, "It's good that you came to visit me." The chicken told him that he came to visit because he needed to ask for his help in planting the three seeds. Tekwani said that he would help. He asked the chicken when, and the chicken said tomorrow. He asked him where, and the chicken said in the land. Then he asked the chicken, "Who else is going to help us?" The chicken told him, "Kalachi, Rabbit, and

ChikoweYE are going to help us." Tekwani replied, "That is good that ChikoweYE is going to go. I am going to eat him! He is my favorite food!"

So then the chicken thought, "Well, I have all of them helping me, who else do I need to help me? Who else shall I look for?" He thought, I have one last friend I will ask to help me. He went to visit his friend Chetirado. He would ask him to help with the planting of the three seeds. Chetirado said to the chicken, "It's good that you came to visit me." The chicken told him that he came to visit because he needed to ask for his help in planting the three seeds. Chetirado said that he would help. He asked the chicken when, and the chicken said tomorrow. He asked him where, and the chicken said in the land. Then he asked the chicken, "Who else is going to help us?" The chicken told him, "Kalachi, Rabbit, ChikoweYE, and Tekwani are going to help us." Chetirado replied, "That is good that Tekwani is going to go. I am going to eat him! He is my favorite food!"

So then the chicken thought, "I have all the help that I need." He returned home to his house. He woke up the next morning and no one had arrived to help yet. Then the Kalachi arrived. Next Rabbit arrived and he ate Kalachi. Next ChikoweYE arrived and he ate rabbit. Then after that, Tekwani arrived and he ate ChikoweYE. Soon after Chetirado arrived, and he ate Tekwani.

The rabbit was then in his house all alone. He was the only owner of the three seeds. They were all for him. All of his friends ate each other one after the other. This was because they were enemies. This was the chicken's plan. No one, including the chicken went out to the land to sow the three seeds.

### **3.3.2.3 El Cuento del Puercoespín**

The Story of the Porcupine By Juvenal Ramirez

May 14, 2008

Once there was a man that worked in the huerta (an irrigated area used for cultivation) and he always was there in the huerta. His huerta was very large and he would even stay there to sleep. He had a wife and children, but they lived in town. The man was the only one that would stay at the huerta and his daughters would bring him his food so that he could eat there.

On one occasion, he woke up and the man saw that many of the things grown in the huerta had been eaten. Many of the crops he had planted had been eaten. He thought that it was the rabbit the had found the night before that had eaten everything that he had planted.

In the morning, he set off again to look over his huerta. He was very bothered and worried and said, "No! How is this possible that an animal has got in here to eat the things that are here if every night I stay here to sleep and I wake up through the night to check to make sure everything is in order here in the huerta. Well, I have no idea how it is it got in here." This was the only thing the man said, and he said it just like that. That afternoon, he stayed there and he was walking around to see that everything was ok, but then he fell asleep.

The next day he woke up and once again an animal had got in and had eaten all of the things that he had in his huerta. He was a little bothered and said, "Well, once again it has eaten the things that I have here. I thought this would only be that onetime, and now... again!" He really wanted to know how that animal got in to eat the things. Also, the man said that he would like to find someone who would kill that animal, and if they killed it, he would give them one of his daughters to marry. That was the only thing that he said and as always, he stayed there en the huerta.

Once again that afternoon he fell asleep. The next day he woke up and he was doing his rounds checking on the huerta to see how everything was. Once again he saw a rabbit, but this time it was dead. He thought, "Ah, it's *you* animal that was eating my things!" He thought it was the rabbit and he even said, "Good! It's *you* animal that was eating my things, but the good thing is that now you're dead and well, I am going to cook you!" He began to skin the rabbit in order to prepare it to be cooked for food.

That afternoon, once again when he was doing his rounds in the huerta, he realized that once again something had eaten some other things from his huerta. The man said, "I thought that you were the only one that was eating the things in my huerta, but now I see that's not the case. You must have another companion that is eating the things also. Now what am I going to do!"

That afternoon, again he saw that something had eaten the things from his huerta. The next day it was the same thing. Day after day it happened like this. The man kept thinking, "How is it that this little animal is eating everything in my huerta? Who knows what it is that is coming to eat everything in my huerta. I know that it's not the rabbit. I have to be able to catch what ever this animal is that is coming to eat, because if I catch this animal, then I'll have both of them and that will take care of the problem."

That afternoon, he went again to check on the huerta and he found another rabbit. But it was already dead. The man said, "Ah, once again it was a rabbit that was eating the food. Well, it was *you* rabbit that was eating my things. Well, that's good that you're dead!"

That afternoon he stayed to take care of the huerta again and he slept there until the next morning. The man was thinking about how he said he wanted someone to come and kill the animal that was eating the things from his huerta. Then he started thinking, "One was found and killed, now another rabbit was found and killed. If this keeps happening and they kill another animal, I'll have to keep giving away his daughters and then I'll have given away all three of them!"

The next day he found another dead rabbit in the huerta. That afternoon he again found that the rabbit had eaten the things from his huerta. That same day, his wife came to visit him in the huerta. She told

him it was time that he came back to their house in town because all he had been doing was staying there taking care of the huerta. He told her that he had to stay there to look after the huerta, but she said it didn't matter now because he already lost his three daughters. She told him that they weren't at home anymore. She said that now it would be better for him to just come home.

The man asked his wife, "Where did my daughters go? You didn't see them leave?" She said she didn't see where they went and that probably some young men came and stole them. She thought that the man would have warned her that the young men were coming for the daughters, but no one let her know or warn her of this.

His wife was expecting another baby, she was pregnant. She was only a few days away from giving birth. Two days later, she gave birth to a boy. This boy was very smart and he grew very quickly. Her husband was ready to give up because all of his daughters were gone but then he had this son and this made him happy.

The boy grew up very quickly and was a young man. He wondered why his dad was always so sad. So his Dad finally said to him, "I have never told you this, but now that you are older I will. I will tell you that you had three sisters, but we lost them. We don't know why or where they went! We have no idea where they could have gone to! No one will tell us anything and no one knows anything about them!" The son said to his

father, "Really? How is this possible that no one knows where they are?" His Dad said, "Really we don't know."

The man told his father that he wanted to help look for his three sisters even though he had never met them. He still wanted to look for them and find them. Now that the man was older, he was now old enough to leave the house alone and could go out in search of work.

When the man left his house, he went out on the street and he saw two little children. He saw two little boys that were fighting in the street for one single shoe and for a morralito (haversack - canvas tote for carrying provisions) that their mother had left to them when she died. Now they were orphans with out parents.

The man said to them, "What are you guys doing?" They replied, "We're just out here fighting!" The man said to them, "Why are you fighting?" The one boy replied back, "Because my parents have died, and all they left us as an inheritance was a morallito and one single shoe. I want the shoe, but my brother wants the shoe too." The man asked the boy, "Why does your brother want just a single shoe so badly? Why fight over one single shoe?" The boy answered back, "Because it's a *really* good quality shoe."

Then the boy explained to the man that the shoe was special because it was magical. He explained to the man that if you put the shoe on and shout "Little shoe, little shoe, take me some place" the shoe will take you to

wherever you want to go. For this reason his brother also wanted the shoe. Then the boy said, "I told my brother that he could keep the mormalito, but he doesn't want it, he wants this shoe, the same as me." The man then said, "Ah, so this is why you are fighting over the shoe." So then the man said to them, "This is what we are going to do. We are going to go down there, down to the river and there we'll see what to do."

They all went down to the river. They went down, past the river to where there was a ravine and the young man said, "This is what I'm going to do. I'm going to throw the shoe, and you guys have to go after it. The one who catches the shoe and doesn't let it fall is the one who gets to keep the shoe." The boys agreed to this.

They went down to the ravine and waited for the man to throw the shoe. He threw it and it went bouncing down. At the very minute that it arrived there, where the boys were, neither of them caught it! It just fell to the ground. Then the two boys both said, "Well, this didn't work! It just fell onto the ground!" The boys yelled to the man, "That doesn't count! No one caught it! It's better if you throw it again and we'll see who catches it this time!" The man said, "Ok, that's fine. Bring me the shoe, and I'll throw it again to see who catches it."

However, what the man was really thinking about was stealing the shoe from the boys. So when the boys gave him the shoe, the young man put the shoe on and shouted, "Little shoe, little shoe take me some place!

Take me to the place where my first sister is!" With this, the shoe took him to his sister. It had taken the man to a cave. His first sister, who was stolen from his dad, had been taken to a cave.

The man said to his sister, "Good afternoon sister." She was surprised and said to him, "When they stole me, I didn't have a brother?!" She then said to him, "Well, come in and sit down. You're in your house." Then the young woman said to him, "I don't remember that I had a brother." He said to her, "That's because when they stole you, I was still in our mother's belly. After you left, I was born." She said, "Oh, well good! Anyway, come in come in. The only thing is that your brother-in-law isn't here. He went out." The man said, "Really? My brother-in-law isn't here? Oh well." She said, "No, he's not. He went out to take a stroll, but he'll come back soon." Her brother said, "That's ok, that's good. I'll wait here for him."

Then his sister said to him, "Well brother, I have to tell you something. I don't want you to be startled or afraid of him, but your brother-in-law is a bull!" Her brother said, "He is?! Well, I'm still going to wait for him." The man waited there for him in his sisters house. While the man was waiting in the cave for his brother-in-law, he heard a noise. As it turns out, it was his brother-in-law, the bull. He had arrived home to the cave and yelled at his wife, "Who are you with!" She responded, "I'm with your brother-in-law. Your brother-in-law is here."

Her brother then said to the bull, "It's I, your brother-in-law. I came to visit the two of you." The bull said, "Ah, it's you brother-in-law? Pardon me, it's just I have never met you before." The man said, "I've never met you either, because when you stole my sister, I wasn't born yet!" The bull said to him, "What can I offer you?" The man said, "No, nothing. I just came because I wanted to visit my sister. I wanted to find out about her and my other sisters because they were all stolen before I was born." The bull said, "Ah, well. I stole your first sister. Your second sister was stolen by a fish, and your third sister was stolen by an eagle. But all of them live around here in caves."

The man said to his brother-in-law, "Well, at least now I know who had stolen my sisters. Well, I guess now I should go because it's getting late and I want to go to see my other sisters." The bull said to him, "Well, if you want just stay here so that you can have something to eat." The man responded, "No. I've already eaten and I must be on my way in order to be able to see my other sisters." The bull said that was ok and told the man, "Well, you know that whenever you want to come and visit your sister you can. I want to tell you something else brother-in-law. If you need help, you just let us know and we'll come help you." Then the man said his farewells to his brother-in-law and sister. "Well, I'm off!" said the man.

Then he went outside of the cave and he put on the shoe. He shouted, "Little shoe, Little shoe take me some place, take me to the place where my

second sister is." So the shoe took him to another cave. This was the cave where he would find his second sister.

He went up to his sister and said, "Good afternoon." The young lady was surprised and said, "Who are you?" He said, "Well, I'm your brother, when they stole you, I was still in our mother's belly and after you left, I was born. When I got older our parents told me the truth about what happened to you and that you were stolen."

