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Playfulness and humor in Nahua *veintena* festivals as attested in early colonial sources*

El juego y el humor en las fiestas de las veintenas nahuas atestiguadas en fuentes coloniales tempranas

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Resumen: Los textos de los siglos XVI y XVII que nos dejaron los frailes españoles y los aculturados autores indígenas y mestizos contienen múltiples descripciones de espectáculos nahuas. Muchos de estos fueron equiparados con piezas dramáticas cortas medievales y renacentistas de contenido humorístico como farsas y entremeses. Sin embargo, la presencia del humor y la risa en el plano performativo no se limitó al entretenimiento, y su dimensión ritual no escapó a la atención de los autores de la época colonial temprana.

Este trabajo se centra en el juego, el humor y la risa en los espectáculos prehispánicos nahuas (principalmente mexicas) que pertenecían a las fiestas de las veintenas. El análisis se basará en dos ejemplos: los dioses que ríen y los bufones rituales. Se tomarán en cuenta diversos medios de expresión: acciones performativas o rituales, expresiones verbales y corporalidad. Los resultados conducirán a algunas consideraciones más amplias sobre la función del humor y la risa entre los nahuas en los ámbitos sociocultural y religioso.

Palabras clave: nahuas; veintenas; humor; risas; bufones.

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Abstract: The 16th and 17th century's texts left to us by Spanish friars or acculturated indigenous and *mestizo* writers contain multiple descriptions of Nahua performances. Many of these were equated with Medieval and Renaissance short dramatic pieces of humorous content such as farces and interludes. However, the presence of humor and laughter on a performative level was not limited to entertainment, and their ritual dimension did not escape the attention of early-colonial authors.

This paper focuses on playfulness, humor, and laughter in pre-Hispanic Nahua (mostly Mexica) cultural performances which belonged to the twenty-day-period festivals (*fiestas de las veintenas*). The analysis will be based on two examples: laughing gods and ritual clowns. It will take into account various means of expression: performative or ritual actions, verbal expressions, and corporeity. Subsequently, it would lead to some broader considerations concerning the function of humor and laughter among the Nahuas in socio-cultural and religious spheres.

Keywords: Nahuas; *veintenas*; humor; laughter; clowns.

Résumé : Les textes des XVIe et XVIIe siècles qui nous ont été laissés par des frères espagnols ou des écrivains indigènes et métis acculturés contiennent de multiples descriptions de spectacles nahua. Beaucoup d'entre eux sont assimilés à de courtes pièces dramatiques médiévales et de la Renaissance à contenu humoristique, comme les farces et les intermèdes. Cependant, la présence de l'humour et du rire au niveau performatif ne se limitait pas au divertissement, et leur dimension rituelle n'a pas échappé à l'attention des premiers auteurs coloniaux.

Cet article se concentre sur le jeu, l'humour et le rire dans les performances culturelles des Nahua préhispaniques (principalement des Mexica) qui appartenaient aux fêtes de la période de vingt jours (*fiestas de las veintenas*). L'analyse s'appuiera sur deux exemples : les dieux rieurs et les clowns rituels. Elle prendra en compte différents moyens d'expression : actions performatives ou rituelles, expressions verbales et corporéité. Par la suite, elle mènera à des considérations plus larges concernant la fonction de l'humour et du rire chez les Nahuas dans les sphères socioculturelles et religieuses.

Mots-clés : Nahuas ; *veintenas* ; humour ; rire ; clowns.

Introduction

The performative and ludic elements of Nahua culture caught the eye of the Spaniards who took part in the conquest of Tenochtitlan or who arrived in New Spain in the decades that followed. Because of this, the early colonial authors of histories and treatises describing life and cultural practices in pre-Hispanic Central Mexico (mostly European friars or their acculturated indigenous or *mestizo* aids) devoted so much space in their works to the whole range of rituals, ceremonies, festivities, and amusements of the indigenous peoples. The desire to preserve what we would now refer to as the intangible cultural heritage, even if only in written form, was not the driving force behind such a focus. Instead, their primary motivation was to preach the gospel while also eliminating idolatry by making known to a broader public the ancient religious practices and the risks of their continuities under the banner of Christian rites.

Examining colonial sources for references to native performances from before the conquest —such as plays, games, or dances— allows us to observe that the majority of the authors of the investigated documents divided native representations into two categories. They positioned dramatic rituals, religious acts, and sacrifices —acts that belonged to the category of sinful and idolatrous practices— on the one pole. On the other extreme, they placed ludic forms, which were similar to the comic performances of Spanish minstrels or jesters (albeit frequently mixed in with the rituals). The latter's reception fluctuated between harmless amusements or examples of the ignorance and childishness of the natives and dangerous niches where pre-Hispanic worship might be easily smuggled right in front of the friars. However, despite this seeming binary division, all pre-Hispanic performances were recognized as some sort of rejoicing, play, ceremony, festivity, or representation, among other things. Additionally, on some level, all of them involved laughter, with its various aspects and implications, though conveying different meanings.

This study examines the role of playfulness, humor, and laughter in pre-Hispanic Nahua (primarily Mexica) cultural performances which embraced such Western categories as rituals, dances, games, and pageantry. Due to the abundance of materials, the focus will be on the so-called *fiestas de las veintenas*, that is, the festivals which belonged to the cycle of 365 days, divided into eighteen twenty-day periods (followed by five additional and unfortunate days, *nemontemi*). The analysis of these phenomena will take into account various means of expression: performative or ritual actions, corporeity, and, to a lesser extent,

verbal expressions. Subsequently, it would lead to broader considerations concerning humor and laughter's function in the studied contexts. This research expands upon a recent study by Elena Mazzetto (2021), who carefully examined the goddess Toci's laughter within the framework of the *veintena* of Ochpaniztli. Here, I present a broader view, attempting to grasp the significance of these events within the complete cycle, taking as a starting point this author's conclusions regarding the role of laughing in one of the twenty festivals. In addition to concentrating on the divine laughter as it appears in the ritual action, I will also briefly explore some of the actors who can be categorized as «ritual buffoons» in these rites.

Of playing and laughter: identifying the object of study

Humans have a tendency to categorize and classify, but when it comes to early-colonial authors' labels for Nahua performances, it resembles what Umberto Eco (2009) called «the vertigo of lists.» They identified these performances with rejoicing (*regocijos*), feasts (*fiestas*), playing (*juegos*)[1], ceremonies (*ceremonias*), shows or performances (*espectáculos*, *representaciones*), or dances (*bailes*, *danzas, mitotes*[2]). Sometimes the chroniclers used terms pointing to some particular features, such as skirmishes (*escaramuzas*), farces (*farsas*), interludes (*entremeses*), jests (*chocarrerías*), and buffooneries (*truhanerías*). As a result, the terminology used in the sources varies from more general categories to those that emphasize the agonistic character, the theatricality, or the humorous contents and mockery, and is far from being precise or consistent. According to the sixteenth and seventeenth century testimonies, the majority of these cultural expressions appear to have taken place in a religious setting. However, we shouldn't expect a Sahagún or a Durán to have followed a clear-cut and rigorous conceptual grid concerning performances (and even less so, to have taken into account the perspective of the Nahua).

