

**Research Essay**  
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**Quichihuah Ca Ininyollo (We Do it Wholeheartedly): Documenting and Teaching Community through Tamales in Huastec Story and Practice**

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**Abstract:** In the case of the indigenous Huasteca community of Veracruz, stories regarding food traditions during the Miccailhuitl or Day of the Dead festival function as a repertoire of memory to transmit knowledge about the community's cosmivision as well as the significance of certain dishes. Chichiquilli are steamed corn cakes wrapped in plantain leaf and stuffed with various meats, sauces, and spices from the Huastec region of Veracruz, Mexico and are a common offering on Miccailhuitl altars. The deceased family members, known as the *animahtzin* then consume the dish, along with a variety of foods, over the two-day holiday. The importance of this dish in establishing and strengthening social relationships within the indigenous community is made evident through an oral story originally intended for children. It is both a cautionary and didactic tale that centers the chichiquilli-making process to delineate the ideal social behaviors for community members during the festival. The purpose of this work is to analyze both how the intersection of food and story reveals the aesthetics of food practices and a community's social value system, and why this dialogue is necessary when addressing the problematic history that exists between the folklore field and indigenous cultural practices. Through a short story originating from the municipality of Chicontepec, in la Huasteca Veracruzana, I analyze how the stages of making chichiquilli for Miccailhuitl transmit collective values that create a sense of identity for the Nahuatl community that persists beyond the physical world, and how we can learn from specific examples to participate respectfully and faithfully in the documentation of indigenous practices.

**Keywords:**

Foodways, traditional knowledge, indigenous peoples, indigenous knowledge systems, indigenous religion

A common saying in my Mexican household states that "*tamales se hacen con amor*" [tamales are made with love]. Initially, the saying evokes the cliché that claims love as the most essential ingredient of any delicious recipe, yet the more I research into the traditions surrounding the variations of the dish, the more I find truth in the saying. Love is embedded into the production and presentation of the dish. Because of my constant proximity to tamale traditions, as my family and immigrant community originate from Central Mexico, I have been blind to love's role within my own practice. My research into a specific variation of tamales, known as chichiquilli in Nahuatl, from the Huasteca region of Northern Veracruz<sup>1</sup>, as well as an oral story originating from the municipality of Chicontepec, has provided a lens of reflexivity through which I analyze my own traditions and their social significance.

Although chichiquilli plays a central role in religious traditions, it is also a quotidian dish in Mexican homes. There are many interpretations of the dish depending on region and season, however all tamales are made in a three-step process that includes preparation, assembly, and presentation or consumption. To make these steamed cakes, one uses corn masa, corn dough made from ground kernels that have been nixtamalized or cooked with calcium hydroxide; meats such as pork, chicken, beef (although vegetarian versions with peppers and beans do exist), and chili sauces. To form a tamal, you spread the masa onto a corn husk or plantain leaf (tropical regions tend to use plantain leaf), add the filling, wrap them tightly with the leaf or with twine and finally steam them until cooked.

Although this dish appears year-round, it is mostly associated with major holidays, most notably *Día de Muertos* or Day of the Dead, along with other commemorative customs such as sugar skull and altar making. Such traditions have been widely documented and analyzed by folklorists in the United States and in Mexico such as Margarita de Orellana, Ruth Lechuga, Regina Marchi; however, one aspect that has been overlooked is the significance of tamales in establishing and strengthening social relationships within a religious framework. A focused study of one region's tamal tradition can illuminate how the community's social values derive from their worldview are thus performed through foodways. Such insight has not always been a valued contribution in our field.