Then she said to him, "Ah you *are* my brother then. Come in, come in so that you can rest." The man asked his sister if his brother-in-law was there and she said, "No he's not. He went out to take a stroll, but he'll come back soon." Her brother said, "Ok, that's good. I'll wait here for him." His sister said to him, "Well, I have to tell you something. I don't want you to be startled or afraid of him, but your brother-in-law is a fish!" The man replied, "That's ok. I'm just going to wait for him because I want to talk with him." He explained to her that he had just been to visit his other brother-in-law and found out that he was a bull, but it was ok. A little while later, his brother-in-law, the fish arrived. The fish yelled at his wife, "Who are you with." The man answered back, "It's I. Your brother-in-law, I came to visit the two of you." The fish said, "Ah, you're my brother-in-law." The man answered, "Yes, I am." The fish said, "How is everything going?" The man said, "Well, what do you know... I was just at my other brother-in-law's house and found out that he is a bull." The fish said, "Yes, yes. He married

your sister." The fish told him, "I want to tell you something brother-in-law. When you need help, you just let us know and we'll come to help you." So the man said, "Yes. That is good to know, but right now I have to leave. I'll come back to visit you another day."

When he went outside the cave, he put on the shoe and shouted, "Little shoe, Little shoe take me some place, take me to the place where my third sister is." So the shoe took him to yet another cave. He didn't know how he got there, but he was at the cave.

He went up to his third sister. She said to him, "Who are you?" He replied, "I'm your brother." She said, "How is that possible? When I got married I didn't have a brother?!" He explained to her that he wasn't born yet and that it wasn't until he got older that their mother explained to him that she had been stolen. He told her that he had just come from visiting his other sisters and that his one brother-in-law was a bull and the other was a fish.

She said to her brother, "Yes. We all live around here. I have to tell you something though. I don't want you to be startled or afraid of him, but your brother-in-law is an eagle. He's not here, he went out to take a stroll, but he'll come back soon." The man said, "Ok, that's good. I'll wait here for him." He said, "That's ok. Actually that's why I came. I wanted to visit you both and I'm just going to wait for him because I want to talk with him."

A little while later, that eagle arrived. He yelled at his wife, "Who are you with." The man answered back, "It's I, your brother-in-law, I came to visit you both". So the eagle said, "Ah, you're my brother-in-law!" The man said to the eagle, "Yes, I came to visit you". The eagle said to him, "Well, why don't you stay to eat?" But the man replied, "No. It's just that... I already have eaten. Better that I come back another day. I need to get going now." The eagle said to him, "Well, when you want, come visit us. Now you know where all your other brother-in-laws live and come by anytime. I want to tell you something brother-in-law. When you need help, you just let us know and we'll come to help you."

Then the man said good by to them and he went outside of the cave. Once again, he put on the shoe, that he had stolen from the boys and shouted, "Little shoe, Little shoe take me some place, where my parents and my house are." Without realizing it, he arrived there at his house.

He went inside his house and he spoke with his mom and said, "Mom, I'm back!" She said to him, "Son, where have you been?" He said to her, "I went to visit my sisters." She said, "How do you know where your sisters live?" He explained to her that he had taken a shoe from some little boys and that you just put it on and shout "Little shoe, Little shoe take me some place" and the shoe takes you to wherever you want to go. He told his mom, "So, I put on the shoe and it took me to see my three sisters!" The man then put the shoe away. He put it in a safe place.

Sometime later, the man stated thinking that he wanted to get married. He said to his mom, "Mom, I 'm thinking about getting married." She said, "You want to get married already?" He said yes and she said, "Well, you will be the one to decide, if you think you want to get married then you should get married." He said, "Yes, I have decided, yes." He also went and spoke with his dad and said, "Dad, I've decided to get married." His dad said, "Yes... well if you've found the girl that you want to marry, it's good. You should get married." The man said, "Yes, I've found her. This afternoon I'm going to go get her." His dad told him that this was ok.

That afternoon, the man left. After a while, he arrived at the house where the young lady who wanted to marry lived and he stole her. Back home, his dad still thought it was a joke because his son was young. He didn't think his son would really get married.

When the man arrived back home to his parents house with the young woman, she came up to the door with him very respectfully and said, "Good afternoon father-in-law." The man told his dad that she was the woman he wanted to marry. His dad said, "Come in, Come in my daughter." The man said to his Dad, "This is the girl I'm going to marry and she's now going to live with me." The dad said that was fine and that he was happy that they let him know their plan.

Then the man's mom came to meet her and said, "So you are the young woman that is going to marry my son." The young woman said "Yes.

Yes I am. He came to my house and stole me. He told you before now that he was bringing me here to marry him right?" The mom answered, "Yes. He told us about it."

The man's mom then said to her husband, "Well, I think now we are going to have to go visit the girl's mother because our son has taken her daughter. We'll have to take her a case of beer and some cigarettes so that we can talk about this."

The man's parents went off to the girl's house to talk to her mother. They took along with them the case of beer and the cigarettes. They arrived at the house and said, "Good afternoon brother-in-law, we have only come to tell you that our son has stolen your daughter." The girl's mother replied, "Yes, that's ok, but only if he stole her because he is going to marry her. If that's the case, it's ok."

His parents said they brought a case of beer and cigarettes so that they could all sit down and talk about it. The girl's mother agreed, so they went into the house, smoked, drank, and talked.

Meanwhile, they had left their son and the girl back in their house. It had been a while. Then man set off for the Sra's house and when he arrived there he yelled, "Dad, Dad, we have to go back to the house now! They've stolen my wife!" He explained they had taken her and he didn't know where. His dad agreed they would leave to go home. He said he understood because they had stolen his daughters long ago.

They all arrived at the house and looked everywhere for the man's wife, but they couldn't find her. The next day, the man woke up and said, "I'm going to talk with my in-laws, they must know where my wife is." His in-laws didn't know where she was. He went back home and said good-bye to his mom, "I'll be back in a little while."

He took the little shoe with him and when he got outside he put on the shoe and said, "Little shoe, Little shoe take me some place, take me to the place where my oldest sister is."

The shoe took him back to the cave. His sister and brother-in-law, the bull, were there. He told them that he came to visit. He said he had to tell them something. Then he commented to his sister and brother-in-law that he needed their help.

He said, "I wanted to ask you for help. I need to know if you know where my wife. They have stolen her from me!" His brother-in-law said, "Ah yes, yes. I know where she is. The person that took her is more powerful than all of us. No matter how many times you hit him or try to use an axe on him, he won't die. No matter what we do to him, he won't die." The bull said his name was *kwekwespin*. The bull said not to worry though, because they would all help him get his wife back.

He told the man to go ask all his other brother-in-laws to help and then to come back to his house with all of them. So the man went outside the cave and put on the shoe and shouted, "Little shoe, Little shoe take me

some place, take me to the place where my second sister is." It took him to the cave where he found his sister with her husband the fish. He told them he came to visit and to ask for help. He said, "They have stolen my wife and I wanted to know if you know where she is?" The fish answered back, "Yes, yes. I know where she is. She was stolen by someone we have tried to kill many times. But, he doesn't die. His name is *kwekwespin*." Then the man said to the fish, "Well, I wanted to ask if you would help me?" The fish said, "Yes, yes. Just tell your other brother-in-law too." So the man said thank you.

He left the cave and when he was outside he put the shoe on again and shouted, "Little shoe, Little shoe take me some place, take me to the place where my last sister is."

The shoe took him to the cave where he found his sister and the eagle. He told them he came to visit and to ask for help. He said, "They stole my wife yesterday and I wanted to know if you guys know where she is?" The eagle answered back, "Yes, yes. I know where she is. She was stolen by someone we have all tried to kill many times, but he doesn't die. His name is *kwekwespin*."

The man said to the eagle, "Well, I wanted to ask if you would help me?" The eagle said, "Yes, yes. We all want to help, but this animal is very, very strong. We have not been able to kill him. He is much more powerful than we are. There is only one thing that we can do. First, we should all go

to the bull's house and we should make a plan of how we can try to beat this one. This one that is more powerful than all of us."

They all went off to the bull's house. There they talked about what they could do. The bull's advice was that one of them had to go and find an ant from one of the anthills. They must tell the ant the story about his wife. None of them could get the message to his wife because they couldn't go into where she was in the cave of the *kwekwespin* because they were too big. The ant could get in there though because he was small.

The bull then advised the man to do this. He said it was too late that night, because where the ants live, they also lock up their houses at night. So, tomorrow morning early, the man should go to where they live in the hill and wait there until the first ant comes out. Then he should ask the ant for his help.

The three brother-in-law said to the man, "We can't go to help you, but you need to go ask the ant for help. Tell him he needs to take a message to your wife. She is the only one that can help because she lives with *kwekwespin*. Tell the ant he needs to enter the cave, find your wife and ask her where they keep the heart of *kwekwespin*, where does he live. This is the only way to help your wife." They again told the man they couldn't go with him, giving their advice was all they could do to help him.

They believed knowing where this animal kept his heart was the only way they could kill him. They needed to know where his heart was because

they had tried to kill him so many other times before and he wouldn't die. They believed this was because he kept his heart in a secret place.

The ant would have to tell the man's wife what to do to get the information. She would need to hug, squeeze, and be very affectionate with the animal so he would tell her where he kept his heart. This was the only way they could kill him.

So the man said to them that he would go off and look for one of the ants to help him. He said, "Tomorrow I will go and find the ant. Then I'll let you know so we can get together to finish our plan."

The man left the bull's cave and again he put on the shoe and shouted, "Little shoe, Little shoe take me some place, take me to my house." The shoe took him to his house. Outside, he began to look for an anthill so he could then ask an ant for help. He finally found one. He knew it was late and the ants were in for the night, so he decided to come back early the next morning.

The man went back to his house to rest for the night. His mom asked him, "You're home. Did you find your wife?" He answered her, "Yes, I found her, but I can't get her until tomorrow."

The next day, very early, the man left his house. He went back to the anthill and waited for the first ant to come out. The first little ant came out and he said to him, "I need your help." The ant said to him, "You are a human, why would you need my help? I am only very small, how can I help

you?" The man said to him, "Yes, although you are small, you will be able to help me". So the ant agreed and the man explained that they had stolen his wife and he needed the ant to take a message to her where he and the other animals couldn't go.

The ant said to the man, "Of course I will help, but I am so small and it will take me a very long time to get to where your wife is!" The man said, "Don't worry. I will carry you. I will carry you in my hat." The ant said ok and they went off. First they arrived at the houses of all of the man's brother-in-laws and then they all set off for the house of *kwekwespin*.

When they arrived, they all waited outside because the only one that could go in the cave was the ant. So then they told him all the things that he had to say to the man's wife once he was inside. They told him he had to go in slowly and find the man's wife. Then he must go up the wife's back until he got close to her ear where he could tell her what to do. She should give the *kwekwespin* a hug and a kiss and be affectionate with him so that he would tell her where he kept his heart.

So the ant knew what he had to do and he went into the cave. The ant entered the cave where the *kwekwespin* lived. He entered very slowly and it was very big in there, the space was very big. He saw the wife. She was cooking. She was making corn dough.

He crawled up her leg, then to her back and ear and said to her, "I've come to tell you that your husband is outside waiting for you. You need to

tell *kwekwespin* what I'm telling you and do what I say so that he tells you where he keeps his heart." The *kwekwespin* was home in the cave, he was laying down in his bed. The wife said to the ant that she would go to *kwekwespin* and do and say what the ant told her.