The blurring of genres was a typical occurrence in sixteenth-century Europe, and this «problem» has not been resolved as yet. It continually stimulates debate among anthropologists, theatrologists, and historians and laid the foundation for the development of Performance Studies (see, e.g., Geertz 1973; Díez Borque 1987; Schechner 1988; Hamayon 2016).

The classification of the phenomena in question is also not always made clear in the early colonial records written in Nahuatl (and it is important to keep

in mind that the fact that these texts were written in Nahuatl does not exempt them from contact-induced influence and cultural biases). One of the Nahuatl terms denoting a category of performance was *cuicatl*. Earlier scholars tended to equate it with song or poetry and, more often than not, focused on the verbal (and transcribed alphabetically) component; today, it is viewed holistically as an integral combination of song, dance, and music (see Garibay K. 2007 [1953-54], 60-61; Baudot 1976, 44; Turrent 2006, 107; Alcántara Rojas 2008, 2015; Brylak 2016; Szoblik 2016, among others). The pre-Hispanic dances were also referred to as *netotiliztli* and *macehualiztli*[3] (though their relation to *cuicatl* is not clear and requires further study)[4]. There is also a whole range of terms attested in the sources, both in nominal and verbal forms, which point to a general feeling or ambiance, such as the ones derived from *ahuia*, «to be happy, to take pleasure,» *paqui*, «to be happy, to experience pleasure,» or *ellelquiza*, «to rejoice, to amuse oneself.» In an intent to find a Nahuatl equivalent of the Spanish word *juego*, López Austin (1967, 11-12) offered a whole list of terms, which underline a particular aspect of the broad range of acts of playing. Thus, *netlatlaniliztli* would have referred to bets and gambling; *neahuiltiliztli* and *neahuiltiloni* to «games of entertainment» or «games of pleasure» (*juegos de recreacion y passatiempo* and *juegos de plazer*, respectively —as Fray Alonso de Molina (1992) translated them in his *Vocabulario* [1, 73r]—); *neellelquixtiliztli* to an action allowing to release the passions[5]; *netlaocolpopoloiztli*, literally «the action of eliminating sadness or preoccupation,» to playing and pleasures (including the sensual ones); *tetlaittaliztli* to shows and performances; and *tlayeyecoliztli* to mock battles[6]. The fundamental problem with this list, however, is that these terms (especially in the nominal forms) are hardly attested in the sources other than Molina's dictionary, which in and of itself contains many entries, undoubtedly Molina's coinages, that were intended to correspond to their Spanish equivalents but never entered into use. Finally, in the Nahuatl texts, we can identify many proper names of particular forms of ritual playing, limited to specific contexts, such as the «flowery race» *xochipaina*, performed during the festivals of Huey Tecuilhuitl and Tititl or *zonecali*, a ritual fight executed during the «month» of Ochpaniztli (see Graulich 1986; Brylak 2011; Mazzetto 2014, 154-56; Díaz Barriga Cuevas 2021).

The emphasis on the overall playfulness, the carnivalesque spirit, or the ludic character (a common denominator of the labels or categories used in the Spanish sources) is what draws the reader's attention in early colonial texts' descriptions of pre-Hispanic religious festivals and their components. Additionally, the chroniclers specifically note the value of laughing or certain forms of humor (such as

ridicule) in many particular rites. Equating indigenous religious practices with plays/games, farces, or even childishness (*niñerías*) by Spanish friars was fulfilling yet another goal. It was helping to ridicule pre-Hispanic religious practices as based on absurd, naive, and laughable superstitions, as opposed to the only true and serious Catholic faith. In many sections of his *Libro de ritos y ceremonias* and *El calendario antiguo*, Durán (2006 [1967]) mentions that the indigenous peoples laugh at such babyish acts from their past (I: 261). The critical reading of Spanish texts does not imply that none of the Nahua religious rituals entered the spectrum of the anthropological concept of playing, nor that playing cannot be a serious activity at the service of the ritual. However, for many authors, the mere presence of joy or laughter seems to be an indicator of a sort of game (see Ávila Aldapa 2009, 18). The «human seriousness of play» is a known concept from Johann Huizinga's (1949) pioneering and now classic work on plays and games (5-6). Nevertheless, as Hamayon (2016) points out, «paradoxical again is the common association of 'play'—at least in Western languages— with leisure, amusement, or the realm of children, whereas the scrutiny of practices called 'games' shows that they are often serious, sometimes restrictive and harmful» (2). Effectively, playing and laughter do not always go together, but when they do, they still can serve grave matters and be crucial for the efficiency of the ritual action. Also, the laughter itself, at times, shows its grim and cruel face.

To define humor and laughter (often, though not always, associated with each other), similarly to the definition of playing, constitutes another challenge. With, again, very flexible frontiers, they can embrace, as Mahadev Apte (1985) noted, «'wit', 'comic', 'incongruity', 'amusement', 'absurdity', 'ludicrousness', 'ridicule', 'mirth', 'funniness', and 'playfulness'» (14), to name just a few. Additionally, in the case of studying such subtle and culturally-determined phenomena as humor and laughter among the pre-Hispanic Nahua, one has to tell apart the indigenous point of view on these matters from the Spanish cultural heritage that abides the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century testimonies. Jacques Le Goff (1997) indicates two basic ways of gathering data and analyzing the perception of laughter (and, through extension, of humor) in past cultures, that is, following the theory and the practice of laughter:

> On the one hand, there are the texts which mention, in a very limited and jeujune way, the presence and forms of laughing —for example, in a chronicle where one sees a person start laughing. To try and capture all these instances of laughter is important for an enquiry of this sort, but one immediately

> sees what a fishing expedition this entails. On the other hand, there is the enormous domain of what is generally described as the comic. (41-42)

In the case of the pre-Hispanic Nahua, no theoretical treatises on Nahuatl laughter were produced neither before nor after the contact. Regarding the practice, all that is left are a few comments made in their writings by Spanish (or, more broadly, European), *mestizo*, and indigenous authors. These mentions are uncommon when discussing *veintena* festivals. In order to understand them within their context, we must first locate the clear references to outward displays of fun and laughter, as well as the occasionally less-obvious allusions to the social conditions that led to them (see Apte 1985, 14). Such a procedure, as well as a subsequent analysis of the gathered data, are still tricky and burdened with a large margin of error when dealing with the past phenomenon from a different cultural tradition. Fortunately, the descriptions of the *fiestas de las veintenas* turn out to be a rich fishing pond that enables us to at least get a glimpse of the fusion of playfulness and laughter within the context of pre-Hispanic Nahua religious practices.