### **Story as inclusion of indigenous voices**

Originally told orally, the story "*Miccailhuitl: animahtzin techhualpaxaloa* [Miccailhuitl: When the Animahtzin Visit Us]" is part of Cruz's collection of short stories, *Tototatahuan Ininixtlamatiliz* [Stories from Our Ancestors]. The collection documents various stories, fables and legends Cruz grew up listening to in his hometown of Lindero in Chicotepec. The collection was published in 2015 as a collaborative project between Instituto de docencia e investigación etnológica de Zacatecas (IDIEZ) (Institute of Ethnological Teaching and Research of Zacatecas) of which Cruz is director and the University of Warsaw. The text has a linguistic pedagogical function as it forms part of IDIEZ's teaching curriculum, my study however; analyzes "*Miccailhuitl: animahtzin techhualpaxaloa*" as a cultural archive that unites Eduardo's voice with his community's. This polyphonic voice that transmits cultural knowledge merits our direct attention.

The importance of bolstering indigenous voices in relation to indigenous food practices stems from a legacy of exclusion that has haunted our field since its introduction to US academics in the 20th century. Rhonda R. Dass describes the relationship between indigenous communities and scholars as self-interested eurocentrism where academics, guided by methodologies developed for European immigrants, would periodically return to these communities for professional gain, thus failing to create a thorough and faithful portrayal of the Native American (Otero and Martínez-Rivera 2021). Mintzi Auanda Martínez-Rivera similarly describes the treatment of Indigenous peoples within the academic field as a method to exclude indigenous voices as creators of knowledge (Martínez-Rivera 2022). Dass and Martínez-Rivera articulate the issue of decontextualization. By this I am referring to the undervaluing, or at times blatant disregard, for a community's social conditions, history and value system that influence their cultural practices. Such methodologies, influenced by colonial frameworks, thus

contribute to the creation of the Indigenous Other whose practices remain severed from their humanity.

Americo Paredes offers similar criticism of William Madsen's lack of regard for his subjects', Texan Chicanos, own worldview. Madsen, according to Paredes, instead asked his subjects to situate themselves within an Anglo perspective largely based on stereotypes (Martinez-Rivera 2022). I do not mean to suggest that looking at the intersection of food and story will undoubtedly yield work that critically engages ideas of racial or ethnic dominance, rather that one method to help us avoid superficial, self-interested, and extractive critical analyses of cultural practices is to center and prioritize the voice of the Other, while reflecting on our own voice. For this reason, I include my own ethnography secondary to my interlocutor's. I hope that in doing so I am not ironically contributing to the same power dynamic I wish to dismantle, but that it serves as a constant opportunity to check my privilege as a white non-indigenous Mexican woman and simultaneously apply a new analytical framework to the broader topic of tamales.

In the context of food practices, it may be helpful to draw upon Richard Bauman's use of "artistic verbal performance" to describe the context, or "physical and temporal setting, his own identity and goals with reference to the situation, the people with whom he is interacting and his competence in the rules of his culture concerning artistic verbal performance" (Dorson 1972). I use Bauman's term not strictly in the context of verbal performance such as recitation, but to describe the dual performance of storytelling and cooking that engages memory. Per Diana Taylor's theories on ephemeral social practices as a repertoire of memory, oral traditions are spaces where knowledge, that cannot as easily exist through formal measures such as texts, is preserved (2015: 55).

As Lucy Long explains, to understand the significance of a people's food, one must enter the labyrinth of affective memory: "In all these cases, the individual has an emotional attachment to the reference of that food symbol, and therefore to the food itself. Those emotions can be positive or negative, but their existence is what makes the food matter to them" (Long 2017: 207).

Stories can, therefore, contextualize foods and dishes within a worldview that reveals nuances. This is critically important in the case of indigenous forms, as through decades of systematic Othering these forms of knowledge are often regarded as banal (Luu 2019).