She went to *kwekwespin*, sat on the bed with him and said, "I want to know how you are so brave and where you get your strength from. Why don't you get hurt when someone hits you? What keeps you from dying? Where do you keep your heart? You are so powerful!" He said to her, "No, I can't tell you that. If I tell you that then I will no longer live." He told her, "Many have tried to kill me, hurt me, leave me for dead, but I keep living."

So then the wife began to hug him, kiss him, and be affectionate with him to see if he would tell her where he kept his heart. So with all the hugs, kisses, and affection that she gave to him he finally decided that he would tell her how it was that he lived and where his heart was. He said to her, "I will tell you, but you can't tell anyone." So she said to him, "Who do you think I would tell if you always have me locked up in here?"

So he said alright and he told her, "Behind the cave there is a hill. In the hill there is a lake. In the middle of the lake there is a box. Inside of this box there is a rabbit. From there is where I live. Where the rabbit is, inside the rabbit there is a dove." He said to her that there at the lake where the box with the rabbit and the dove are, are the days of his life. She

said, "Oh. Ok, that's good." Then he told her again not to tell anybody and she said she wouldn't.

She left him in his bed and went back to doing her chores. She then whispered to the ant who was still by her ear, "Did you hear everything?" He said, "Yes." The ant told her it was time for him to go and he left the cave.

Outside the cave the ant found all of his companions. He told them what he found out from her. She found out that there is a hill behind the cave, a lake in the hill, and in the middle of the lake there is a box. In the box is a rabbit, and in the rabbit is a dove. The rabbit is *kwekwespin's* heart and the dove is the days of his life.

After they heard this, the brother-in-laws said to the man, "Now we know how to kill him. How to kill *kwekwespin*. We have tried so many times and he wouldn't die. You stay here and wait for your wife. We will go." They all left. The bull, the fish, and the eagle all left together.

They went to the hill and found the lake. They said to the fish, "You can swim, so you get in the lake, and in the middle of the lake you'll find the box." So the fish went in the lake to the middle found the box. He pushed and pushed it until he came back with it. He was very tired. He was at the shore of the lake and said to the bull, "Now it's your turn."

The bull was able to lift the box from the water with his strength and then said, "Now we have to open it!" The eagle said to the bull, "Yes! It's

my turn to help. You open it bull, but we have to make sure the rabbit doesn't get out." So the bull stepped on the box until it opened and out jumped the rabbit. The eagle was able to grab it with his talon. He opened up the rabbit's chest and out came the dove. It tried to fly away, but the eagle grabbed it. He wouldn't let it. He then killed it. Back at the cave, in his bed the *kwekwespin* closed his eyes and at that very moment he died.

All the brothers went back to the cave to see what happened. When they got there, they found the man and his wife outside of the cave. The man said thank you to them for their help. They thanked him as well since they never could kill *kwekwespin* themselves. Then they thanked the ant for his help too. The ant reminded the man that he had to take him back to his anthill. Everyone went back to their houses. The man took the ant back to his anthill too. Then the man finally went back to his own house with his wife.

### **3.3.3 Folktales By: F. J.**

#### **3.3.3.1 El Cuento del Niño Mentiroso**

The Story of the Untruthful Boy

May 2001

There was a gentleman who was also a landowner. There with him a little boy worked. The little boy always worked there, he always worked. Later, another boy also wanted to work, and then went to look for work there with the landowner too. So, he arrived and knocked on the door and said, "I want to work". They accepted him to work there. But there was already the boy that had been working there for a long time. The boy began to get mad because he didn't want that anyone else worked there, except for himself.

So, he began to get mad and the landowner had accepted the other boy to work there too and he told the boy that he would work in the fields. But the other boy got very mad because he didn't want the other boy to work the fields. Only he should work the fields, him only. He wanted to work alone in the fields.

But the two were accepted by the landowner to work the fields and they were both sent out to the fields to work. The gentleman always said that they should take with them their food (tortillas) to the fields. The

tortillas were the food they would take with them. But the new boy, also was told to take his food and to eat all of it in the fields. But as it turned out, the new boy didn't want to eat his food (tortillas). He didn't want to eat because he saw all the little animals that were there, little animals, he felt pity for them, he felt sorry for them. He thought better he should feed them. Instead of him eating, better that he give the food to the animals to eat.

Well, the other boy got mad, the boy that had been working there for a long time got mad and he said to the new boy, "why are you doing that? If the landowner told us that we should eat all the food that he gives to us?" But the new boy said, "no, it's just that I feel bad for the little animals, and I think that they are hungry because no one gives them anything to eat". And the new boy fed them.

The boy that had been working there for a long time returned from camp and he was mad and he said to the landowner, "do you know what sir, the other boy doesn't eat his food (tortilla), he doesn't eat the food that you send with us, and he only gives it to the animals in the fields". And they boy stayed mad, but there was nothing he could do. So the next day once again he went to work in the fields, but all he was doing was looking out for whether or not the new boy was eating his food or not. And once again he saw that the new boy didn't eat his food, but once again he gave it to the animals in the fields, the ones that were around where the boys were

working. Once again he returned from the fields and the other boy didn't come back to eat. So the boy that had been working there a long time, once again went to the landowner and said, "Do you know what sir, well, that new boy doesn't eat, and hasn't eaten anything that you have given him. He always gives it to the animals".

And then, the boy thought and he thought to himself, "I'm going to tell lies about the new boy to the landowner". And now he was really mad and said, "I'm going to tell lies". And as it turns out, he returned to the landowner and he said to him, "Do you know what sir, that new boy says that out in these fields where the milpas are (the landowner also had many milpas) those milpas are now really full of weeds (workers will clear out all the weeds so that the milpas were clean) and well, do you know what the new boy said to me? He said that he could clean out the milpa you have there in the field all by himself, him only, and he could clear out all the weeds that it is filled with by himself".

But this wasn't the truth. The boy that had been working there for a long time was just telling lies about the new boy because he was mad at him. And the landowner arrived and said, "*Really*, did he really say that to you?" And the boy said to the landowner, "yes, that is how he said it to me!" The landowner could not believe that the new boy would have said that he was able to clean out the milpa all by himself and questioned that

boy that had been working that for a long time about it once again. The boy replied, "Yes, yes, yes... he said that he could do it by himself".

Then the new boy returned and he said that what the other boy was saying wasn't true. He told the landowner that he had never said anything like that at all. He told the landowner that the boy was just telling lies about him.

Once again the boys went to work the fields and once again the new boy was observed by the other boy giving his food to the animals. Once again upon returning from the fields, the boy that had been working for a long time told another lie about the new boy. He said to the landowner, "Do you know what sir, the new boy says that if you throw him into a fire, he won't be burned! This is what the boy said to me" "*Really? Is that really what the new boy told you?*", the landowner said. "Yes, yes, yes... he says that if you thrown him in a fire that he won't be burned".

It turned out that the boy returned again and said to that landowner, "Do you know what? The boy told me that if you were to throw him into a fire, he would not be burned". And the landowner said, "You know what, we are going to try it out and see if it's true that he is not able to be burned".

So the boy that had been working there for a long time had told many lies. He already said that the new boy could do all the things himself and he was able to clear out all the weeds that were in the milpa himself even though it was a very large milpa. But the new boy hadn't said these things.

The other boy was just telling lies about him and knew that what he was saying really wasn't true about the new boy.

Now the landowner arrived and said to the new boy, "You know that the other boy told me? He said that you, you know how to clear out all the weeds from the milpas by yourself. Well, you are going to clear out all the weeds from them since you say you can do it and I want to know if it's true or not. So... Do it!" The new boy began to cry and said, "well, it's just that... well, I didn't say anything like that! The other boy is telling you all lies, I can't do that (clean the milpas alone)". The boy cried more and more.

Then the boy was alone and began to cry again. Suddenly, all the animals from the fields arrived and said to him, "why are you crying?". The new boy replied, "They have sent me here to the milpas to clear out everything and to clear out all the weeds that are in the milpa, but I am not going to be able to do it because it's not true that I said I could do it by myself. I never said anything like that!". The animals said to the new boy, "Don't cry, we'll help you! We the little animals that you always fed, we are very thankful to you because you always gave us food and now we can help you". The animal that spoke for the others then said, "I have more help here, my children, come and take away all these weeds. Take away all the weed so that the milpa is very clean once again". And they did it, the animals did it. Well, the landowner saw that it was true what the new boy was able to carry out the task that he said he could.

Now the landowner said, "Now we'll see if it is true. You said that you aren't able to be burned". But that wasn't true, the new boy really hadn't said anything like that. It was once again the other boy, that had been working there for a long time, that was mad at the new boy and was telling lies about him to the landowner.

The landowner got a huge stock pot and he threw the new boy in there. He put a lot of firewood around the stock pot so that the flames would be strong and burn that new boy. The landowner wanted to burn the boy because he said that he could not be burned. So they lit the firewood and started the fire. The boy stayed in the pot and began to cry and said to himself, "Well, now I am surely going to die, because, well, how will I ever save myself from here!"

As it turned out, the little fish came to him. They came to him because he also gave them food, he gave the little fish that lived there in the river food too. The little fish came out and they said to him, "Why are you crying?" The new boy said, "Because, well, they are going to burn me! They are going to burn me and I'm going to die!" Then the little fish said to him, "Don't cry". All of the sudden, the water from the river next to the fields where the animals lived went out and put out the fire under the stock pot. The new boy didn't get burned because the water put out the fire. He was unable to be burned. He didn't get burned and he was saved.

### **3.3.4 Folktales By: I. M.**

#### **3.3.4.1 El Cuento de los Elotes**

The Story of the Roasting Ears (of corn)

May 2009

One day, there was a young man who said to his wife that they should go to the fields to the milpa to plant elotes (roasting ears). He always went with his wife to the milpa (small field, type of crop growing system used in Mesoamerica) because she was always working there.

Then it was that day, the 24<sup>th</sup> of June that they would plant the elotes. And then later when there was corn, he said to his wife to go and tell her dad that they were inviting him to eat (the elotes) with them. So then, the girl went off to tell her mom, "Mama, my husband has invited you to come and eat elotes. To come and eat elotes there in the milpa."

So they went off and then the young man went off to cut some fire wood for them. So he went and got the firewood and they made a fire to cook the elotes there in the milpa. And then after they had eaten the elotes, the young man, his mother-in-law and his father-in-law all turned into animals.

Like animals, odd animals. And the wife of the young man (who was now an animal) began to cry. She asked her spouse, "What has happened?"

Her husband replied to her, "Well, we didn't know anything about this or how it happened!" Now, when there are elotes, these animals are always there eating the them because it is said that the young man, his mother-in-law and his father-in-law all turned into animals for eating the elotes. So you always see these animals in the milpa with the young woman who takes care of them.

So, the young woman is always crying and saying she didn't know what happened to her mom and was this was happening like this. And later on, a gentleman, that was old, they say, passed by there. And this gentleman was very, very poor and he didn't have anything at all. He would always pass by there and that he and his wife were poor and they never had anything to eat and his wife was always crying. Because when it was this time (of the year) there were no more elotes, and they had eaten all that they had.