Keeping the gods happy

Even though laughter was by no means the primary subject addressed by early colonial authors, friars were aware that the external expression of joy was essential for the ritual's efficacy. The primary objective of religious acts is frequently, if not always, to appease the supernatural or the gods in order to gain certain benefits or to avoid wrath and punishment (or, at the very least, to preserve the *status quo*). In the case of *fiestas de las veintenas,* the need to keep the gods happy and laughing was gaining a literal sense. During all of the Nahua festivals, the deities were physically present in the form of *ixiptlahuan* (plural of *ixiptla*), taking part in the celebrations or re-living the events from the sacred narratives[7]. Such a presence could be achieved in various ways, two of them being the most frequent. One consisted of the elaboration of the divine effigies from *tzoalli* dough (made of amaranth seeds, often mixed with maize grains and glued with honey)[8]. It was provided with eyes, nose, and mouth to enable its sensory participation in the ceremony, and even a heart that could be extracted through sacrifice. The other way of manifesting the divine presence was through human representatives or live embodiments of gods.

During the rituals, the human substitutes of deities had to follow strict prescriptions concerning their mood. Some of them had outright bans against crying. Such was the case of the goddess of salt Huixtocihuatl, a central figure during Tecuilhuitontli, «small festival of the lords,» in 1519 celebrated, according to Durán, on the 29th of June. This *veintena* forms part of a sequence of four consecutive festivals dedicated to one of the four female companions or «spouses» of Tezcatlipoca during the twenty-day period of Toxcatl (see Graulich 1999, 375; Olivier 2004, 374-78, 393-96). For ten days prior to her sacrifice, she was required to dance with other accompanying women (who in daily life were engaged in salt production) while they sung to keep her cheerful (Sahagún 1950-1982, II: 93, 2001, 175-76).

Then, during the following Huey Tecuilhuitl «great festival of the lords,» a similar attitude was kept towards the *ixiptla* of Xilonen, a female incarnation of young maize. Once the perfect human vessel for the sacred representative of this deity had been selected in the preceding «month,» she was being introduced everywhere in the public space (banquets, marketplaces) and entertained so that she would not become sad or cry. Right before the sacrifice, she had to participate in singing and dancing activities atop the temple stairway and continuously show external manifestations of joy and happiness (Durán 2006 [1967], I: 126, 267).

Within the framework of the *veintena* Ochpaniztli, in 1519 celebrated at the beginning of September, the Aztecs worshipped and sacrificed the representatives of three deities: Atlatonan, goddess of water, Chicomecoatl, goddess of maize and food in general, and Toci (also identified as Teteo Innan), a telluric «Mother of Gods» linked to maize and fertility. The sources mention no data concerning the mood of the *ixiptla* of Atlatonan. In what concerns Chicomecoatl, similarly to Xilonen from Huey Tecuilhuitl, the live image of this goddess was being taken around in the public space and visiting the lordly houses and made to dance and amuse herself and the others. As Durán (2006 [1967]) explains, her behavior contrasted with the general atmosphere of «sadness and penitence and fasting» (I: 137).

Nevertheless, probably the most often studied (but also the most extensively described in the early-colonial documents) laughing goddess was Toci, whose principal festival was also Ochpaniztli. The *ixiptla* of Toci was treated with high respect, served the most exquisite food, praised and entertained, and engaged in collective weaving activities. With «shouting and rejoicing» (*con vozería y regozijo*), young warriors reenacted a ritual combat in her presence to cheer her up and help her in to forget the upcoming sacrifice. Female physicians were in charge

of planning these crucial activities. The same women later would enact another staged skirmish involving Toci herself as a participant in one of the bands. Finally, there were promises of another kind of pleasure, the sexual intercourse with the *tlatoani*, the supreme ruler (Sahagún 1950-1982, I: 5, 119, 2001, 62, 193-94). Durán (2006 [1967]) adds that keeping Toci happy also encompassed some verbal incitements to laughter (I: 145). Unfortunately, no transcription or description of such «jokes» got included in his *Libro de los ritos*, though Elena Mazzetto (2021, 66-67) supposes that these must have belonged to the genres of *zazanilli* or *tlaquetzalli*, witty riddles and stories respectively[9].

Not only female *ixiptlahuan* had to remain content in the framework of religious rituals. During the celebration of *huauhquiltamalqualiztli*, «eating of tamales with green amaranth leaves,» which took place within the *veintena* of Izcalli, male slaves offered by their owners and purified in order to turn into sacrificial victims, had to be kept happy and laughing. To this end, the *ahuianime*, «pleasure girls,» identified by the Spaniards with the prostitutes, were engaged:

> *auh ce avienj, in jtepixcauh muchioaia: muchipa caviltia, caavilia, qujcamanalhuja, qujvetzqujtia, qujquequeloa, iquechtlan âaquj, qujquechnaoa, caatemja, qujtzitziquaoazvia, qujpepepetla, qujtlaoculpopoloa* (Sahagún 1950-1982, II: 169).
>
> An *ahuiani* was becoming his guardian. All the time she was amusing him, she was repeatedly amusing him, she was joking with him, she was making him laugh, she was tickling him, she was embracing his neck, she was hugging his neck. She was playing with his hair, she was repeatedly combing him, she was smoothing his hair. She was appeasing his sadness. (trans. mine).

Likewise, even though the sources do not state it explicitly, it can be assumed that other male or female *ixiptlahuan* had to remain in a good mood before the sacrificial death as well[10]. One such example could be the young and handsome *ixiptla* of Tezcatlipoca, who throughout the entire year preceding the Toxcatl festival embodied this god and was treated as such. Fed with exquisite food, he was spending time playing flute, accompanied by four «wives» (female *ixiptlahuan* of the goddesses Xochiquetzal, Xilonen, Atlatonan, and Huixtocihuatl, venerated and sacrificed in the posterior *veintenas*, see Graulich 1999; Olivier 2004)[11].

Such an assumption does not imply that every *veintena* festival required divine laughter. Instead, the dialectical relation between laughter and crying marked the religious landscape of the pre-Hispanic Nahua. An abundance of tears was required from the infant victims dedicated to the rain gods, in a sort

of propitiatory mimetic action guaranteeing plenty of rain and, consequently, the growth of the crops (Sahagún 2001, 113; Graña Behrens 2009, 162). Some female embodiments of the telluric goddesses, sacrificed after the great fertilizing laughter of Toci during Ochpaniztli (which can be considered the apex of goddesses' laughter in the ritual action), are said to cry upon the sacrifice. Such was the case of the *ixiptlahuan* called *coatl incue* (lit. «their skirts are of serpents,» the multiple manifestations of Coatlicue), that is, female companions of Mixcoatl during the festival of Quecholli (Sahagún 1950-1982, II: 140, 2001, 208; see also Olivier 2023)[12]. Also the *ixiptla* of Ilamatecuhtli, «Elderly Woman,» who was sacrificed during one of the last *veintenas* in the cycle, Tititl, was allowed (or event incited) to cry[13]. During this month occurred the «culmination of aging» (Johansson 2002, 71), and the goddess represented the chthonic senility (Torquemada 1986, III: 408).