### **Contextualizing chichiquilli in La Huasteca**

As such, I propose studying the significance of Huastec tamales from Veracruz known as chichiquilli within the context of *Miccailhuitl*, or Day of the Dead (literally, Feast of the Dead) through a short story originating from the municipality of Chicontepec, Veracruz. The purpose of this essay is to analyze how the four stages of making chichiquilli (preparation, assembly, cooking, and presentation) for *Miccailhuitl* teach and reinforce communal ties. The Huasteca of Mexico is a geographic region located in the northeast area of the country. It encompasses the states of Hidalgo, Puebla, Querétaro, San Luis Potosí, Tamaulipas, and Veracruz. Despite the large territory and ethnic diversity, the indigenous populations maintain cultural and linguistic similarities with most communities speaking a

variation of Náhuatl. The story and traditions analyzed for this work come from Náhuatl professor Eduardo de la Cruz who grew up celebrating Miccailhuitl in his hometown of Chicontepepec. The holiday is a two-day affair, celebrated November 1st and 2nd. For Náhuatl communities, the first day is dedicated to honoring deceased children, while the adults are celebrated on the second.

The purpose of the holiday is to honor and host the *animahtzin* (*animah* for singular entity) or the returning souls of the deceased by creating and displaying elaborately decorated altars in private homes, cemeteries and public squares. Although the contents of these altars is left to the discretion of the maker, an altar will typically feature drinks, apples, bananas, and citrus fruits along with tamales as one of the central offerings. The making of Chichiquilli for Miccailhuitl is specifically documented in “*Miccailhuitl: animahtzin techhualpaxaloo*” [Miccailhuitl: When the Animahtzin Visit Us]. Cruz recalls his mother telling this story when he was about seven years old to explain the significance of the traditions. It opens with a brief explanation of why Miccailhuitl is celebrated where we immediately recognize both an emotional and physical link between the living and the animahtzin: “*Miac quihtoah quemman ce acahya miqui, ayoccanah mocuapa. Cequin quihtoah, techhualpaxaloo pan miccailhuitl, huallohuih ininchan, campa itztoyah*” [Many say that when someone dies, they do not return. Other say they visit us during miccailhuitl and return to the home where they once lived] (De la Cruz 2015: 73). The importance placed on the physical home as the center of the holiday indicates a connection between the terrestrial and the spiritual that permeates into the actions and emotions of the individual. The story later goes on to address the preparation of the altar and the offerings: “*Nochi mopalehuiah, paquih, quichihuah ca ininyollo huan amo mocualaniah yon motehuiah, pampa tlan motehuizceh, animahtzitzin pehuah mocuezoah*” [This is why everything is done wholeheartedly without arguing or fighting, because if we do so, the animahtzin will be saddened] (De la Cruz 2015: 73).

This is the central action of the festival and is what Beverly Stoeltje describes as “what is spoken, acted or displayed in festival -public or private...” that as a result “...makes demands on participants, requiring their attention. And this concentration of attention heightens consciousness, creating an intersection of individual performance and social reflexivity” (Stoeltje 1992: 263). Similarly, Theodore C. Humphrey argues that to understand foods during festive occasions, one must contextualize them: “The important thing here as for any festive event, is to see these foods not as individual entities on a menu, but rather as part of a celebratory, festive context, the purpose of which was to mark an important threshold in a manner heightened by ritual and festive elements” (Humphrey 1988: 20). For Veracruzanos during Miccailhuitl, this intersection between individual actions and spirituality begins with the altar “*el altar es el contacto con las animahs, las animahs llegan al altar, no a cualquier lugar*” [the altar is the contact with the animah, the animah arrives at the altar, not just any place] (De la Cruz, interview with author, 2023). Because the actions of the individual have a direct effect on the reception of the deceased, it comes as no surprise that this dynamic is embedded into the process of making chichiquilli.