So then later he was out working with his compadre (very good friend) to try to plant elotes again. Some time later, his compadre said to him, that he was always asking for something. The man started crying.

So he went out to the mountain, and he saw an image. The man saw an image out there. He went to it and he was crying a lot and then a young woman, they say was very, very pretty said to the man who was crying, "If you want to have again what you used to have, you will have to tell your wife to kill a hen. I am going to eat this."

So the man brought the very pretty woman back to his house and his wife was there in the house and began to cry and said, "Again you have brought a woman to our house and there is nothing to eat! We have two children and we have nothing to eat!"

Then the husband went to the *ixtlamatl* (where they kept their maize). He went there and said they had to kill a hen. He told his wife that there they would have to kill a hen and to eat it with the very pretty lady he brought back with him. And then the young woman took the hen with her and she got into the *ixtlamatl*. Then the wife asked her husband where she was going to get maize from since they didn't have any at all in the *ixtlamatl*.

Her husband said for her to go look again in the *ixtlamatl* for maize. So she went over to it and looked in and it was filled to the top with maize. And she asked her husband, "How, how is this?" He said to her, "Because the pretty woman that I brought here to the house said we had to do as she asked and then we would have once again what we had before." Then the woman began to cry again and said, "What happened. How is it that we have maize again?"

The *compadre* of the man then came and asked where all the maize that was in the *ixtlamatl* was from. He said that before, his dad had a lot of money, and was very rich, and now his dad didn't have anything because a

young woman passed by where he was. But that his dad was very rich and because he had a lot of money he wasted a lot.

He threw away a lot of maize and tortillas. And he ate a lot of it for himself. So what happened was that the maize (from the rich man) passed to the other man that was poor and had nothing.

### 3.3.4.2 El Cuento de la Curandera

The Story of the Curer Woman

May 2009

Once there was a bird, and it never got married. It was single. And then, later when it grew up and was older, it was always crying. And it would say, "Where are we going to go?" and another bird answered it and said, "Come down over here." This bird was a male and he wasn't married yet either. The two of them found each other. So they were calling out to each other that the other should come down because neither of them was married. They were both single.

Then a witch came. A *curandero* [curer], came and she went with a young boy and was asking for a lot of money. She told the boy that she could *limpiarlo* (clean him) (cure) him for 15,000 pesos. She said then he would never have that illness again. So the young man gave her the money and even though he did, his illness didn't go away. Later, the young man met up with another curer who told him that the other curer had tricked him since he didn't get better. So the young man went off to look for the curer that he gave the money to, but he couldn't find her anywhere, she had disappeared. Later, she appeared again there in the town. The young man said to her, "I will pay you well, if you cure me well." He told her that even though she said he would be cured before that he was still sick.

So the curer said to him that once again he should give her the money if he wanted to get better. She said she would get rid of whatever illness he had. But this time the young man didn't want to trust her. Later, he went with his wife to a party. There at the party it was very, very dark. There at the party he met up with an older lady, who was his neighbor. She asked him where he came from because it was 3:00 in the morning. She said she saw him running from the other side of town. Then the neighbor went away.

Then the next morning, the neighbor went to see the young man and asked him why he was out so late the night before. The young man said that he hadn't gone anywhere the night before that he had been home the whole night sleeping in his house. But the neighbor told him that she saw him out in the street very late last night. He told her that no, he hadn't gone out anywhere, that he was sleeping there at his house. So, the young man, as it turns out started to have problems with the illness again.

And now he found himself cutting his feet, almost until he didn't even have a foot anymore. He cut them until almost he didn't have either of his feet anymore.

So, when the neighbor woman saw this, she thought that he must have an even worse illness than he did before. But the curer woman, who was supposed to have cured the young man, she had gone away again from the town and disappeared again.

Then later, he went with a young woman, who was 25 years old. She told the young man that if he paid her 7,000 pesos, that she would cure him and very well. She told him that his portrait was over there in the mausoleum and they had it over there and he was going to die that month, May. She told him, "You are going to die this month, May." The young man said, "Me. Why? I'm not that sick that I am going to die. I only have some problems and I have a cough." The young woman told him, "Well. That's ok. You don't have to believe me, but I am telling the truth. You are going to die after this month of May." So the young man said to her, "If you are going to cure me, but for real...because I do have a bad cough...how much money do you want?" She replied to him, "4000 pesos and I will cure you really well, really well. We are going to go there at 1:00 am (in the morning) to the mausoleum, and we'll take your portrait out of there."

So they went there, with his brother and his brother-in-law and they took out the portrait and then later they also took out a little doll. This little doll had a lot of spines in it. It had the spines in its head and in its nose. So the woman who was helping the young man said to him, "See. You thought I was a liar and didn't want me, and thought that I wouldn't really help you, and you didn't believe me, but look what I have here..."

The young man began to cure and to get well, and he got better, but not all better, he still had a cough. So he thought, "They still haven't taken away all my illness because I still have a cough." He thought, "Now I don't trust or believe this curer either because I still have a cough." It wasn't a curer at all, she was a witch and it was brujeria (witchcraft).

### **3.3.4.3 El Cuento de la Asirena**

The Story of the Siren

May 2009

It is said that in the river, there lives a creature called *asirena*. This creature seems as if it was a woman, but it is really a type of fish. This creature only comes out at night. She has a companion that is a lizard and he also comes out with her at night. They both live together underneath the river and they hide themselves there during the day. They hide amongst the large rocks on the floor of the river.

When someone goes at night to the river to swim, the *asirena* grabs them and she pulls them down to the rocks on the floor of the river so they drown and then she eats them.

This is why it is dangerous to go to the river at night to swim.

#### **3.3.4.4 El Cuento de la Gallinita y el Perro**

The Story of the Hen and the Dog

May 2009

There is a creature that is a dog, that lives in the river. He has a companion that is a little hen that lives on the land, the shore of the river. The little hen walks around the shore eating what ever she may find, and the dog only comes out of the river water at night.

Also, there is a snake that only comes out of the river water at night. All of these creatures are very mischievous and play tricky games there along the shore of the river at night.

The people that go to the river to fish at night sometimes see these creatures at the shore of the river. This is very bad when you go fish and you see these creatures because they are mischievous and they can bite you. These animals frighten the people a lot and they cause those that see them to have very bad dreams. This is why people don't want to fish at night because they are afraid to see these animals.

### **3.3.4.5 El Cuento de la Telaraña Roja**

The Story of the Red Spiderweb

May 2009

They say there is a poisonous red spider-web that is found in the forest, in the milpa. The spiders go to the milpa, and they put there eggs there in the milpa. More little animals grow out of the eggs there. All these little animals can harm people. Especially when it is summer. They say when someone goes walking around in the milpa in the summer, if you step of the red spider-web, you can be killed.

These animals come out a lot when it is the rainy season.

### **3.3.4.6 Los Cuentos de Brujería en Oapan**

The Stories of Witchcraft in Oapan

May 2009

Once a woman was out in the street, late, and she was hugging her baby and a neighbor asked her what she was doing carrying the baby outside in the street. The neighbor knew that this woman didn't have any babies or grandchildren, but she was out there in the street saying that this baby was her baby. It was witchcraft.

Once when I was washing clothes, and was near where my mother-in-law was and she was sick, we took her to the doctor, but she didn't get better. Again one day I was washing clothes for my mother-in-law, because she was sick, a dog came up to me. And there, where I was, the dog was. It was staying around there and passing by around there close to me, and circling around me. And I didn't want to say, "perro" (dog) because I didn't want him to bite my foot. He was trying to bite my foot. That same day that the dog came to me when I was washing, was the same day my mother-in-law passed away. That same day, and that's why I believe that there is a lot of bad witchcraft and that the bad animals come.

Another day when my aunt was very, very sick, and my dad came to me and he said, "We have to go there with your aunt, because she is very sick and she is going to die." So at about 3:00 in the morning, we also went

out into the street, and down the street I saw a woman, she was very white, very very white, and I saw her out there and when we got closer to her, she wasn't there. She was there, on the street, but then she disappeared. She wasn't there anymore and she was there in the street before, she was always there.

One time I was walking with my daughters and said , "Let's go, now it's getting late to be on the street!", and a big dog came out at us, and I thought this was very strange because on the street there, there are no big dogs and it was very strange. There in my town (San Agustin Oapan) you would never have a big dog, that big, that size in my town. And I believe that there are a lot of witches there in the town because of this, they change into the dogs and roam on the streets because we don't have dogs like that there in my town and when they come it is bad. It brings bad things.

Also, when my dad was very sick, and I was taking care of him, there was a woman out there in the street one night, very white, on the street and I saw her. It was late. I was sitting there, I was awake, I wasn't asleep even though it was late, but I couldn't move. And then a dog came up to me and was biting at my feet. I saw that the woman on the street was gone. She wasn't out there. I couldn't move, and I was stuck there. I wanted to say "mom" but I couldn't talk or move, and my mom was deep asleep.

So the next day then when I woke up I said, "Mom, there was a woman here, outside on the street, but I don't believe that she was really a woman because after I saw her, I couldn't speak or move. Then the dog came. I was there on the floor and couldn't move. And my dad couldn't move either. And I think that there was witchcraft on our house.

Then one time when I was in the house and sitting on the floor painting, a bird came in. This bird arrived and he wanted to bite my dad on his mouth. And I grabbed a stick and I hit the bird with it and then it went away. And then he [the bird] didn't appear ever again, but he wanted to get my dad, to bite him [my dad]. My dad died after that on May 28 2006.

### **3.3.4.7 El Cuento del Escorbio**

The Story of the Gila Monster

May 2009

There lives an animal, a creature in the forest that is dangerous. It is like a lizard, but he has the power to throw a liquid on people that makes them die.

His name is *escorbio*. This is why it is said that if someone sees this creature, and he sees the person, he will throw liquid on you and kill you. This is why people shouldn't walk alone in the forest, because this animal will kill you if he sees you. He lives in the forest.

### **3.3.5 Folktales By: Z. F.**

#### **3.3.5.1 El Cuento del Origen del Maíz**

The Story of The Origin of Corn

May 2008

I am Zoila, and I am 18 years old. This is the story about corn and how god provided the corn.

There was a married couple that was very poor and they didn't even have anything to eat. The gentleman didn't have any money, he didn't even have a job. He always had to ask for someone to lend them corn to be able to have something to eat.

One time, the man said to his wife that he wanted to go and look for a job. He said he wanted to go look in order to be able to eat and to have where to get food from. He told his wife that they couldn't live as they were any longer. His wife agreed and said that yes, like he said and however he felt, that would be fine.

So the man asked his wife for one favor. He said that she had to go the neighbor and ask her to lend them a comal (griddle) so that she could make him tortillas the next morning because he was going to leave very early.

She said that she would, so the wife left and went to the neighbor to ask if she could borrow that comal so that she would be able to make the tortillas for him.

So the next morning, very early, the woman got up to make the tortillas for her husband. Her husband left the house very early, like around 6am. He went off on his way, on the path, but he didn't even know where he was going to go. So he was traveling and then he arrived there in the middle of the mountains, he came upon a cross. This cross was among the thorns.

