

Nemiliztli and Tlamaniliztli
(NEWLAMP)

Nahua moral-social-political philosophy

And thus were the customs (*tlamanca*) said to be established: as with warp thread (*tetectitica*), as with a measuring rod (*octacayutica*), as with a model (*machyotica*). Thus was it said: “The way of life (*nemiliztli*) is the black, the red (*tlilotoc tlapalotoc*) (Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, *Primeros Memoriales*, Thelma D. Sullivan, et al. (eds.), Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997, p. 228).

Nemiliztli =df life; conduct; way of living; lifeway (be it morally good or bad); a way of moving across / living upon *tlalticpac* (“the earth’s surface”).

Tlamaniliztli = df an ordering, arranging, extending, laying out, spreading out of things.

Nemiliztli-cum-tlamaniliztli =df ordering, arranging, spreading out of a lifeway; a lifeway that has been ordered, arranged, configured, extended and spread out upon *tlalticpac* in a specific manner (neutral). a way of being extended, arranged, stretched out or spread out upon the surface of the earth (in any manner whatsoever be it ordered or disordered, well or not, etc.); of a way of *andar* =df advancing through life in any manner whatsoever.

In intlili, in tlapalli (“the black, the red”) nemiliztli-cum-tlamaniliztli =df wise **living or lifeway**; one that has been ordered, arranged, configured in a good (*cualli*) way. It enables humans to live a morally upright life, a life of true/genuine humanness (*nelli tlacayotl*); enables the becoming and attaining of humanness. It arranges and interrelates persons so as to promote reciprocal inter-personal relationships and hence individual-social-cosmic balance – including humans’ relationships with other-than-huma-persons.

In intlili, in tlapalli nemiliztli-cum-tlamaniliztli orders humans normatively speaking; it arranges and spreads them out normatively in such a way so as to produce balanced humans, community (*altepetl*), and Fifth Sun-Earth Ordering. It *norms* humans by weaving them into relationships of reciprocal meriting and obligating -- e.g., creator being~human, parent~child, gifter~gifted, feeder~fed, and so on – with other humans as well as with other other-than-humans. The ordering is a normative ordering, defined by *macehua* and mutual obligatedness.

Extrapolating from Sahagún’s informants’ remarks (Florentine Codex, Book X) on good artisanship, I suggest that good/wise – “the black, the red” -- *tlamaniliztli configured nemiliztli* -- like well-composed woven fabric, featherwork, and song-poetry (in *xochitl in cuicatl*) -- consists in humans being spread out, extended and arranged in such a manner as to *minimize*: (a) social (inter-personal) discord, disquiet, derangement, and disharmony;

and (b) the presence of tears, rips, snags, holes, gaps, frays, wrinkles, obstructions, and tangles in the social fabric (society); and as a consequence (c) minimize personal physical-psychological discord, disharmony, imbalance, and illness.

This has the effect of: (a) bringing, fitting, and joining together humans as well as humans and other-than-humans; (b) adjusting, uniting, and matching humans with one another as well as humans and other-than-humans; (c) timing and placing humans properly relative to other humans as well as other-than-humans; and (d) making the relationships between humans -- as well as between humans and other-than-humans -- level, flat and even. Good *tlamaniliztli* irons out wrinkles and snags in the social fabric. It makes for the smooth unhindered, unobstructed flow of life-energy throughout human society and the cosmic society consisting of humans and other-than-humans.

Wise/good “the blackened the reddened” *tlamaniliztli* choreographs a constellation or ensemble of *life-processes*, *life-activities*, and *life-doings*. Like good artisanship generally, good governing and hence good *tlamaniliztli* involve knowing how to manage and order an *activity and process*: e.g., the processes of childrearing, cooking, farming, coppercasting, weaving, and singing.

Wise/good “the blackened the reddened” *tlamaniliztli* orchestrate the vital energies, life-activities and life-processes of humans. They order humans and other than humans to live in such a manner as to enable these humans to live together well, to get along with one another. Good *tlamaniliztli* promote the development, the becoming of morally upright, genuine human being (*neltlacatl*, *nelli tlacatl*). Those humans ordered, created and cultivated by good *tlamaniliztli* know how to live together, to get along with other humans and other-than-humans. By arranging people qua processes and active humans, one is arranging active, processive relationships between them.

I propose we gloss *tlamanca* as “the way things were extended and configured” (rather as “customs” following Sullivan since this is what customs do, afterall). The passage thus states that humans were wisely extended and configured upon the surface of the earth so that their resulting way of life (*nemiliztli*) accords with “the black, the red,” i.e., the wisdom and thus moral system, morality, morally upright lifeway of the ancestors.ⁱ Because of this, we might say humans are able to live “a blackened, a reddened” way of life.

The passage (and others like it ⁱⁱ) offers us invaluable insight into how the Mexica understood *tlamaniliztli* and how they understood the relationship between *tlamaniliztli* and *nemiliztli*. It explicitly likens *tlamaniliztli* to warp threads, measuring rods, and models, i.e. to things used to count, match, measure, configure, order and arrange things in a specific and concrete manner so as to prepare those things for future transformation; to things that count, measure, etc. things in the process of transforming them. In so doing, the passage implicitly likens *nemiliztli* (human living) to: (a) the ongoing product of interlacing (weaving/ woven product) warp and weft threads, to a cultivated milpa, and the like, to *tlamaniliztli*-configured living OR (b) weft fibers as yet unwoven with warp / just as warp orders weft, so likewise, *tlamaniliztli* orders *nemiliztli*.

As with so many of the principal concepts of Nahuatl philosophy, I suspect that maize horticulture rests at the root of the notion of *in tlalli in tlapalli nemiliztli-cum-tlamaniliztli*: in this case, the careful measuring, extending, arranging and spreading out of a milpa and the seeds in the milpa. Dennis Tedlock explains the opening lines of the Maya Quiche creation story transcribed and known as the *Popol Vuh* as the creator beings' measuring and laying creation in the way farmers lay out and measure a milpa. The good (*cualli*) milpa not only consists of but actively enacts the proper interrelationship between seeds, earth, sun, shade, and water (and probably some *relata* I'm leaving out).

ⁱ Sullivan glosses "*tlilotoc tlapalotoc in nemiliztli*" as "the traditions and ways of life of the ancestors" (Sahagun 1998: 228, note 5). See also Sullivan (1994: 259, note #67).

ⁱⁱ E.g., Sahagún (1953-1982: BK VI: 246-247).