### **Preparation stage**

The preparation stage of making chichiquilli is the family’s initial embodiment of

communal values. Although all variations of the dish can be offered to one's *animahtzin*, pork *chichiquilli* are the most coveted. The procurement, fattening and subsequent slaughter of a pig demonstrate a communal commitment to the festivities. Because families must allocate resources such as time, labor, and money to the raising of a pig designated for the celebration, this early preparation takes on a festive aspect. For Barbara C. Fertig, hog killings in Virginia share similar traits: "In fact, it is the work itself that is celebratory and festive. The harmony of working hard together and bonding with old times and old ways, reaffirming family and neighborly ties, and creating a communal opportunity to exercise direct control over at least one small piece of nature" (Fertig 1988: 112). The story, likewise, associates the killing of a pig to the communal feast: "*Cequin tlen quiahxiliah, quimictiah ce pitzotl huan yainon quimactiliah animahtzin. luhquinon motlamacah, motlaoniltiah yehyectzin*" [those who can, kill a pig and offer it to their *animahtzin*, they eat and drink together cheerfully] (De la Cruz 2015L: 75). In practice, this is a process wholly embedded in community. Prior to slaughter, a family sets up a ceremony to honor the animal as an offering to their deceased. The pig or chicken is enveloped in copal smoke as the late family member's name is spoken aloud, thus linking the animal's fate to the larger social network that includes the world of the *animah*. It is this bridging between the tangible and intangible communities that assures the animal's death is as painless as possible.

Further on in the preparation stage, families take on smaller tasks related to the *chichiquilli*. For example, someone must take on the task of preparing the plantain leaves by cleaning, deveining, cutting into smaller pieces, and finally soaking them in warm water to make them pliable. Likewise, some family members are responsible for processing the meat; toasting the chilis that will be used for the sauce and frying the mixture or *guisos* together. Although the tasks are organized into manageable steps, this is a process that is by no means simple; the laborious task a family undertakes when making tamales is fertile ground for conflict. In my family, it is common to engage in petty arguments and disagreements while making them. As is common in many group collaborations, individual egos often clash with other's *picadilloes*, and poor communication can create hurt feelings that turn into resentment. As such, individual opinions on the best method of soaking corn husks or the correct amount of cumin that should be added contribute to an emotionally draining process. During *Miccailhuitl*, however, such egotistic emotions must be avoided. After all, to be a good host to the visiting *animah* is to create a joyful environment. Regarding the topic, Cruz explains: "*Pues allí los papas piden. Se trata de comportarse bien estos dos, tres días porque tenemos visita*" [Well, this is what the parents preach, it is about behaving well these two or three days because we have company over] (De la Cruz, interview with the author, 2015).

### **Social responsibility through behavior**

The demand to behave according to social norms and, as the story urges, to act "*ca ininyollo*" [from our hearts] is a testament to the spatial and temporal shifts that occur during festivals like *Miccailhuitl*. To regulate our emotions as we partake in traditions is to remove ourselves from the norms of the ordinary (where conflict is tolerated) and enter the "time of out of time" (Long 2004: 50), or that constructed social space where the extraordinary (such as the return of the deceased) is possible. For the *Chicontepec* community, this extraordinary time demands emotional self-reflection: "*las animah imitan*

*todo lo que uno hace en la casa, si tu te peleas, ellos se van a pelear*” [the animah imiatate everything one does in the home, if you are fighting, they will be fighting] (De la Cruz, interview with the author, 2023). Likewise, the physical space is transformed to both host the visitors (via the altar) and reflect their emotions: “*Mi mama decía que cuando un alma está feliz la cera de vela brilla, resplandece bonito. Pero cuando un alma está triste, la cera empieza a colgarse, al caer, eso indica tristeza*” [My mother used to say that when a soul is happy, the wax of a candle shines and glows beautifully. But when a soul is sad, the wax begins to drip, and the dripping indicates sadness](De la Cruz, interview with the author, 2023).