The man thought, "Don't worry [cross], I'm going to clean up (weed) around here where you are". So the man began to clear away all of the thorns and all, but all the trash that was around the cross. Then the man thought, "I have spent a lot of time here, and now it is late and I don't have anywhere to stay, so I'm going to stay here with you [cross]".

So he did, and he fell asleep. In that moment, he began to dream that God was talking to him. God said to him, "My child, thank you for cleaning here the place in which I am. And now I am going to provide you with many blessings. I know that you don't have anything to eat, but now you will always have. But, you have to do the things that I tell you to do.

I am going to give you this corn, but you have to, when you arrive to your house, you have to tell your wife that she put it in the ixtamal and that she will make tortillas. Also she will go and buy a chicken". The food that

the wife would make from this will would be for the corn because the corn that God gave the man was in the form of a young woman. They would have to give her something to eat.

Then, God told the man that he would have to tell his wife to go and get a very large cooking pot in which he could put the young woman. Then she will be able to eat.

So God told the man that which he had to do; get the large cooking pot, to put the young woman inside the cooking pot, the corn, and then to give her something to eat. In that moment the, God had to decide which of his daughters would go with the man.

In that moment, God played a little drum and a white young woman came. She was white corn. God said to her, "My daughter, I want to know how they are treating you there where you are, and if they love you and respect you?" She replied, "Yes my God, where I am, the whole family loves me. They respect me and they treat me well, and I am very happy there and I don't want to separate myself from them".

So God said that this was ok. So once again, God played his little drum and a yellow young woman came. She was yellow corn. God said to her, "My daughter, I want to know how they are treating you there where you are, and if they love you and respect you?" She replied, "Yes my God, where I am, the whole family loves me. They respect me and they treat me well, and I am very happy there and I don't want to separate myself from

them". So upon hearing this, the poor man became worried. He thought that none of the daughters would want to go with him.

So once again, God played his little drum and a red young woman came. She was red corn. God said to her, "My daughter, I want to know how they are treating you there where you are, and if they love you and respect you?" She replied, "Yes my God, where I am, the whole family loves me. They respect me and they treat me well, and I am very happy there and I don't want to separate myself from them".

So once again, God played his little drum and a black young woman came. She was black corn. But when she arrived, she was crying. And God said to her, "My daughter, how are you?" And she replied to him, "I can no longer put up with where I am! No one there loves me. They make tortillas on the comal and they leave me there. Sometimes they only eat half of what they make. The only thing they do is throw tortillas away and what they have left over they throw out to the pigs. I am not pleased with that and I want to go somewhere else".

In that moment God told her that the poor man needed her and that if she wanted to leave where she was, she could go with him. She said that yes, she would go with him. At that very moment that poor man woke up (from his dream). Sitting next to him was a young woman. The man knew who she was and that God wanted him to have corn so he took her with him. He took her far, far to his house where he lived with his wife. When he was

close to his house, his wife could see him off in the distance that he was coming with a young woman and she was very mad. She said to herself, "How is this possible, if we don't even have any money, even enough money to eat with, that he is maintaining another woman". She thought this because they didn't even have enough money for the two of them to buy food with. What the woman was thinking about the young lady was without her knowing that she was something sacred.

When the man arrived with the young lady, he said to his wife, "I want you to go once again to the neighbor and ask her if you can borrow some corn, and that very soon we will pay her for it, and also to ask her for a chicken. This is so that you can make mole. We are going to have tamales and mole. Also, ask her if she could lend you a large cooking pot, a very, very large cooking pot". She replied that she would to her husband. The wife was feeling much happier because she thought that finally they would be able to eat something and to eat well. She was very happy about this.

Once the woman had gone to the neighbor and then had prepared all the food, she made it all. Then the man put the young woman that he brought back with him into the very large cooking pot. He put her in there, and he also put in the pot with her all the plates to eat and the tamales so that she could eat. His wife became very angry about this and thought, "Why if I have made all this wonderful food that I am not going to eat!"

This is not correct or fair that this other young woman that my husband has been taking care of gets to eat this food I prepared and that I do not".

Once the young woman was finished eating, the man took her out of the very large cooking pot and then he took out all of the plates from there as well. Then the man said to his wife, "lean over and look into the cooking pot". When the woman leaned over to look in the pot, it was filled with black corn. The large cooking pot was full of black corn! At that moment, the woman began asking her husband for forgiveness.

So the pot began to provide them with all the corn that they needed, and so they collected a lot of corn. The pot provided them with corn to pay all that they had owed and much, much more. So much that they began to sell the corn. They became very rich.

However, the wife then became very proud and arrogant. She also started to disrespect the corn and mistreat it. At times the couple even threw away many tortillas.

One day, the young woman, the woman of black corn, decided that she wanted to leave there. They were not treating her well. They would leave her there on the griddle and they had let the tortillas to burn on the griddle. When the young woman left their house and started down the path, she left with her face covered by a veil. She had to cover her face now because her entire face was now badly burned. She then found God and

told him that she had left the couples house. She said to God, "They mistreated me, they burned me, they didn't respect me, and they didn't love me". God said to her, "It is alright my daughter, you may leave them".

From that moment on, the couple returned to being poor, as poor if not more then they were before. This was all the fault of the man's wife because she didn't respect or take care of the black corn.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

## 4.1 SYNCRETISM

The folktales presented in this study show that although no specific myths have survived in their original form from pre-Hispanic times in Oapan, there is no question that the folktales in Oapan are syncretic entities. I base my assertion on the definition of syncretism given by Hugo G Nutini (1980) which I have adopted for use in this study. His definition maintains that syncretism, in the case of the Mexican indigenous groups, is a mixture of Mesoamerican polytheism and Spanish Catholicism in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Some of the Oapan folktales illustrate, through their overlapping and numerous themes, characteristics of European fables which are a direct reflection of contact with the Spaniards and their religion (Catholicism), while maintaining in some cases certain aspects of the pre-Hispanic mythologies and folklore including Mesoamerican flora and fauna, certain references to color, food staples, and the supernatural entity known as the nagual (transforming witch).

Despite the fact that the term *syncretism* does not have unitary meaning in ethnographic writing, the concept has been conceptually used in two ways. The first is the fusion of religious and non religious traits. In this conception of syncretism, the reinterpretation of elements from the interacting cultural traditions gives rise to new entities. The second

conception of syncretism is only concerned with the blending and reinterpretation of religious elements (Nutini 2001: 177-8).

Nutini points out that syncretism is a special kind of acculturation in which the elements in interaction have a high degree of initial similarity in structure, function, and/or form. Although these views on syncretism may be applied to many different studies on the aspects of culture and society, they are more significant, especially in Mesoamerica, when dealing with religious phenomena and the study of how religions and magical systems come into existence, grow, develop, decay, and in turn give rise to other systems (Nutini 2001: 177-181).

Although I refer to the folktales in this study as syncretic entities, and am doing so in a non-pejorative fashion, it is important to point out that for other scholars in the field, the idea of syncretism is not always considered useful to these types of studies.

There has been much discussion over this topic within the field. In their book, *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis*, Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw present a collection of essays on what they consider to be a "highly contentious term which has undergone many transformations". They begin by saying that some see syncretism as a pejorative term for religious traditions that have been deemed as "impure" or "inauthentic" because they are permeated by local traditions, while others find it has a positive connotation as a form of resistance to cultural

dominance, as a link with a lost history, or as a means of establishing a national identity in a multicultural state.

In addition, they interject that development and modernization are often accompanied by the syncretic appropriations of world religions. They also examine the debate on who has the authority to describe a particular religious tradition, including their own, as syncretic?

Some of the problems encountered with syncretism that are presented in the collection of short essays in the book, deal more with the actual terminology of the word itself. First, the term has been defined and re-defined over and over again; therefore having no one fixed meaning. Second, some scholars believe that the term itself alludes to modernity rather than post modernity. At times, it can come off as the opposite of what it attempts to convey. Some of the various definitions of syncretism presented over the years suggest a sense of authenticity and/or purity that are at their core, a polar opposite to a term used mainly when describing religious synthesis. (Stewart and Shaw 1994: 6-7)

Anti-syncretism, the antagonism to religious synthesis shown by agents concerned with the defense of religious boundaries, is frequently bound up with the construction of "authenticity", which in turn is often linked to notions of "purity". Authenticity and originality do not depend on purity but rather have uniqueness about them. Both pure and syncretic traditions can be considered to be "authentic" if people claim these traditions are

unique and uniquely and historically theirs, or do not know otherwise. Therefore syncretic blends could be considered historically even more unique (Stewart & Shaw 1994: 6-7).

The authors do, however, suggest that just as many terms have been classified as pejoratives throughout the years and then have made a comeback in later times, this may very well also be the case with syncretism. The difficulty lies with the fact that there needs to be some way of describing, with clear terminology, the process of religious synthesis; and that term is syncretism.

Many of the negative connotations surrounding the term syncretism were from scholars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Now, in postmodern anthropological academia, should we still avoid a term because it was unfavorable in the past? Melville Herskovitz (1941), after studying syncretism, developed his analysis of "acculturation". His acculturation addressed the issues of "culture contact", and he perceived the concept of syncretism as an analytical tool:

"The very use of the term syncretism helped to sharpen my analyses, and led me to a more precise formulation of problem and of theory... It was now evident that if we accepted the proposition that culture contact produces cultural change, and that cultures of multiple origin do not represent a cultural mosaic, but rather become newly reintegrated, then the next

essential step was to ascertain the degree to which these reconciliations had actually been achieved, and where, on this acculturative continuum, a given manifestation of the process of reworking these elements must lie" (1941: xxii-iii).

His meanings of syncretism contrast to those of the 19<sup>th</sup> century pejoratives of confusion and deviance, but the overall idea of mixing still remains. Herskovitz's notion of acculturation was problematic in so far as people must acculturate if they are living in close contact with any different group for a long period of time. The way each person does so is very different and on their own terms. It is not a regular process or logical progression as he would like to make it out to be (Stewart & Shaw 1994: 5).

Nutini believes that Herskovitz's (1937) view of syncretism is that of the second kind aforementioned, concerned with the amalgamation and reinterpretation of religious elements only, and does not necessarily involve the direct confrontation of the entire institutional arrangement of the interacting cultural traditions because Herskovitz never specified the conditions under which syncretism occurs, or the nature of the resulting entities (Nutini 2001: 178).

## 4.2 MEXICO: 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY TO THE PRESENT

What has occurred in Mexico's history, from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the present also lends a hand to the decline from mythology to folklore for the Oapan. Political changes within the country that were extremely dynamic for hundreds of years after the arrival of the Spaniards have perpetuated the changes in the stories from one type to the other.

Over the past nearly 500 years, Mexico has undergone a series of social and cultural changes that have effected the Indian population. Understanding what happened in the years between the arrival of the Spaniards in the early 1500's, until the present, aids in appreciating the tremendous struggle that Indians have gone through and continue to go through in most parts of Mexico today. It also helps to understand why there was a shift from old world mythology to what we see to be contemporary folklore.

After the conquest (1519-1521), the Spaniards brought missionary priests to New Spain (Mexico) to aid in the conversion of the Indians from the old polytheistic religion to Christianity (specifically Catholicism). By the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, colonization was under way, and the Catholic Church played a large role in the society of New Spain.

