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# From Ollamalitzli to Pelota Mixteca and Beyond

The role of globalization in the historical development of an indigenous Mexican ballgame

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## Preface

To the general public, 'The Mesoamerican Ballgame' is one of the best-known characteristics of the Mesoamerican cultural area. Tourists from all over the world, who flock to Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, and Honduras for the climate and culture, visit archaeological sites and hear about "that game in which they decapitated the winners... or was it the losers?" They see the impressive *juegos de pelota* that have been found and reconstructed in sites like Chichén Itzá, Monte Albán, and Copán and hear the stories that tourist guides tell them about the ritual ballgame. According to these stories, the game was played to please the gods, as a substitute for warfare or as a means of consolidating power and was, according to the tour guides, invariably accompanied by human sacrifices.

Parallel to this general public-oriented discourse, which, as said, most often emphasizes the competitive and 'bloody' nature of what is referred to as 'The Precolumbian Mesoamerican Ballgame', exists a wealth of scientific studies in Mesoamerican archaeology. These studies document, describe, and analyze archaeological finds, ethnohistorical documents, and iconographical sources related to a hipball game that was called *ollamalitzli* by the Aztecs (Molina 1944[1571]), *tiquija làchi* by the Zapotecs (Córdova 1942[1578]), and, possibly *pok ta pok* or *pik* by the Classic Maya. They have focused on issues as diverse as the sociopolitical role of the ballgame in pre-Columbian society, the cosmological significance of the game, the implements and attire used to play the game, and the architectural development of the I-shaped ball courts inside which the game was played (Borhegyi 1980; van Bussel, van Dongen, and Leyenaar 1991; Castro-Leal 1986; Fernando 1992; Leyenaar and Parsons 1988; Scarborough and Wilcox 1991; Scheffler et al. 1985; Taladoire 1981; Whittington 2001, to name but a few of the most often cited works).

While many of the studies mentioned above have mostly considered 'The Mesoamerican Ballgame' to be one specific game played with the hips, others have suggested the existence of multiple (ritual) ballgames in Mesoamerica, including football, handball and stickball (Cohodas 1991; Green Robertson 1991; Stern 1949; Taladoire 2003; Uriarte 2006, among others). While the so-called 'unity principle' of the Mesoamerican ballgame is still a matter of debate among archaeologists, the proliferation of different modern-day indigenous ballgames has attracted the attention of archaeologists and ethnographers alike. These indigenous ballgames include, but are not limited to, *rarajpuami*, *carrera de bola*, *pelota purépecha*, *ulama*, *pelota tarasca*, and *pelota mixteca* (Berger 2010; Cortez Ruiz et al. 1986, 1992; Inzúa 1985; Kelly 1943; Leyenaar 1978, 2001; Turok 2000). Whereas ethnographers have focused mostly on game forms as they are practiced today, archaeologists have tried to use these games as evidence for the existence of different forms of pre-

Columbian ballgames in Mesoamerica and to interpret pre-Columbian Mesoamerican iconography (see for example Baudez 2007; Bernal 1968; Bernal and Seuffert 1979; Bernal and Oliveros 1988; Sweezy 1972; Taladoire 2001, 2003). Few in-depth studies of indigenous (ball)games played in Mexico today exist, and even fewer, if any, have studied the historical development of these games or have focused on the social, cultural, and political issues and questions that surround these modern-day expressions of indigenous culture (Padilla Alonso and Zurita Bocanegra [1997], Inzúa [1985] and Turok [2000] are notable exceptions, but these are also limited in scope).