Such dynamics can be attributed to the festive aspects of the holiday, as Stoeltje affirms: “... festival yokes the social group into the cyclical force, establishing contact with the Cosmos and the internal processes of time” (Stoeltje 1993: 268). Chichiquilli, therefore, are a component of this spatial and temporal shift; they are the sustenance offered to the deceased to maintain them in the collective memory. As Arturo Gómez Martínez argues:

*“Dichos alimentos les sirven para nutrirse durante un ciclo y mantenerse presentes en la memoria de sus familiares, cuando dejan de “recibir los tamales” se pierden en el tiempo, tornándose ancestros sin ningún vínculo con los vivos”* [Such foods nourish them [the deceased] during a cycle and keep them present in the memory of their family members, when they no longer ‘receive tamales’ they are lost in time, turning into ancestors with no link to the living.] (Martínez 2014)

The dish’s emotionally nourishing aspect further complicates the subject of memory as the chichiquilli are both the sustenance for the spirits and a vessel of memory for the maker. To make and consume them is to dialogue with the memory of the deceased. As Rachelle Saltzman explains, beyond the nutrition, food can offer “emotional sustenance because they provide spiritual sustenance; they are imbued with meaning and carry family histories and memories as well as cultural history writ large as part of their essence. Without them, there is no structure to carry the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, through time and the generations” (Saltzman et al. 2022). Similarly, Rosalyn Collings Eves, analyzes memory not as a static receptacle, but as “ a dynamic, evolving body of knowledge and stories that connects us to our pasts and informs our identity as individuals and members of communities” (Eves 2005: 281). In the case of chichiquilli, the dish is a form of externalized memory that contextualizes oneself, not only as part of a family unit, but as a part of a collective that transcends this earthly realm. To partake fully in the tradition, one must commit themselves *ininyollo* or wholeheartedly, by controlling one emotions and actions, to the community.

### **The story**

*“Miccaihuitl: animah tzin techhualpaxaloa”* [Miccaihuitl: When the Animahtzin Visit Us] tells the tale of an incredulous man who rejects the chichiquilli traditions, thus eschewing the purpose of Miccaihuitl. It is both a caution to the children of Chicontepec and a heightened illustration of Huastec community values. Preceding the tale, the narrator explains that families must not work on the two days; as the deceased are forced to imitate the actions of their living family, going to work on this holiday is a massive disrespect: *“Yainon techpohuilah huehuentzitzin tlan ce acahya tequitiz, quihtoah amo qitlepanitta*

*ianimah huan quiixcahuiltia ma tequiti*" [This is what the elders tell us. If one were to work, one does not respect their *animah* and burdens them with work] (De la Cruz 2015: 75). The incredulous man, scolding his wife who had begun with the festive preparations, explicitly rejects the tradition as he proclaims: "*Axmela huac huallohuih animah tzitzin*" [It is not true that the *animah tzitzin* will visit us] (De la Cruz 2015: 75) and heads off to work in the field. From the opening of this story, the audience is given an example of the non-ideal Huastec man. As Cruz comments as he retells the story, in the patriarchal Huastec communities, the man of the household dictates the spiritual well-being of the family. Despite his wife's loyalty to the tradition, he has the final say and by refusing to behave according to the customs of *Miccaihuitl*, he severs the link between his living family and his ancestors, a choice that he will ultimately regret.

According to the story, after the man works in the field, he rests under a tree by a path where he hears the voices of the *animah*. As the *animah tzitzin* walk the path in front of him, they are gleefully discussing the offering their living families left them: "*Cequin quihuicah alaxox, pitzotl, piyomeh, refrezcoh, pantzin, chichiquilli; iuhquinon miac tlamantli quihuicah*" [Many of them have oranges, pork, chicken, drinks, bread *chichiquilli* and many other things left for them] (De la Cruz 2015: 76). To his shock, amongst the *animah tzitzin* he recognizes his deceased mother holding only a burning piece of wood known as a *tlicuahuitl*. This piece of wood is typically used in homes to light the wood-burning stove and, as Cruz adds, it imitates the candle found on the altars (De la Cruz, interview with the author, 2023).