The Church was largely under the control of the Spanish Crown, and the king of Spain was the secular head of the church which had power over the Indians.

In the early Colonial period (1525-1810), the friars were in charge of converting the Indians. Three mendicant Orders sent missions soon after the conquest, the Franciscans arriving in 1524, the Dominicans in 1526, and the Augustinians in 1533 (Durán 1994: xxv).

Conversion included the friars learning the Indian languages and traveling throughout New Spain teaching Christianity; they also preached loyalty to the Crown.

The priests destroyed the majority of the Indian temples, books, and paintings in this process, and the Indians were forced to pay tribute to the Church regardless of whether they were practicing Christians. Conversion appeared to be successful and the friars believed that many Indians began practicing Christianity and learning to speak the Spanish language. This may have been the case for some Indians, but not for all.

Many were directly and indirectly resistant to the Christian doctrine and there are many accounts of Indian resistance to Christianity including this excerpt from Fray Diego Durán's *Book of the Gods and Rites and the Ancient Calendar*:

Some 50 years after the Conquest... "One day Fray Diego discovered that a couple he had joined in marriage with full Catholic rites had been led away after the ceremony by pagan priests to be married again according to pre-Hispanic ritual.

On another occasion, Durán was called to hear the confession of an old woman at the point of death. Before anointing her, he noticed her large head covering and suspected something unusual. On removing the cloth, he saw that her hair had been shorn according to ancient religious custom.

Children's heads were feathered with the plumes of wild birds, and liquid rubber was smeared on their heads. These children continued to run away when they saw a missionary priest approaching them.

Once Fray Diego had a sharp exchange of words with an aged woman who had been a priestess in the times of Motecuzoma. She informed him that Easter and Christmas were nothing new to the Indians, nor was Corpus Christi, or the other feasts of the Catholic calendar, since all had been celebrated in Mexico long before the Conquest (Durán 1971:21-22).

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century mining also played a role in the development of New Spain. Gold and Silver were plentiful and provided more wealth to the Crown; who claimed they owned the land, therefore the mines as well. This further pushed the Indians into poverty as their land and the riches found in it were no longer theirs. For hundreds of years, the Indians were taxed by the church and the Crown while their lands were being stripped away from them. (Suchlicki 1996: 42-47)

By the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, although the Church was a very wealthy institution, it continued exploiting the Indian population. There were new classes of peoples emerging in New Spain.

The *Mestizo*: a mix of white and Indian, and the *Creole*: a Spaniard born in New Spain. Indians and Mestizos were of a lower class and lived under poor conditions while the Spaniards and Creoles enjoyed a higher status. However, although the creoles were ethnically Spanish, they did not have the right to hold high government positions in New Spain. These positions were held only by *Spanish born* Spaniards, known as *peninsulares*. Consequently, this caused great tension in New Spain and eventually lead to the overthrow of Spanish rule (Suchlicki 1996: 40-41).

The end of the colonial period in Mexico came in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when two Creole priests led an independence movement from the Spanish Crown. On September 16, 1810, they called for the removal of the *peninsulares* from power. Both Indians and Mestizos quickly joined this

movement until New Spain (Mexico) won its independence from Spain in August 24, 1821 (Suchlicki 1996: 55-60).

From this point until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Mexico was in a radical and unstable state. Rebellions and coups were frequent and many different individuals occupied the presidency. All the while, the Indian population continued to be ignored and disenfranchised. In 1846, the United States went to war with Mexico. This war ended in 1848 with the United States annexing Texas, California, New Mexico, Utah, Nevada, Colorado, and Arizona.

In June of 1856 Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, treasury minister of Mexico, drafted the *Ley Lerdo* (Lerdo Law) which barred the church from holding land not used for religious purposes and compelled the sale of all such properties and tenants. The Law's intent was to create a rural middle class, but since it made no provision for division of the church estates, the bulk of the land passed into the hands of merchants and capitalists, both Mexican and foreign (Keen 1996: 194).

The Ley Lerdo brought unexpectedly negative results. It partially destroyed the economic foundations of the country. Church properties were mostly well managed and the overseers of the properties generally treated the Meztizo and Indian workers well. The destruction of communal lands did not produce a country of small landowners as was its intent. The Indians had neither money nor any conception of private property since the use of

community land was a common practice during the time of the Mexica-Tenochca rule in Mexico. The ancient *ejidos*, or communal land holdings, were bought up at a fraction of their value. The Ley Lerdo alienated entire Indian tribes who failed to comprehend this attack on their traditional way of life (Suchlicki 1996: 83).

Around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (1876-1910) Porfirio Díaz, for 34 years, ruled the country. Mexico was divided into upper and lower classes and encouraged foreign investments in oil and railroads (Suchlicki 1996: 53-78). The dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz resulted in Indians and Mestizos being thrown further into poverty. His rule precipitated the Mexican revolution of 1910 which lasted until 1928.

During the Mexican revolution, once again, the Indian and Mestizo population rose up to help the revolutionary armies, with little given back to them in return. In 1917, in the midst of the Mexican Revolution, the delegates to President Carranza's Constitutional Convention, under enormous pressure from rebellious peasants like those led by Emiliano Zapata in Morelos, adopted Article 27 unanimously. Article 27 proclaimed the Mexican nation the owner of the lands and waters of the nation, established an agrarian reform to redistribute land to the peasants, and provided for communal ownership of that land (La Botz 1995: 24).

President Lázaro Cárdenas' agrarian reform of 1934-1940, was provided a constitutional basis as a result of the passing of Article 27. During the 1930's, Cárdenas's distribution of land to the *ejido* laid the basis for a revival of agriculture and a renaissance of Mexican Indian villages. But since the 1940's, the exhaustion of the soil, the enormous growth in population, and inadequate support from the government, meant that the *ejidal* and communal lands declined and peasantry and Indian villages sank lower into poverty. By the 1980's, most *ejidatarios* could no longer support themselves by farming, and many worked as wage laborers. Nevertheless, for millions of Mexicans, Article 27 still held out the hope of land ownership and economic improvement (La Botz 1995: 24).

In the mid 1990's with the signing of NAFTA, under the presidency of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994), there were many more Indian uprisings in this developing country, especially in the state of Chiapas where there is a large Mayan Indian population. When Salinas signed NAFTA, which eliminated quotas and tariff barriers, it concerned many Indians as the cultivation of corn was their livelihood and had been for thousands of years. The peasants and Indians worried that NAFTA would eventually flood the Mexican market with corn from Canada and the United States and lead to the economic ruin of their farms and villages (La Botz 1995: 25). Salinas also intended to bring Mexico's property laws more in tune with those of Canada and the United States and he pushed through the Mexican

legislature changes to Article 27 which ended agrarian reform and permitted the privatization of ejidal lands (La Botz 1995: 118). This amendment to Article 27 made it possible to break up indigenous villages and endangered the survival of the Indian community as a whole.

### 4.3 LINKS TO THE PRE-HISPANIC PAST

As seen through this brief history, the Indian population of Mexico has been quite isolated and disenfranchised since the time of the Spanish conquest, and continues to be today. Through these difficult times, the Indian population seemed to maintain one aspect of their cultural practice, although always changing, and that was religion. As they were under the control of the Church, the adoption of Catholic and quasi-Catholic traditions either in combination with or in place of the polytheistic traditions was an inevitable part of their new way of life.

A factor in the surviving syncretism that took place in the 16<sup>th</sup> century is the fact that the Oapan folktales are recounted and remembered in Nawa. Otherwise, these stories would be recounted in Spanish, which they are not. Contemporary Nawa-speaking Indians, the descendents of the Mexica, ensure that this great polity and people will survive through the Nawa language itself. Hence, language is one of the links that the contemporary Nawa-speaking Indians, including the Oapanecs, have to the pre-Hispanic past.

As reflected by the stories of today, the Oapan folktales, when they address religious themes, are about God, Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and other Catholic Deities and Saints which have no ties to the polytheistic deities of the pre-Hispanic past. Major pre-Hispanic Mexica-Tenochca deities such as

Quetzalcoatl, Tezcatlipoca, Huitzilopochtli, and Tlaloc are in no obvious way incorporated into the everyday life of the contemporary Oapan indigenous community today; however, some other pre-Hispanic traditions have been maintained. This is not to say that all indigenous communities in Mexico have no connection to the pre-Hispanic polytheistic deities in contemporary times. Several Mayan Indian communities in Mexico still maintain traditions which incorporate these deities into their daily life.

As previously mentioned, the Oapanecs include in their folktales certain animals that were prevalent in the Mexica-Tenochca mythology. Some of these include small birds, dogs, eagles, fish, frogs, toads, and rabbits. Also mentioned are insects such as ants and certain colors which were of particular significance to the Mexica-Tenochca. Furthermore, food staples such as maíz (corn) of many different colors, corn dough, tamales, and tortillas are frequently included in folktales of the Oapanecs and myths of the Mexica-Tenochca.

Additionally, the idea of people receiving messages through dreams, and heeding what they perceived to be prophetic signs through those dreams is something common to both the Mexica-Tenochca and the Oapanecs.

In several stories told by the Oapanecs, an individual receives a message or warning through a dream or it is revealed to them as a sign by some act of nature or the appearance of something out of the ordinary. In

the tales of witchcraft from Oapan, animals of bad omen, such as large strange dogs, which are not usually seen around the village appear at night on the street, and strange bright lights and illuminated individuals are seen walking the streets. In the tale of the origin of corn, the man receives a message in his dream from God about how he will be provided with food.

The Mexica heeded the messages contained in omens and prophetic dreams as well. In Book 12 of the *Florentine Codex*, Sahagún's indigenous informants recounted many bad omens in the years leading up to the arrival of the Spaniards. People described hearing and seeing a woman wondering the streets of Tenochtitlan weeping in the middle of the night, there were reports of sightings of strange birds around the city, also reports of monstrous beings appearing in the streets (León-Portilla 1962: 6). The Mexica ruler Motecuzoma is also reported to have had prophetic nightmares which troubled his sleep in the years preceding the Conquest.

Colors were symbolic in pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica. For example, in the human figure yellow almost always meant the female sex, violet suggested royalty of the principal lord, blue represented the south, and red and black meant writing and wisdom (León-Portilla 1969: 12).

The folktale of the origin of corn in Oapan tells of a poor man who falls asleep and God reveals himself to the man in the dream to help him by providing him with sustenance (corn).

In this tale, God summons his daughters who are different colored corn (white, yellow, red, and black). This is similar to the pre-Hispanic Mexica-Tenochca myth about the origin of corn from the *Leyenda de los Soles* (Legend of the Suns):

After creating people at Tamoanchan, the gods go out in search of food... "Quetzalcoatl finds a red ant carrying a grain of maize and asks him where he found this wondrous food. The ant refuses to tell but after much bullying agrees to take Quetzalcoatl to the source, the Mountain of Sustenance (Tonacatepetl).

Transforming himself into a black ant, Quetzalcoatl squeezes through the narrow opening and follows the red ant deep into the stony mountain to a chamber filled with seed and grain. Taking some kernels of maize, Quetzalcoatl returns to Tamoanchan. The gods chew the maize and place the mash into the mouths of the infancy humans to give them strength.