The meaning and importance of *ixiptlahuan*'s ritual laughter may be inferred from religious rites' context. Also, on many occasions, the colonial authors of the descriptions of Nahua festivals did not refrain from offering some interpretations, either provided by their native informants or formulated based on the authors' own apprehension. While referring to the happiness of male slaves sacrificed in the *veintena* of Izcalli, Sahagún (2001) insists that the entertained victims had to be fat for the sacrifice, and the vision of the approaching death was blocking their appetite, hence the necessity of a distraction (243). While it could have been the case, such commentary could also echo the friars' «fascination» with the acts of anthropophagy, which, in their opinion, followed almost every human sacrifice. In what concerns Toci's laughter in the «month» of Ochpaniztli, Durán (2006 [1967]) only points to its augural importance (I: 145), while Sahagún (2001) further explains that, according to the indigenous people, if Toci did not laugh, «it meant that many soldiers were to die on war or that many women were to die during childbirth» (*esto significava que havían de morir muchos soldados en la guerra, o que havían de morir muchas mugeres de parto)* (193, trans. mine; see also Planchart Licea 2000, 59-63). Thus, the laughter guaranteed the harvest in all its manifestations: maize (food), captives (and, subsequently, future sacrificial victims) on the male battlefield, and healthy-born children on the female battlefield. Such an explanation, as pointed out by Mazzetto (2021, 70), corresponds with the observation by Vladimir Propp (1980) that in many cultures, one of the ritual functions of laughter is to increase riches (71). Thus, the goal of cheerfulness and laughter of both, the *ixiptlahuan* embodying maize

and the male slaves from the Izcalli festival, was to propitiate multiplication or enhancement.

Additionally, Elena Mazzetto's (2021) insightful analysis of the laughter of Toci during the festival of Ochpaniztli emphasizes the significance of two components that are embedded in the goddess' hilarity: playful sensuality and staged violence. The former is demonstrated, among other things, by the presence of Toci's Huastec aides or companions who, in accordance with Mexica ethnic stereotypes, were promiscuous, prone to intoxication, and engaged in unrestrained sexual interactions[14], and by the act of weaving. The violence is visible through the ritual battles performed for and with Toci. In reality, Freud (1993 [1905], 138) had already identified these two characteristics, aggression and sexuality, as sources of wit in one of the earliest approaches to laughing and humor as an object of research (see also Hamayon 2016, 3).

In the description of the *veintena* Huey Tecuilhuitl, Sahagún's informants mention the performance of a dance in which men and women participated in mixed pairs, with hands resting on their partners' shoulders. The female participants, with their long hair worn loose, are identified in this text with *ahuianime* (Sahagún 1950-1982, II: 98). Fray Agustín de Vetancurt (1960-1961) went even further in his commentary to this particular dance by saying that it was full of dishonesties[15] (I: 404). Unfortunately, the sources do not mention similar details concerning the *ixiptla* of Huixtocihuatl or Chicomecoatl.

Mazzetto (2021), while studying Toci's laughter, concludes that the cheerfulness preceding the sacrifice corresponds with the opening and fecundation of the telluric goddess. Such an interpretation is fully justified since what follows the *ixiptla*'s ritual death is the birth of another maize god, Cinteotl. Ingvild Gilhus noticed the link between laughter and the opening of the female body in various classical cultures of the Old World and in medieval times[16]. It might have been the case of other pre-Hispanic laughing goddesses as well: their laughter and posterior sacrifice occurred within the ritual cycle of the maize. Moreover, a closer look at the overall dialectic relation between sacred laughter and sacred crying in the framework of the *veintenas* festivals allows us to correlate it with the cycle of maize growth and agricultural labor. The rain petitions (achieved, among others, through the sacrifice of children) required mimetic tears. Then, the sequence of rituals whose central figures were female *ixiptlahuan* incarnating maize at different stages of the vegetative cycle is linked to the hilarity as leading to opening, fertilization, multiplication, and abundance. Finally, at the end of the cycle, the aged Coatlicues and Ilamatecuhtli, already barren, have the right to shed tears.

Ritual clowns

The divine laughter is not the only manifestation of playfulness in the context of *fiestas de las veintenas*. Another ritual behavior recurrent in the descriptions of pre-Hispanic rituals has to do with (sometimes harmless) mischievousness, mockery, and sanctified transgressions (or, at least, socially approved crossing of the boundaries). In the «month» of Etzalcualiztli, whose central part was the consumption of *etzalli*, a bean and corn stew, everyone prepared it and shared it with others. Some (in the Nahuatl text of the *Florentine Codex* identified as *papaqujni, yn ahaujeni* «the happy ones, the rejoiceful,» that is, the «pleasure girls,» and *tiacahuan*, brave warriors) danced the «*etzalli* dance» (Sahagún 1950-1982, II: 84). They also adorned themselves in a particular way, with the circles around their eyes (probably imitating the serpent «goggles» of the rain god Tlaloc, to whom the entire festival was dedicated). Sahagún (2001) compared their disguise to that of *zaharrones*, buffoons (169), thus reinterpreting their role in the vein of the European carnivalesque[17]. Armed with maize staffs and holding jars filled with *etzalli*, in pairs or groups of three, four, or five, they were going from house to house dancing and menacing the dwellers with a sort of a Nahuatl «trick or treat» song:

> Yn naie yn naie[18] tla achi in metzal, intlacamo xinechmaca, njmjtzcalxaxapotlaz
> *Yn naie yn naie*, a little bit of your *etzalli*; if you do not give it to me, I will break a hole in your house. (Sahagun 1950-1982, II: 84, trans. mine).

After such a calling, people granted them the festive stew. The *etzalli* dance lasted from midnight till dawn.

In some other passages from the sixteenth-century sources, due to the scarcity of information, we can only assume the presence of those whose acts might be identified with buffooneries. On the occasion of the festival dedicated to the rain deities *tlaloque* (probably within the *veintena* of Tepeilhuitl), Sahagún's (2001, 87) informants mention that some jester youths (*mozos juglares*) played musical instruments or emitted sounds by ably putting fingers in their mouths[19]. Later their received food for their participation and contribution to the celebrations (Sahagún 1950-1982, I: 48). Similarly, in the «month» of Ochpaniztli, while the participants were engaged in a silent dance to the rhythm of a drum, some «mischievous boys» (*mancebos traviesos*) were breaking the silence by imitating the sound of the instrument (Sahagún 2001, 193, 1950-1982, II: 118). This behavior, described almost as sacrilegious, in fact, seems to have belonged to the ritual

itself. Had it been only an occasional incident, with all probability, it would not have called the attention of the Franciscan's informants.