Because the man refused to light a single candle, his mother had no choice but to grasp onto the only source of light in her home. Similarly, we can interpret the *tlicuahuitl* as representative of the man's lack of faith or as a tangible nothing that stands in contrast with the rich foods the other *animah tzitzin* carry. The man, now distraught, calls out to his mother, promising her a *chichiquilli* feast: "*Ximochiya, na niconmictiti ce pilpitzotzin, nitlatlaliz tlaixpan huan yainon nimitzmactilia xihuica*" [Wait, I will slaughter a pig for you, I will place it on the altar and you take it with you] (De la Cruz 2015: 76). The man desperately returns home asking his wife and friends to help him make *chichiquilli*, thus the story now centers the dish both as the man's atonement and salvation.

### Assembly

Although the story does not detail the dish's assembly process, it is understood that with his wife and his community's help, the man is socially redeemed; as the narrator states: "*Cihuameh huan tlacameh quipalehuiah tlatatl pampa ya quicuamachilih animah tzitzin quena techhualpaxaloah pan miccaihuitl*" [Women and men came to help the man because now he understood that the *animah tzitzin* do come visit us on *Miccaihuitl*] (De la Cruz 2015: 76). Based on personal experience, the tamal assembly process is the most labor-intensive stage. Usually, families will assign tasks based on social hierarchy, experience, and age. It is worth noting that making tamales is mostly a tradition taught and dictated by women. I broke with these traditions upon inviting male friends to make the dish for our class potluck. I was surprised when my thirty-four-year-old male friend, who hails from the same region of Mexico I do, admitted that he had never been included in the assembly process before, saying "I only helped my grandmother carry in the pots." Although the

positions are never explicitly designated, it is understood that the matriarch of the family (the mother or grandmother) will delegate the more important jobs (such as stuffing and folding the tamales) to the older girls. Similarly, Cruz explains that this process is controlled by the mothers or grandmothers, while a few men are allowed to contribute by wrapping twine around the assembled chichiquilli. Meanwhile, young children (both male and female) are given corn husks and masa. There is no expectation of them to contribute to the process, but rather as Sharon Sherman identifies, it is “to bind the children together as active participants and the adults as an encouraging audience” (Sherman 2002: 34). This is an immersive education experience where the younger generation learns not only how to make the recipe, but also what behaviors or values make them part of their wider community. Such has been the case with Cruz, whose mother would retell the story while making chichiquilli.

For me, this was my favorite part of the process as it gave my mother and I an opportunity to distance ourselves from modern distractions and share wisdom. Often, this came in the form of stories from her childhood. Because I immigrated at a young age, my memories of Mexico are an amalgamation of fractured images held together by her stories. Making tamales was the anchor to those stories not only because the repetitive actions of smearing, filling and wrapping created a therapeutic and rhythmic space where her nostalgia blossomed; but also because I could smell, feel, and taste Mexico. She told stories about waking up extra early before school to place a heavy pot of nixtamal over the fogón or hearth and of the smell of fresh lard from her grandmother’s pigs. Despite us using *Maseca*, processed dehydrated corn flour, and *Mazola* corn oil, the nutty alkaline smell from the flour and the shine on my hands from the oil linked me to the Mexico of my mother’s childhood.

### **Communal presentation**

The communal aspects of chichiquilli culminate in their presentation to the *animahtzin*. In the Huastec region of Veracruz, many families will create the altars on the graves of their deceased. They first offer the chichiquilli to the *animahtzin*, then to the neighbors: *“Si vas al cementerio a ofrendar a tu difunto, primero pones tu ofrenda. Y después de recoger la ofrenda, si hay personas alrededor del cementerio. Les das el tamal, ellos te van a dar los de ellos. Se intercambian, es una tradición. O sea, se convive con la comunidad”* [If you go to the cemetery to offer to your deceased loved one, first you place your offering. And after collecting the offering, if there are people around the cemetery, you give them a tamale, and they will give you theirs. They exchange, it’s a tradition. In other words, you socialize with the community] (De la Cruz, interview with the author, 2023). Thus, the arduous chichiquilli process unites the tangible and intangible Huastec communities. The story concludes with a similar lesson. After the man and his community make the chichiquilli, he leaves his wife in charge of the steaming pot while he takes a nap. But he never wakes up; he dies, and his soul takes the chichiquilli to his mother. In this example, the feast takes place in the spiritual realm; nonetheless, the once incredulous and disrespectful man is reintegrated into his community through his actions. In that manner, the dish’s tradition is the crux of social inclusion, without it, the man and the forgotten *animah* are cursed to a perpetual state of liminality, forgotten from the collective memory, and forced to roam the world aimlessly.