In this dissertation, I trace the history and development of one of these modern-day ballgames, pelota mixteca. Pelota mixteca is an indigenous ballgame which was originally played in the state of Oaxaca, in southern Mexico, but which, due to the extensive labor migration that has taken place over the past century, is nowadays played not only in Oaxaca, but also in Mexico City and parts of the United States. While pelota mixteca is undeniably an indigenous ballgame, which has been played by many generations of indigenous individuals in Oaxaca for hundreds of years, the origins of the game are disputed. While some, including myself, (Berger 2010, 2011; see also Gillmeister 1998) have argued that the game is a Spanish import that was assimilated by the Mixtec and Zapotec population of Oaxaca after the conquest, others have argued that the game is of pre-Columbian origin (Bernal and Seuffert 1979; Bernal and Oliveros 1988), or is a pre-Columbian game which has been influenced by the introduction of Spanish handball games (Taladoire 2003). In the first part of this study, then, I try to answer the question of the origins of pelota mixteca. Is the way the game is played indeed pre-Columbian, is it European, or is it a pre-Columbian game that was modified under the influence of European games? I will approach this question by studying the way pelota mixteca is played today, followed by a comparison of the game to traditional handball games played in Europe since the Middle Ages. From this comparison I conclude that the set of rules by which pelota mixteca is played is of European origin. Subsequently, I will turn my attention to the archaeological record and sixteenth-century historical accounts, in order to examine if there is any evidence of a pre-Columbian game similar to pelota mixteca. In this part of the work I also attempt to come to an understanding of how pelota mixteca came to be a part of the traditional culture of several indigenous peoples in Oaxaca. Answering this question of the origins of pelota mixteca is relevant for two reasons. First, the interpretation of the archaeological record is hindered by the, in my view, erroneous assumption that pelota mixteca had a precolonial precursor. If such a game never existed, as is my contention, analyses and interpretations of iconographic programs in which this hypothesized game is depicted should be revised. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the supposed precolonial origin of the game, which gave the game its status as a 'deporte prehispánico' or a 'deporte ancestral', has profoundly influenced the discourse that was created around pelota

mixteca by the Mexican state, as well as the attitude that young potential players of the game have towards pelota mixteca. As a consequence, it has also affected the number of people that play the game, and its chances of survival in a globalized world. I explore these questions of discourse, the state and the perpetuation of pelota mixteca more profoundly in the second part of this work.

In Part II I focus on the present. Lynn Stephen (2007: 31), in the introduction to her book *Transborder Lives*, says that her goal “is to weave together the personal histories and narratives of indigenous transborder migrants and the larger structures that affect their lives and to highlight their creative responses in many arenas to transborder existence.” I attempt to follow Stephen’s example and try, through personal narratives of players of pelota mixteca, to explore what role issues of identity and community formation play in the way the game has developed and continues to develop and how international migration and globalization have affected both the game and its players. I also examine the relationship between pelota mixteca and the Mexican state, directing my attention to the way that the Mexican government has used sport in general, and pelota mixteca more specifically, in matters of nation building and national identity formation. What type of discourse was created by the state and by the (indigenous) players themselves around pelota mixteca, and how do these discourses relate, contrast, conflict, or unite? How does the appropriation by the state of pelota mixteca, or the lack thereof, reflect broader issues concerning the relationship between indigenous peoples and mainstream Mexican society? What role does pelota mixteca play in ‘the transnational community’, now that the game has been ‘internationalized’, and how have the game and its players been influenced by the onset of globalization?

In this study I attempt to understand the historical development of pelota mixteca over the course of the past centuries, and explore its possible future trajectories. Considering the topic of this study, it is clear that it is, and must be, diachronic in nature. In a broad sense, it seeks to examine the relationship between sport and power in Mesoamerican/Mexican society at different points in time. For the period after the Conquest, it seeks to understand how the game that is nowadays called pelota mixteca was constituted over the centuries as a European game, an indigenous game, and, possibly in the years to come, a Mexican game, through the discourses created around it. Because of the thematic that I attempt to address in this work, this has to be an interdisciplinary study, combining archaeology, anthropology, history and sociology. Naturally, having been trained as an archaeologist, I feel more at home in some of these disciplines than in others. Because of this wide scope, I feel I ran the risk of ‘spreading myself thin’ and producing a study that only scratches the surface of all the topics addressed, rather than a thorough and insightful study of only one aspect. I



will leave it up to the reader to judge if my attempt to answer all these interrelated questions has been successful.

### ***Acknowledgements***

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# Part 1

From ollamalitzli to pelota mixteca

# CHAPTER 1. Pelota mixteca

## ***Introduction***

This first chapter is concerned with the very basics of pelota mixteca: how, where, when and by whom is it played and what is its (recent) history? In the first part, I will present an overview of the different modalities of pelota mixteca that exist today, as well as the rules for all of these modalities, the places where the game is played, and the types of occasions at which pelota mixteca is played. The second chapter is concerned with the (recent) history of the game and the question of its origins. In that chapter I will argue that pelota mixteca developed from a family of handball games played in Europe around the time of the Spanish conquest of Mexico, some of which are still played in several European countries today.