Then the gods cast lots to decide who will break open the rock of sustenance to provide food. Nanahuatzin with the help of the four directional gods of rain and lightning break open the mountain and the seeds scatter in all directions. The red Tlalocs snatch up the seeds of white, black, yellow, and red maize as well as beans and other edible plants (Taube 1993: 39-40).

There are several shared features of the Mexica-Tenochca myth of the origin of corn and the Oapan folktale of the origin of corn. In both, God provides food for the people, the food is corn, and the corn is of different colors (specifically white, black, yellow, and red).

In the Oapan folktale of the porcupine, it is a small ant that is able to fit through the narrow passage into the cave to deliver an important message. In the Mexica-Tenochca myth of the origin of corn, it is an ant that is able to squeeze into the mountain of sustenance to retrieve the corn.

As for the animals, small birds and eagles are seen throughout the myths of the Mexica-Tenochca and are referenced in several of the Oapan folktales. Fish and frogs also appear in both.

Dogs were mentioned frequently in pre-Hispanic myths in connection with the god Xolotl (god of lightening, death, fire and bad luck frequently depicted as a dog) and Quetzalcoatl. They were frequently referenced with Mictlan (the underworld) and had a negative connotation. In the Mexica-Tenochca Legend of the Suns, Tezcatlipoca is infuriated with man, Tata, and his wife Nene, for cooking a fish without permission and subsequently sending smoke up into the heavens. "Immediately Tezcatlipoca descends from the sky in a fury and asks, 'What have you done? What have you all done?' In an instant he cuts off their heads and places them on their buttocks: thus the first dogs created" (Taube 1993: 36).

In the *Codex Telleriano-Remensis*, the goddess Chantico-Cuaxolotl "She in the House, Head of Xolotl" was punished and a spell was cast upon her that turned her into a dog for cooking and eating a fish. Furthermore, in the *Codex Vaticanus*, Chantic is once again punished for cooking the fish: "They say that because of this daring, as soon as the smoke reached the sky it was offered to Tonacatecuhtli, and he sent a curse that changed her into a dog, the hungriest of all animals..." (Graulich 1997: 100).

Dogs are also considered of bad omen to the Oapenechs. In several stories related to witchcraft in Oapan, large dogs were seen in the street at night and/or large dogs appeared as if from no where. This was seen as a warning to go home and to not be out on the street.

In the folktales of witchcraft in Oapan, it is recounted that a large dog appeared while the informant I. M. was washing at the river and that same day, her mother-in-law passed away. She believes this was directly related to the large dog appearing to her. The large dog was considered an animal of bad omen to her. In Oapan, it is widely believed that witches transform themselves into dogs and roam about the streets causing trouble.

In the folktale of the little chicken and the dog, people are cautioned against going to the river at night to fish because there is a dog that lives in the river that comes out at night and if you lay eyes on it, it will cause you to have very bad dreams and may bite you.

Rabbits are particularly noteworthy to pre-Hispanic mythology and are also referenced in Oapanec folktales as well. Mesoamericans believed, as do contemporary Mexicans believe, that there is a rabbit on the face of the moon. This stems from an ancient Mexica-Tenochca myth which maintains that the gods threw a rabbit up to the sky in order to strike the moon, bruising it, so that it would not shine as brightly as the sun. Rabbits had a rather mischievous and sinister personality and were associated with the color blue in the pre-Hispanic mythology. The rabbit was one of the 20 day names of the vague year of 365 days and was also a year bearer name for the Mexica-Tenochca.

The rabbit was an animal associated with pulque, an alcoholic drink made of fermented agave sap, with the south, and with the cold nature of things. "The moon was the celestial body related to intoxication, to the changes involved in fermentation, to menstruation, and to pregnancy. There are many links between the rabbit and the moon in ancient Mesoamerican concepts, and many of those ideas continue to exist among indigenous Mexican peoples today" (López Austin 1996: 5).

During the new moon, the invisible liquid floods the earth. It is composed of many essences. One of them is the rabbits essence. If the rabbit essence penetrates a pregnant woman's womb, her child will be possessed..." (López Austin 1996: 66).

In the Oapan folktale of the chicken by informant J. R., it is the rabbit that tricks all his friends at the end into eating one another. Also, in the Oapan folktale of the porcupine, it is believed that a rabbit is the one that is responsible for eating and destroying all of the man's crops.

#### 4.4 HISTORY OF MYTH: USE AND DECLINE

If we examine historically the use of mythology around the world, some groups with elaborate and well documented mythologies included the Greeks, the Romans, and the Norse. The Greeks and Romans, historically, were large scale groups (empires, powerful city states, etc.) that in their heyday, ruled and governed over many. These old world classical mythologies did not survive into contemporary times.

In general, there was a push away from polytheism towards new religions that were less complex, mythological, and ritualistic in nature. For this reason, the birth of folktales and folklore, out of the decline of mythology has been documented for many peoples.

Folktales for smaller groups (family and kin) are adequate in dealing with identity, morality, and the history of the community during certain periods of time.

As empires dissolved and city states broke up, the need to employ a large scale mythological system by the rulers dwindled. The purpose of these systems, in the past, was to bring the people together along with their rulers under a common system. The Mesoamerican civilization however, with its common religion, was not a phenomena associated with "empire".

Many of these histories and mythologies served the elites well by recording their triumphs and heroic deeds for future generations. The immortality of literary and artistic creation was a commonplace of Greco-Roman literature, and the historians, as artists working in a genre with a distinguished tradition, were well aware of this (Feldherr 2009: 15).

In many cases, such as the Roman, mythology and historiography served a highly political, and at times, propagandistic function in order to maintain the people's loyalty to the Empire as a whole. Literary quality, didactic value, rhetoric and moral philosophy were important to the Roman historical writers. "Every Roman schoolboy was taught the legends of early history, which exemplified the virtues that the Romans liked to think were part of the essential Roman character, and stressed in particular the principle that the welfare of Rome must come before the desires of the individual, and even before loyalty to the family group" (Gardner: 1993: 41).

Though the primary audience, the elite were surely not the only one. The story of Rome was of interest to all Romans and the population as a whole often listened intently to the achievements of the fallen Roman heroes and their ancestors to the point that they became "fellow-sufferers" with them (Feldherr 2009: 13).

The Norse, however, may have had traditions more similar to contemporary folklore reflecting a blending of pagan traditions with Christianity. "Extra-Scandinavian material was written down by Christians unsympathetic to Viking ideas, beliefs and behavior, and so is sparse. We need not assume that the advent of Christianity necessarily made radical changes in Norse practice or belief. "It was quite possible, we are told, for an Irish Norseman to put his trust in both Christ and Thor. Rather than replace it, the Christian myth may have been added to, or may have penetrated Norse myth" (Page 1990: 10). Each kin group had their own name for a particular deity that reflected their way of life directly and there were many names and invocations to major gods, such as Odin, in the Norse pantheon as each group adopted their own name through time (Page 1990: 35-40).

Similarly, this is a pattern that can be observed in pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica with the Mexica-Tenochca polity as well. They were originally made up of numerous wandering nomadic tribes that were eventually unified by a common belief; the search for their promised land (to be sent to them by means of a prophetic sign) which was part of a mythological tradition that they had maintained for many years.

After consolidating and building up their polity, the Mexica-Tenochca upheld these mythological traditions, and mimicked in their religious practice, the long held mythologies of their warrior gods and the defeat of

these gods over their enemies. This was a way of unifying the people for the greater good of the polity as a whole.

Just as the Romans, the Greeks, and the Norse, the Mexica-Tenochca religious practices and mythologies themselves were recorded, mainly by Spanish missionary priests, and are testimony to them as a crucial part of the peoples lives and the politics of the pre-Hispanic time.

After the arrival of the Spaniards and the dissolution of the polity as it was, there appears to have been dissolution of the mythologies as they were, and the adoption and conversion into a more folkloric tradition. There was simply no need to maintain the old religious mythologies and religious practices, as the larger group was broken up into smaller groups. As a result many, but not all, indigenous communities' mythologies, including the Oapanecs, declined to folktales which contain elements of both Roman Catholic religion and European fables, while maintaining certain pre-Hispanic qualities.

#### 4.5 THEMES IN FOLKTALES

The Oapan folktales include mostly Catholic elements; however the underlying linguistic form is pre-Hispanic. Some of the folktales collected in this study involved witchcraft, sorcery, and supernatural forces. The same pre-Hispanic underlying linguistic form is observed in these as well.

The following table shows the Oapan folktales collected in this study and provides a list of common themes found in folkloric tales. All of the Oapan folktales contain at least three of these common themes. This is due to the fact that they are now syncretic entities combining polytheistic elements of the pre-Hispanic past with new traditions including Roman Catholicism and some characteristics of the old world European Fable.

Table 2. Oapan Cuentos and Common Folkloric Themes

| <u>Cuento</u><br>[folktale]          | Animals/<br>Nature | Tricksters | Super-<br>natural<br>(Religion) | Heroic<br>Qualities | Lessons<br>/Morals | Good vs.<br>Evil | Autonomy<br>(leaving<br>home) | Rites of<br>Passage | Clothing | Role of a<br>companion/<br>friend | Magic<br>(power of<br>magic) | Language<br>(power of<br>words) |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| El Cuento de una Mujer y un Burro    | X                  |            | X                               | X                   | X                  |                  |                               | X                   |          |                                   | X                            |                                 |
| El Cuento de Juan y Carme            | X                  |            |                                 |                     | X                  |                  |                               |                     |          | X                                 | X                            |                                 |
| El Cuento del Sapito                 | X                  |            | X                               | X                   | X                  | X                | X                             | X                   |          | X                                 |                              |                                 |
| El Cuento del Pollito                | X                  | X          |                                 |                     | X                  |                  |                               |                     |          | X                                 |                              |                                 |
| El Cuento del Puercoespín            | X                  | X          | X                               | X                   | X                  | X                | X                             | X                   | X        | X                                 | X                            | X                               |
| El Cuento del Niño Mentiroso         | X                  | X          |                                 | X                   | X                  | X                | X                             | X                   |          | X                                 |                              |                                 |
| El Cuento de los Elotes              | X                  |            |                                 |                     | X                  |                  |                               |                     |          | X                                 | X                            |                                 |
| El Cuento de la Curandera            | X                  | X          | X                               |                     | X                  | X                |                               |                     |          |                                   | X                            |                                 |
| El Cuento de la Asirena              | X                  |            | X                               |                     | X                  |                  |                               |                     |          | X                                 |                              |                                 |
| El Cuento de la Gallinita y el Perro | X                  | X          | X                               |                     | X                  |                  |                               |                     |          |                                   |                              |                                 |
| El Cuento de la Telaraña Roja        | X                  |            | X                               |                     | X                  |                  |                               |                     |          |                                   |                              |                                 |
| Los Cuentos de la Brujería           | X                  | X          | X                               |                     | X                  | X                |                               |                     |          |                                   | X                            | X                               |
| El Cuento del Escorbio               | X                  |            | X                               |                     | X                  |                  |                               |                     |          |                                   |                              |                                 |
| El Cuento del Origen del Maíz        | X                  |            | X                               | X                   | X                  |                  |                               |                     |          | X                                 | X                            |                                 |

Some themes, in particular, that support the idea that the Oapan folktales are syncretic entities include those of magic, tricksters, and the supernatural. Some of these themes illustrate European concepts, and are not of a pre-Hispanic origin. These include morals/lessons and clothing. However, some themes cross over into both; supernatural (religion), companions, magic, tricksters, and animals/nature. The themes in the Oapan folktales are also largely overlapping; that is to say that in one story, you will find numerous themes and not just one in particular.