### **Chichiquilli beyond La Huasteca**

For Eduardo, the significance of chichiquilli transcends physical borders. As his work as a Náhuatl professor takes him abroad; his efforts to partake in Miccaihuitl traditions intensify the practices' social significance. From his current home of Austin, Texas, he shares with me some photographs of past celebrations where I am introduced to his family. Through the screen, a toddler; Eduardo's son, dressed in the traditional Huasteca Veracruzana dress with a white linen guayabera, matching sombrero and red neck tie smiles cheerfully back at me. With his mother's arm gently around his waist, he poses in front of an arch of flowers above a table adorned with drinks, fruits and chichiquilli. Next to the boy hangs a small basket with snacks. This, as Eduardo explains, is for the boy's cousin who passed away in childhood.

Because our work as folklore academics comes from a position of privilege that gives us access to people's personal narratives as well as their precious cultural objects, I believe it crucial, as Stoelje et al. propose, to reflexively analyze our position when documenting practices not only because it brings to surface potential biases, but also because it offers us a more informed perspective through which we can analyze the significance of food practice (Stoltje, Fox, & Olbrys 1999). I have made tamales nearly my entire life as a way to link my past to the construction of my present identity. Yet, despite my familiarity with the dish, my work with chichiquilli has illuminated an unexplored corner of my memory where I store the dish. Unbeknownst to me, I had engaged with the dish through a lens of colonialism. In my adulthood I have prepped, assembled, and consumed tamales not for myself, as I initially thought, but as a way to assert my "Mexican-ness" in a space where such identity has not always been embraced. Though this aspect is legitimate and worthy of analysis, it is not a complete dialogue with my own foodways. Growing up in a white central Mexican community, where our contact with indigenous people was nonexistent, I was fed a problematic discourse regarding indigeneity in Mexico. Through family stories and well as popular media, I was told the indigenous man was a historical relic through which we could proudly claim heritage, so long as that heritage did not manifest itself as anything other than Euro-centric. By this I am referring to the larger and more complex issue of racism and exploitation of indigenous cultural practices. In sum, the Mexican State since the post-revolutionary period (1920) has created a celebratory myth of inclusion that promotes indigenous traditions as the essence of "Mexicaness" while ignoring (or actively repressing) the same communities' efforts against social, environment and economic injustices (Taylor 2009). Now, as I think back to my mother's proclamation that tamales are made with love, I am burdened with a desire to return. I wish to return to the maternal nucleus that births stories such as "Miccaihuitl: animahztzin techhualpaxaloo", and where the making of a dish like chichiquilli is the ultimate expression of love for the past, present and future.



*figure 1. Altar for Miccailhuitl in Eduardo's mother's home. Tecomate, Chicontepec, Veracruz.  
Photo by Eduardo de la Cruz. 2024*



figure 2. Altar for Miccailhuitl in IDIEZ's work office. Zacatecas, Mexico. Photo by Eduardo de la Cruz. 2023



*figure 3. Altar with chichiquilli in Eduardo's home. Salt Lake City, Utah. Photo by Eduardo. 2024*



*figure 4. wrapped, uncooked chichiquilla with red chili sauce. Zacatecas, Mexico. Photo by author. 2023*



figure 5. freshly steamed chichiquilli made with IDIEZ instructors. Zacatecas, Mexico. Photo by author. 2023

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<sup>1</sup> While *Huasteca* refers to the region, it also refers to the Teenek people with the region who do not speak Nahuatl. For the purposes of this article, I refer to the to the inhabitants of the Nahuatl-speaking Huasteca as Nahuatl communities

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