The only indication that these individuals are comedians and institutionalized transgressors comes from the friars' use of the Spanish terms *juglar* or *travieso* to describe them. However, aside from these instances of monkey business, certain characters occasionally appear at some of the *veintena* festivals, standing out from the other participants and whose antics can be traced to a broader phenomenon of ritual clowning or ceremonial buffoonery. Ritual clowns have been attested in many Amerindian cultures. Until today, they play a crucial role in rituals or ritualized activities among the Mayo and Yaqui in the Northwest of Mexico (see Parsons and Beals 1934; Albero Molina 2003) or the Pueblo Indians, especially the Hopi and the Zuñi in the Southwest of the United States (see Hieb 1972; Seavey Griffith 1983; Sweet 1989). Victoria Bricker (1973) studied such figures among the Mayas in Highland Chiapas, notably the Tzotzil Maya. In what concerns pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica, René Acuña (1978) dedicated one of his studies to ritual jesting in Yucatán, and Karl Taube (1989) authored an in-depth work on ritual humor and the figures of «clowns» in the Maya art form the Classical Period. Descriptions of the Central Mexican festivals of Tlacaxipehualiztli, Xocotl Huetzi, Teotleco, and Panquetzaliztli include comparable entertainers.

During the Tlacaxipehualiztli festival, at the beginning of the sixteenth century celebrated in February, one of the main rituals consisted of flaying the bodies of the sacrificed victims, whose skins were then worn by the living images of the god Xipe Totec, «Our Lord the Flayed One.» After twenty days, the *xipeme* deposited the already dried skins in a designated place called *netlatiloyan*. Later, every owner of the sacrificial victims chose a young and brave boy to adorn him with all the paper ornaments belonging to the one who had died in honor of Xipe Totec. Provided with a shield and a *chicahuaztli* staff, each youngster became Tetzompac, «the one who washes people's hair.» Their role was to run through the city and pursue people to rob them of their coats and deliver the booty to the one who adorned him in the first place, the owner of the sacrificial victim (Sahagún 1950-1982, II: 59, 2001, 153-54). Even though the city-dwellers could defend themselves from this scary figure, it seems that Tetzompac always ended up victorious (see also Díaz Barriga Cuevas 2021, 115-19). The robbery and the appropriation of people's belongings, as pointed out by Mazzetto (2014, 275), could be compared to the capture of sacrificial victims.

Carlos Javier González González (2011, 292) noticed the relation between Tetzompac's «playful» persecution of the noblemen with the descriptions of Tlacaxipehualiztli outside of Tenochtitlan, in the localities of Acolman and Teotitlan. According to *Relaciones geográficas del siglo XVI*, in the former village, once the *xipeme* deposited the flayed skin, they went to the fields and cut the hair from the crown of the heads of inadvertent passers-by (in case of not encountering anyone, they substituted the «trophy» with agave stalks). In the case of Teotitlan, additional information is provided that those marked by scalping were treated as war captives that should be sacrificed the following year.

Another leader of a ritual fight aimed at acquiring a particular loot is described in the context of the *veintena* Panquetzaliztli, celebrated in November. He is identified as Chonchayotl, a representative or embodiment of the god Huitzilopochtli (*yxiptla in vitzilopuchtli*, Sahagún 1997, 65). Sahagún endows him with a carnivalesque character by equating him with the European *zaharrón*, a ridiculously disguised figure who entertains and makes other people laugh (see note 18). However, judging from Chonchayotl's description, his function was to scare at the same time. His hair was disorderly and bloody (Sahagún 1950-1982, II: 149), which, according to Alexis Wimmer (2004), perhaps relates to the etymology of his Nahuatl name from *tzontli*, «hair» (with the initial sound *tz* pronounced as if it were *ch*), and *chayotl*, a type of fruit «like a squash with a spiny top or like a hedgehog» (*fruta como calabacilla espinosa por é[n]cima o como erizo*) (Molina 1992, II: 19r; see also Clavijero 1974, I: 16)[20]. While in the Nahuatl section of the *Florentine Codex,* Chonchayotl's hair is the only detail of his physical appearance, the Spanish text of *Historia general…* adds additional detail. Accordingly, his costume consisted of «some hideous coat and mask» (*unos [b]alandranes y carátulas espantables*, Sahagún 2001, 215), which recalls the clothing of the priest who appeared as the god Mictlantecuhtli during the burial of the Mexica ruler Tizoc (see Brylak 2011):

> He had very bright mirrors for his eyes and a very large and fierce mouth, curly hair, with frightful horns, and on each shoulder he had a face with eyes made of mirrors, and on both of his elbows, he had faces, and on his belly, another face, and on his knees, his eyes and faces, which seemed, with the glare of the mirrors that in these parts he brought for eyes, that he looked everywhere, and he was so ugly and abominable that they did not dare to look at him with fear. (Durán 2006 [1967] II: 312, trans. mine)[21].

For Mikulska (2007, 23), Chonchayotl, with his entangled bloody hair, resembled the deities inhabiting and ruling Mictlan. Following the same trope, Díaz Barriga Cuevas (2021, 247) links this figure with *tzitzimitl*.

During the battle held on the third day of Atemoztli (though still belonging to the cycle of rites from the preceding *veintena* of Panquetzaliztli), Chonchayotl led the group of *calmecac* priests and students. The warriors of a different school, *telpochcalli*, were his adversaries. Along with combat, the opponents also attempted to rob the headquarters of the other side. Max Harris (2000, 92-93) interprets this feigned skirmish in terms of inter-scholastic rivalry, which reflected the conflict between social classes (the children of the nobles, *pipiltin*, studied mostly in *calmecac*, and those of the commoners, *macehualtin*, attended mainly the *telpochcalli*), although it could equally have been the confrontation of two groups in power: the priests and the warriors (see Duverger 1984, 32-33). In the earlier work collected by Sahagún, in the manuscript of the Royal Palace of the *Códices Matritenses* (fol. 252v, in Sahagún 1997, 65), Chonchayotl is said to have been seizing the encountered passers-by and taking them to the top of the temple (as if they were the sacrificial victims), where he would grab them by the hair and cut their earlobes with an obsidian knife. Hence, Tzontempac and Chonchayotl share many similarities, turning their raids through the city into the ritual imitation of captives' acquisition (see Graulich 1999, 215-18; Mazzetto 2014, 275).

Two more clown-like figures, apparently always acting in pairs, stand out in the *veintenas* festivals. They marked their presence during the «months» of Xocotl Huetzi and Teotleco, on both occasions, in the context of sacrifice through fire. The main playing activity during the feast of Xocotl Huetzi was a race. The participants, outstanding warriors (or aspiring to become ones), had to climb a smoothed wooden pole of about 25 fathoms (Spanish *brazas*) using the ropes tied to the summit in order to capture the effigy of *xocotl* that was resting on the top. *Xocotl* was a figure of the *tzoalli* dough representing the god Otonteuctli or one of the invocations of the god of fire Xiuhteuctli. According to the sources, it had a form of a human (Sahagún 2001, 188; Gómez de Orozco 2016, 47; *Codex Tudela* 1980, f. 20r; *Codex Magliabechiano* 1970, f. 38r), of a bird (Sahagún 1997, 61, f. 251r; Durán [1967] 2006, I: 271) or of a mortuary bundle (*Codex Borbonicus* 1980: f. 28; *Codex Telleriano-Remensis* 1995, f. 2v). The first to reach it received rich jewels and blankets (Sahagún 1950-1982, II: 117, 2001, 192). The race equated to the capture of the warrior, symbolically represented as *xocotl*. Afterward, the sacrifice of victims in honor of Xiuhtecuhtli was taking place: the captives were thrown into the fire, but once the flames touched them, they were taken

out, and their hearts were extracted. While this was happening, as we can read in the alphabetic text of *Codex Tudela* (1980), a person «put on a feather clothing, like a bat, and was dancing while they were throwing [the slave] into the fire, and he was making many signs of pleasure, and he was holding a broom in his hand to sweep the ashes and embers when they spread from the fire» (f. 20v, trans. mine; see also Gómez de Orozco 2016, 47). In his description, Fray Diego Durán (2006 [1967]) provides even more details concerning the behavior of this Nahua bat-man who was guiding the dance:

> He was dressed in the same way as this idol [the one placed on the top of the pole, AB], dressed as a bird or as a bat, with his wings and crest [made] of rich and large feathers. They [the dancers] had golden bells on the ankles of their feet and on the wrists of their hands. In both hands he carried rattles of the type they use. With the sound of them and with his mouth he was making so much noise and shouting, and so many and so different wiggles, so out of order and rhythm of the others, from time to time making sounds, saying words that few or none would understand. This Indian was showing great contentment. (I: 121; trans. mine)

Sahagún, in his description of this festival collected form his informants, does not include such a performance of a bat. However, while describing *cuauhxicalco*, one of the buildings from the sacred zone in Tenochtitlan, he mentions the other protagonist:

> *vncan mjtotiaia in techalotl yxiptla: yoan vncan moquetzaia, in mjtoaia: xocotl, çan quavitl, […] Auh ipan in teutleco muchioaia: no cexiuhtica.* (Sahagún 1950-1982, II: 182)
>
> There the impersonator of *techalotl* danced, and there was standing erect what was called *xoxotl*. It was only a tree […]. It was being done during the [*veintena* of] Teotleco, also [it was done] every year. (trans. mine)

In the Spanish text, the person in a «squirrel» (*techalotl*) disguise is compared to a *chocarrero,* that is, a buffoon or a mocker (Sahagún 2001, 250).

Teotleco was a festival in which, at different stages (depending on unique features of the particular deities), all the gods were arriving, beginning with the most agile, young, and virile (therefore, faster than the others, like Tezcatlipoca-Telpochtli). The old ones (Xiuhtecuhtli) or those coming from farther lands (Yacatecuhtli, god of the merchants) arrived last. Once all the deities had gathered, a sacrifice through the fire was performed in a similar way as during the Xocotl

Huetzi. It was precisely then that, following Sahagún (2001, 129) informants' description, certain youths «disguised as monsters,» a *techalotl* and a bat, were dancing around the fire:

> *auh in vncan tetlepãtlaxo, vncan mjtotitinemj techalotl, çan mochichioaia quachichiqujltone, quachichiqujle, mjxtecujcujlo: ioacalton qujmamatinemj, vncan onotinemj, tochtlaoatzaltontli: in jquac ce contlaça tleco, mapipitzoa:*
>
> *yoan ce tzinacan vncan nenca, mjtotitinemj, vel iuhqujn tzinacan: ic no mochichioaia vntetl in jaiacach, vccampa in aiacachotinemj.* (Sahagún 1950-1982, II: 129)
>
> When there was throwing of people into the fire, there went along dancing the *techalotl*. Thus was he adorned: he wore a little crest, he wore an egret crest, he had his face painted, he went along carrying his little carrying frame on his back, in which was lying a small dried rabbit. When they cast (some)one into the fire, he was repeatedly whistling with his hands.
>
> And there was a bat, he went along dancing, also he was arrayed very much like a bat. He had two rattles, he had them in each hand when he went along rattling. (trans. mine)

Even though the data concerning the «bat» and the «techalotl» and their performance during the two festivals are scattered and fragmentary, it seems that they operated in a duet and played a similar ritual role, partly derived from the symbolic dimension of the animals in question within the Nahua culture. The bat is an animal on the boundary of classificatory systems: a unique mammal that can fly. In Mesoamerica, it was associated with the underworld, caves, and darkness, similarly to the European perception (Ruz Barrio 2016). It also bore a strong link with fertilization and sexuality. According to a myth registered in *Codex Magliabechiano* (1996), this animal was born from the semen of Quetzalcoatl, and the gods ordered it to bite a fragment of Xochiquetzal's vagina. From this piece, washed and planted in Mictlan, grew the flowers (f. 61v; see also Johansson 2012; Dupey García 2013).

As for *techalotl*, Anderson and Dibble, following Sahagún's Spanish text, translate this Nahuatl term as «squirrel.» However, in other early colonial documents, *techalotl* is compared with other animals: the author of the gloss in *Codex Tudela* (1980, f. 45r) labels it as a mole (*topo*), while in *Codex Magliabechiano* (1996, f. 63v), it is identified with a skunk. Notwithstanding the taxonomic status of this animal in pre-Hispanic Central Mexico, obscured by the mediation of Spanish culture, on a symbolic level, it shared many features with other animals, such as rabbits, opossums, and even coyotes (Brylak 2015). *Techalotl* was a thief,

but in his divine form, as a god *techalotl*, he was also linked to performance, mockery, drunkenness, and sexuality. On one of the cartoons, copied from *Codex Tudela* or another document belonging to the same group, and included in his work by Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas, the gloss clearly states that he was «a god of buffoons» (*un dios de los truhanes*, in Cuesta Domingo, de Rojas and Jiménez Garcés 2002, 162). In the indigenous manuscripts, he was often paired with the god Ixtlilton, «Black-faced one.» Together, they seem to correspond to a couple of clown gods identified in the Classic Maya culture by Taube (1989): God N or Pawahtun, represented with the entire body painted in black but for the area around the mouth (just like it occurs in the graphic renditions of Ixtlilton), and his zoomorphic companion called *mam*, opossum (see Brylak 2015).

The *techalotl* and the bat share many features with ritual clowns from other Amerindian cultures. With the blurred identity and incarnating socially restrained activities and disapproved postures, such as drunkenness, excessive sexuality, mockery, and mischievousness, these liminal and trickster-like figures within rituals act as masters of ceremony, leading the dancing groups. At the same time, paradoxically, they seem to stand aside, observing and commenting with whistles, shouts, seemingly uncontrolled bodily movements, and incomprehensible gibberish, with all probability causing the gathered audience and participants to laugh, despite the seriousness of the sacrificial context. Both buffoons also carried particular artifacts. The bat, sweeping the ashes with the broom, instead of helping to clean the site, probably was mocking this ritual practice. The attribute of *techalotl* was a dried rabbit that he carried in a box on his back. Mesoamerican cultures associated rabbits with *pulque* and drunkenness, but also with stealing (in a trickster manner), sexuality, and entertainment (see Houston, Stuart and Taube 2006, 196-200; Vásquez Monterroso 2009). The early colonial sources do not leave any clues as to the possible usage of this object by *techalotl*. However, Victoria Bricker (1973), while participating in the carnivalesque festival of Saint Sebastian in Zinacantán, Chiapas, noticed that the entertainers carried stuffed squirrels and spider monkeys. These animals symbolized the shameless wives of delinquent religious officials who did not attend the ceremonies because, as was assumed, they had sexual intercourses with them (58). Also, as Bricker notes, the disguised participants were throwing dried animals at each other, shouting obscenities. A similar use of these objects by buffoons has been attested elsewhere in Mexico, for example, during the dance of the Moors (*ibid,* 199). Sahagún does not clarify for what purpose the living image of *techalotl* was keeping his dried

rabbit. The analogy with contemporary ritual clowns is plausible, but due to the lack of confirmed data, it must remain a tentative interpretation.