The interesting aspect of the Oapan folktales is that while some of them are clearly lessons on how to behave, where to go and not to go, when to do certain activities, etc., based on someone's personal experiences; others embody a more "story-like" tone and have a much more imaginative and perhaps fantastic feel to them.

Regardless of this quality, these folktales are respected by the people in the community with or without proof or knowledge of whether they came from any one person's own experiences or that actually happened or not. It appears to be irrelevant to the Oapanecs whether the situations being recounted in the stories did or did not actually occur.

In their 2002 book entitled *Gender, Song, and Sensibility: Folktales and Folksongs in the Highlands of New Guinea*, Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern examine similar phenomena in the folk tales and oral

narratives in New Guinea. In the case of New Guinea, Stewart and Strathern explain that:

“To speak of these stories as being related to the imagination does not mean that their tellers and listeners think of them simply as “untrue”. The question of whether or not they literally happened is not one that the people raise. They are “stories,” blending many themes from everyday and customary experience with elements of a magical kind connected to the spirit world.” (Stewart and Strathern 2002: 91)

I have found this to be true in my work with the Oapan folktales. Many times, when I was collecting data, other members of the family or community were present to listen to the folktales as well. It never mattered whether or not it was a story that had been heard before, or whether it was new; not one individual ever questioned the validity of the story being recounted by the teller. Many of the stories that fall into this category include those that involve the spirit world and/or the supernatural.

## 4.6 THE NAGUAL

One supernatural force that has survived intact, as a link to the pre-Hispanic past, in the Oapan folktales is the nagual. Nagual(es) are humans that have supernatural powers and are able to transform themselves into various animals, typically of bad omen and of a mischievous nature. They are crafty, seen as tricksters, and they take advantage of humans causing them harm, but they are not seen as being as dangerous or malicious as witches. The word nagual is a Spanish word that is derived from the Nawa word */naWalli/* which means transforming witch. Anthropomorphic supernaturalism is seen throughout Mesoamerica and the concept of the nagual is seen in a wide distribution in Mexico. The nagual dates back to pre-Hispanic times in Mesoamerica, and is mentioned in detail by many Spanish chroniclers in their accounts written on the history and mythology of the Mexica-Tenochca. Nutini maintains that:

“The syncretism that anthropomorphic supernaturalism has undergone has not basically altered its pre-Hispanic nature and position in the social structure. The syncretism has been asymmetrical in favor of the pre-Hispanic side; moreover, it was essentially spontaneous, unlike the guided syncretism that formed Mesoamerican Catholicism. Although the behavior of contemporary anthropomorphic supernaturals may at times resemble that of the traditional European

witch and sorcerer, their position within the world view is not the same: they rely on an ideology that contains practically no Roman Catholic elements. Rather, the Spanish and African elements that entered into the syncretism came late, and they were exclusively practices and techniques that amalgamated with specific manifestations of the pre-Hispanic sorcerer and witch” (Nutini 2001: 332).

Based on research by Nutini, and my own findings, it is my belief that the nagual, as a supernatural entity within the Oapan folktales, has not been altered in its description or function since the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

#### 4.7 FUNCTION OF FOLKTALES AND MYTHS

The Oapan folktales almost invariably have a didactic component. In this regard, they may be regarded as fables, in the European sense, to convey the sacred values of the community and family life. Many of these values conveyed through the telling of folktales illustrate the syncretic Roman Catholicism that is practiced by a majority of the Indians within the community. Most lessons and morals are conveyed through the forces of a Catholic deity (Jesus, God, Virgin Mary) who does their work through some other entity or motif. These entities, for the Oapanecs, include crosses, small animals, and amphibians.

The recounting of folktales can be seen as a social action, and social actions may be interpreted in different ways as to their function. There are primary and secondary functions to the Oapan folktales. First, I will establish the difference between these two.

I define these from Nutini 1993 in which he states primary function as complying with the following conditions: it is efficacious across the entire configuration of an institution, unit, or well-delineated domain; the behavior and action of the actors involved are the effect of other behavior and action not part of the structural configuration of the institution, unit or domain (the assigned function is a consequent and not an antecedent); subsequently, the function's domain of efficacy must be equivalent, in extension and intension,

to other domains of the social structure in operation (the efficacy of the normative belief system is not fragmented); and the ontological configuration of the function is most often latent (socially unconscious) (Nutini 1993: 357).

Secondary function can be defined as follows: it is efficacious only within a segment, large or small, of an institution, unit, or domain; the behavior and action of the actors involved are determined by primary behavior and action (as a subordinate aspect of the latter in a circumscribed segment); substantively, the function's domain or extent of efficacy is never exclusive (it is shared by comparable segments in equivalent primary functional institutions, units, or domains; and the ontological configuration of the function is most often manifest, and may be verbalized by the average actor in action (Nutini 1993: 357-8).

Socially, the Oapan folktales serve a primary religious and kinship function within the community. This is determined by an examination of the content of the folktales themselves and who within the Oapan community actually recount them. As previously discussed, most of the folktales have a didactic component and most have a syncretic Roman Catholic religious aspect which is conveyed through various motifs.

With reference to kinship function, in most cases, it is the responsibility of elder individuals of each family to recount the folktales to the members of their own family. The kinship function also illustrates that

folktales are not shared among different kin groups or families therefore indicating perhaps a secondary political function as well. The fact that the folktales are not shared among the different families is socially unconscious to the Oapan. They do not specifically set out not to tell their family's stories to other families, but rather it is simply not done. Unconsciously, they do not share the stories outside of their own kin group.

This demonstrates a certain degree of cultural intimacy among the Oapanec families. The performance of identity plays a fundamental role in the recounting of familial folktales. The stories are efficacious within the smaller segment; the family. Each family's folktales can be identified as uniquely theirs and helps to distinguish them as their own segment of the institution.

The secondary political function I am referring to is "political" within each family itself (the family being a smallest segment of the larger institution which is the Oapan community as a whole). For traditional communities, like the San Agustín Oapan, the family is the basic unit for the organization of labor and the conveying of practical knowledge and the basic kin group type is the nuclear family. A Nawa household is generally the nuclear family, but it may consist of the extended family as well. In Mesoamerica, bilateral terminologies are most common, and this was apparently the case even before Spanish contact. Bilaterality reveals a structural equivalence of males and females in the construing of descent ties

to their progeny, and it results in a greater emphasis on the coalescence of cognatic rather than unilineal descent groups (Gillespie 2001: 3940). The “politics” of the family would be the rules that govern who can be a storyteller in their particular family and that individual generally being elder and more often than not, a man.

Oapan folktales also have a psychological function. However, it appears to be in most cases, secondary to the social functions of most folktales. This is to say that the psychological function of the folktales in Oapan have not changed in recent (contemporary) times, although the socioeconomic conditions may have changed over the years.

The psychological function of the folktales, specifically those involving the nagual, play a primary role in the community as this is something that has particularly stayed intact for centuries among Nawa-speakers.

The psychological ability of the Oapan Indians to blame misfortune, illness, and death on the nagual helps to alleviate the emotional stress associated with these conditions to the actors involved.

With in the art of telling folktales, performance plays a key role for the Oapan. Performance is the actual use of language and knowledge to use language in a particular way in speech acts. The way in which people speak in given situations is extremely important to both the function and the analysis of their words. For the Oapan, it is especially important depending on the content and message conveyed through the folktale being recounted.

Verbal performance is a salient feature in the recounting of certain Oapan folktales, namely those involving the supernatural and the nagual, which have psychological functions.

It was observed, on various occasions, that the verbal performance involved in the recounting of a folktale dealing with death, supernatural forces, and/or the nagual was told in a more dramatic way. This further substantiates the fact that the nagual, specifically, and other folktales related to the supernatural do in fact have a strong psychological function.

In the many of the stories recounted by I. M., she was able to blame misfortunes, such as her mother-in-law passing away, on the supernatural or nagual. Her mother-in-law passed away after a large dog appeared to her when she was washing at the river. She believed it was a witch that transformed into a dog and saw it as a bad omen. She also places blame on the bad omen of seeing a "very white woman" out on the street late at night around her house. She then recalls being in her house lying down and not being able to move and a large dog was around her. She believed the "very white woman" was actually a witch and had transformed into the dog which paralyzed her. The next day she recalls that a small bird entered her house and began to peck at her father's mouth. He died the next day.

These tales were all told in a highly stylized manner and with a tone that conveyed much more emotion than some of the other tales collected. The Oapanecs psychologically deal with misfortunes, specifically illness and death, by blaming the nagual and witchcraft.

The psychological function of myths to the Mexica-Tenochca also played a primary role. Mexica mythology had a very strong psychological functional impact which controlled almost every aspect of the polity's social, religious, and political life. The Mexica were a very fatalistic people who embraced many prophecies and myths. They placed great importance in dreams and omens, particularly those that reflected their mythology.

In fact, the psychological function of mythology in the Mexica-Tenochca polity was so efficacious that it was one of the many contributing factors to their downfall in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Mexica lord Motecuzoma Xocoyotzin, who ruled from 1502-1520, knew that the people embraced the myth of the Feathered Serpent god, Quetzalcoatl, and his vow to return to reclaim his throne in the year of One Reed (1519 CE). In one of history's most bizarre coincidences, this was the exact year that Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés reached the gulf coast of Mexico. Motecuzoma's doubt as to whether or not Hernán Cortés was the returning god Quetzalcoatl played a role in the outcome of the conquest.

Evidently, the practice of re-counting folktales in the Oapan community is not only a ritual practice, but a social one as well. It illustrates the rich cultural intricacies of the people, but also reminds us of the drastic changes that the Mexican Indigenous groups have undergone since the time of the conquest in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Many of the folktales reveal a syncretic shift toward European ideals and Roman Catholicism which, for the most part, seem to have overpowered the native tradition.

## EPILOGUE

The links the Oapan folktales have to the pre-Hispanic past that can be uncovered in these contemporary works of literary art, remind us that the Mexico of today is a vastly different world than it was before the arrival of the Spaniards. Furthermore, the Indians of today living in contemporary Mexico are a product of the acculturative process that took place since the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. On August 13, 1521 the last Mexica-Tenochca ruler (tlatoani), Cuauhtemoc, surrendered to Hernán Cortes, the Spanish conquistador, in Tlatelolco. Now, a memorial with a plaque at that site of his surrender reads:

“El 13 de agosto de 1521  
Heroicamente defendido por Cuauhtemoc  
cayó Tlatelolco en poder de Hernán Cortes  
No fue triunfo ni derrota  
Fue el doloroso nacimiento del pueblo mestizo  
que es el Mexico de hoy.”

“Heroically defended by Cuauhtemoc, Tlatelolco fell under the power of Hernán Cortes. It was neither a triumph nor a defeat. It was the painful birth of the mestizo people who are the Mexico of today.”

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