Those who studied ritual clowning provided diverse interpretations of its role in the context of religious practices. For some authors, the goal of the clowns was to break a taboo (Charles 1945; Makarius 1970) or to provide a sort of comic relief (Honigmann 1942). For Elsie Clews Parsons and Ralph L. Beals (1934), ceremonial buffoons have a punitive and policing function (499), and their actuation can be considered in terms of war traits (*ibid*, 497). The latter aspect may be visible in the figures of Tetzompac and Chonchayotl, sowing-fear figures who partake in ritual skirmishes imitating actual warfare aimed at taking captives but ending up with the acquisition of more material and mundane «trophies» or «booty.» According to Don Handleman (1981), «Clown types are well-suited to perform as such reflexive agents: clown-like figures often stand apart from, or separated from, ritual or drama, at its borders or *boundaries* — an ideal vantage point from which to comment on a ritual action, as it is ongoing» (327). In this sense, the ceremonial buffoons performing during the pre-Hispanic festivals of Tlacaxipehualiztli, Xocotl Huetzi, Teotleco, and Panquetzaliztli accomplish a double role of both participants and external commentators mocking the other participants and their actions. Also, at least in the case of Tetzompac and Chonchayotl, their playfulness is ambiguous, and their victims were probably far from laughing (though it cannot be excluded that other participants found their miseries quite amusing). They were cruel in their mockeries[22], which only brings them even closer to a trickster type.

Conclusions

The phenomena of playfulness and humor were never a central aspect that would focalize the attention of the colonial authors describing pre-Hispanic religious practices. Nevertheless, the descriptions of Nahua festivals left to us by friars (also thanks to the aid of their native informants) contain numerous, though often brief and fragmentary, references to laughter, mockery, or hilarity. This paper, limited to the *veintena* festivals, focused only on two aspects: the divine laughter and ritual clowning, providing their general overview. To a certain extent, each of these phenomena can be considered universal because they appear in many other cultures. At the same time, however, they are expressed within the narrower ramifications of the Mesoamerican cultural and religious contexts. Thus, maize

goddesses are entertained throughout a series of «months,» but the culminating moment is Toci's festival of Ochpaniztli, when she bursts open with laughter to get fecundated and give birth to Cinteotl, maize *par excellence*. With it, the female laughter ceases, and the *ixiptlahuan* of mature telluric goddesses are more inclined to cry. The Nahua buffoons, while bearing many features of the more broadly extended Amerindian clown types, take the anthropo- and zoomorphic forms embedded in the Mesoamerican worldview.

In both of the selected examples a corporal dimension stands out, either expressed through the physical movement, wiggles, bodily opening via the outbursts of laughter, and mimetic mockery, or on the symbolic level, as in the case of laughing goddesses. By no means less important or less frequent in the framework of religious festivals was the verbal component leading to comic situations and provoking laughter, today almost unattainable for a modern scholar due to the scarcity of data. Either in the form of jokes aimed at keeping the *ixiptlahuan* in a good mood and cheerful or as insults or reversed speech of the ritual clowns, paradoxically, it is now less tangible than the performative dimension of the ludic activities.

A closer look at the occurrence of sacred laughter in the broader context of the entire festive cycle allows us to elucidate some patterns. In the case of female incarnations of the divinities, the hilarity seems to be strongly related to the vegetative cycle of the maize, translated into alterations between laughter and tears throughout the agricultural year. The Nahua buffoons, in turn, on the one hand, combine many of the functions ascribed to the clown-like figures: they create a ludic performance, establish a frontier between the sacred and the profane, lead the participants and mock them, reinforce the importance of the rituals by recurring to ridicule. On the other hand, however, they are locally rooted in the symbolic framework of Mesoamerican, or even more narrowly, Central Mexican culture.

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Notes

1 The Spanish term *juego* embraces what in English is called either a «play» or a «game.» In order to avoid ambiguities and assigning a meaning not necessarily intended by the author of a colonial text, I follow Roberte Hamayon's (2016) solution to recur to the term «playing», which, as this scholar explains, places emphasis on the process (26).

2 This term is a loan from the Nahuatl verb mitotia, «s/he dances.»

3 According to fray Toribio de Benavente (1996), better known as Motolinía, the first of these terms refers to a dance of rejoicing, less restricted and practiced for entertainment. In contrast, the other one designates solemn dances often practiced as a form of worship (543). Nevertheless, as Alfredo López Austin (1997) pointed out (186), such division finds no confirmation in the sources (e.g., in book II of the *Florentine Codex*, dedicated to religious rituals, most, if not all, dancing performances are described with the verb *itotia*, from which the noun *netotiliztli* derives).

4 John Bierhorst (1985) while studying the corpus of *Cantares mexicanos*, a collection of «songs» (*cuicatl*) in Nahuatl, concluded that they derived from the *netotiliztli* type of dance because «the numerous Cantares-style songs described by Hernández are grouped under the rubric netotiliztli; and the verb macehua (to dance) is used only once in the Cantares manuscript, whereas the verb itotia (to dance) recurs constantly» (92). For the discussion concerning the generic terms for 'dance' in Nahuatl and their reinterpretation by the Europeans in the colonial period see Scolieri 2014 and Danilović 2016, among others.

5 Such an interpretation of this term by López Austin, with all probability, anticipates what this scholar fully exposed in his later work, *Cuerpo humano e ideología* (1984). According to his theory, the Nahua identified various animical centers in the body, including *elli*, liver, responsible for vitality, affection, and passions (208-10).

6 Amós Alejandro Díaz Barriga Cuevas (2021, 54, 57-60) having carefully analyzed all the different «generic» names given to ritual games and ritual battles in the early colonial sources, proposes that a good candidate for such a label in Nahuatl would be *neyayaotlaliztli*, «fighting game» (*juego de pelea*, see Molina 1992, I: 73r). This author, however, recommends to be

cautious and not to force any supposedly all-encompassing general term; instead, he opts for recurring to the particular names that correspond more closely to each of these individual ritual acts (82).

[7] The Nahuatl notion of *ixiptla* designates a god's representative, substitute, or (localized) embodiment. The literature on this topic is abundant and still growing. Among the scholarly works dedicated to this aspect of pre-Hispanic Nahua religion are Hvitfeldt 1958; Bassett 2015; Peperstraete 2015; Dehouve 2016 and Kruell 2020.

[8] One of the early colonial recipes for making *tzoalli* is provided by Sahagún's informants (Sahagún 1950-1982, III: 5; XII: 51-52, 2001: 277) and by Durán (2006 [1969], I: 28). The analysis of *tzoalli* and its ritual use has, likewise, been subject of numerous studies (see Reyes Equiguas 2006; Brylak 2013; Mazzetto 2013, 2017; Schwaller 2019, among others).

[9] In the case of the *ixiptla* of Toci, the sources mention a whole range of performative and ritual actions aimed at entertaining and cheering up the goddess. Interestingly, in various instances, Spanish religious authors did not fully believe these could eliminate all the saddening thoughts related to the upcoming death. Therefore, they mentioned their suspicions of the priests also recurring to other methods, such as embriagation (with «wine», that is, *pulque*, an alcoholic beverage made of fermented agave juice) or enchantment (Durán 2006 [1969], I: 126, 267). While describing the live image of Quetzalcoatl, who was sacrificed during the festival in Cholula, Durán (2006 [1969]) states that the priests «were taking the sacrificial knives and they were washing them from that human blood that was left on them from the past sacrifices, and with those knives they were preparing him a gourd of cocoa and they were giving it to him to drink» (*tomaban las navajas de sacrificar y lavábanles aquella sangre humana que estaba en ella pegada de los sacrificios pasados, y con aquellas navajas hacíanle una jícara de cacao y dábansela a beber*). (I: 63, trans. mine).

[10] As a matter of fact, Durán (2006 [1969]) says that «if those who represented the live gods and the goddesses saddened, remembering that they were going to die, they had it for the worst omen of all, and therefore, so that they would not become sad, they intended to provide them with all [sort of] contentment and rejoycing» (*si estos que representaban los dioses y las diosas vivos se entristecían, acordándose que habían de morir, teníanlo por el más mal agüero de todos, y así, a fin de que no se entristeciesen, procurábanles dar todo contento y regocijo*) (I: 145; trans. mine).

[11] One more explicit reference to a male *ixiptla* that could not become sad was Quetzalcoatl's incarnation during his festival in Cholula (see Durán 2006, I: 63-64). However, this festival from Durán's work did not belong to the cycle of *fiestas de las veintenas*, the reason for which I do not include it in the analysis.

[12] I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for calling my attention to these figures. It has to be stressed, though, that Sahagún's informants do not clearly explain whether the Coatlicues were crying as a «side effect» of the sacrifice awaiting them or, rather, their tears were crucial for the ritual action. What we read in the *Florentine Codex* is that «when they climbed up, they went singing a lot, some of them went dancing, some of them really cried» (*in jquac tleco, cenca cujcativi, cequjntin mjtotivi, in cequjtin vel choca*) (Sahagún 1950-1982, II: 140, trans. mine). However, given the overall laughter-cry dichotomy within the entire cycle of the veintenas, it would fit well for them to be obliged to shed tears.

[13] Torquemada (1986, III: 408) comment is quite explicit in that respect: «This woman was allowed to weep and grieve a lot (a case denied to others who died on other days)» (*A esta mujer le era permitido llorar y entristecerse mucho [caso negado en otras que morían en otros días*], trans. mine).

[14] The echoes of it are visible in the sacred narrative belonging to the so-called Toltec cycle. In it, the daughter of Huemac, a Toltec ruler, fell in love with the Huastec chile vendor (the reference to chile being one of the multiple allusions to eroticism), who, like a stereotypic Huastec, was not wearing his loincloth and managed to seduce the Toltec princess by exposing his erected phallus of impressive size. Also, in the graphic representation of the *veintena* Ochpaniztli from *Codex Borbonicus* (1980, pl. 30), the figure of Toci's *ixiptla* is surrounded by a retinue of Huastecs holding their erected artificial male members.

[15] On the other hand, Fray Juan de Torquemada (1986, II: 269-70) refutes any negative overinterpretations of the dance and clarifies that far from expressing frivolity, the loose hair of young girls partaking in the dance imitated the hair of a young maize cob to attain their growth on the fields.

[16] According to Gilhus (1997), this consideration of laughter in the context of female corporeity led to its restraining early in Christianity (111).

[17] The name «zaharrón» comes from the Arabic *sahhar* (see Díaz Barriga Cuevas 2021: 244). In his *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* Sebastian de Covarrubias Orozco (1611) translates the term *zaharrón* as «el momarrache, or botarga» (261v). The *Diccionario de la lengua española* defines «momarrache» or, rather, «moharracho,» as «a person who disguises himself ridiculously in a function to cheer up or entertain others, making ridiculous gestures and gestures (*persona que se disfraza ridículamente en una función para alegrar o entretener a las demás, haciendo gestos y ademanes ridículos*, trans. mine). «Botarga» has a similar meaning and its links to the theater are due to the fact that it comes from the name of an Italian actor Stefanello Bottarga. Further, Covarrubias Orozco (1611: 261v) writes that the *zaharrón* «in time of carnival comes out looking bad and with bad figure, sometimes making gestures, to frighten those he meets, and [he does] other things to frighten them» (*en tiempo de carnabal sale con mal talle, y mala figura haziendo ademanes algunas vezes, de espantarse de los que topa, y otras de espantarlos*).

[18] It is not clear what the Nahuatl «refrain» *in naie in naie* means, the reason for which I left it untranslated. Dibble and Anderson rendered is as «when I do, when I do;» however, it is not clear on what basis.

[19] It is possible that the goal was to imitate the sound of the rain; that being the case, these «buffooneries» would have played an important imitative and propitiatory role in the ritual. According to the ethnographic data analyzed by Díaz Barriga Cuevas (2021: 144), in Acatlán (Guerrero, Mexico), at the end of April, when the rainy season approaches, the dancers called *cotlatlastin* perfomed a dance during which they make sounds with their mouth similar to howling of the wind that brings along the rain.

[20] For the discussion concerning this figure's name, see Díaz Barriga Cuevas 2021, 241-42.

[21] Ryszard Tomicki (1990) has indicated the original «cold,» aquatic-lunar-telluric (and, thus, Mictlan-like) character of the Mexica tutelar god Huitzilopochtli, and his posterior solarization, related to the re-writing of historical and religious narrative after the victorious war against Azcapotzalco. Richard Haly (1992), on his part, while analyzing the sources, has reached the conclusion that Huitzilopochtli substituted for an earlier «bony» deity Omiteotl, hence his skeleton-like features.

[22] In this sense, as noted by Díaz Barriga Cuevas (2021, 142-49), they are similar to the contemporary *tlacoleros*, the guardians of order during the jaguar fights performed until today in different communities in the Mexican state of Guerrero (e.g., in Acatlán and Zitlala) to propitiate

rain. The *tlacoleros* act like ritual clowns, mediating between the fighters and the audience, and do not hesitate to use their whips to reinforce the propitiatory ritual action (by, as Díaz Barriga Cuevas observes, reproducing the sound of thunder) but also to playfully mock their victims, even if this playfulness turns out to be violent.