Apart from the referenced literature, the information presented in the first part of this chapter is based on conversations and interviews conducted with spectators and players at pelota mixteca matches in the periods of January 2007, July-August 2008, and July-August 2011 in the cities of Oaxaca, Nochixtlán, and Pochutla in the state of Oaxaca, as well as a visit in 2012 to the international pelota mixteca tournament that is organized annually in Fresno, California in the United States, and attendance of two matches in Los Angeles in 2015.

## ***Modalities***

The game of pelota mixteca has three modalities: pelota mixteca de hule, pelota mixteca de forro, and pelota mixteca de esponja (also referred to as pelota mixteca del Valle), which are distinguished mainly on the basis of the equipment used for the game, rather than on rules or court size.

### *Pelota mixteca de hule*

Pelota mixteca de hule is played using a glove of about 20 x 25 x 15 cms., that weighs somewhere between 3 and 5.5 kilograms, a weight that depends on the preferences of the individual player, and on when the glove was made (Fig. 1, 2). Nowadays, the standard weight for a glove is 5-5.2 kilograms, but some players prefer to use lighter gloves. The fingers are placed inside the glove, after which it is tied to the hand with the use of shoelaces. Before the 1950s, the balls for *hule*, which means rubber, were made from natural rubber that was obtained from rubber trees in the southern part of the state of Oaxaca, most notably around Juquila (Leobardo Pacheco Sr., personal communication). These plantations, however, have died out and rubber is no longer produced in this region. Today, the ball is made of industrial rubber that is vulcanized using a process especially

devised for the ball. The ball has a diameter of about 12 centimeters and weighs approximately 920 grams (Fig. 3). Pelota mixteca de hule is the modality of pelota mixteca that is best-known outside the circle of players of the game and has always been the variety of the game with the most active players. Hule is played in all areas of Oaxaca, except for some parts of the Mixteca Baja, and is also popular in Mexico City and the United States.

#### *Pelota mixteca de forro*

As opposed to hule, which is named after the rubber ball that is used in the game, this modality of pelota mixteca is played with a ball that is made of leather, wool and thread, which are sewn together in a ball weighing about 275-300 grams (Castro Leal et al. 1986; Cortés Ruiz 1992; Inzúa 1985:84). In this variety the ball is hit with the hand, using a regular glove, of the type normally worn by gardeners or construction workers. This glove is wrapped with cotton bands, in order to make the ball bounce off the hands more easily (Fig. 4). Pelota mixteca de forro is mainly played in the Mixtec region, especially the Mixteca Baja and the western part of the Mixteca Alta, in the (north-)western part of the state of Oaxaca, as well as some areas in the Mixteca Costa. Forro also has some players in the city of Mexico.

#### *Pelota mixteca de esponja or del Valle*

Mostly just referred to as pelota esponja, this variety of the game is played with a ball that weighs about 100 grams and is slightly smaller than a tennis ball, about 6 centimeters in diameter. The ball is hit with a wooden board of about 20x20 centimeters that is tied to the hand with shoelaces, in the same way as the glove used for pelota mixteca de hule (Fig. 5). Inzúa (1985:85) and Turok (2000:63), who base their data mostly on research in Mexico City, refer to pelota esponja as pelota mixteca del Valle. Personally, I only encountered this name on a sign hanging above the entrance to the pelota mixteca court in Mexico City, and in some newspaper articles. It appears that the name pelota del Valle is generally used in Mexico City, whereas the game is mostly referred to as pelota esponja in the state of Oaxaca.

According to Cortés Ruiz (1992:213), this variety of the game first emerged during the 1960s in the southern part of the Valles Centrales and the Sierra Sur of Oaxaca, especially around the town of Ejutla de Crespo. As this variety of the game became more popular, it spread from the Sierra Sur to other parts of the state of Oaxaca. Unlike pelota mixteca de hule and pelota mixteca de forro, pelota esponja is not mentioned in a *reglamento* of pelota mixteca that was written around 1947 by Raúl Bolaños Cacho, then secretary of sport and culture in the Oaxacan administration. Hence, we can be sure that pelota esponja was not widely played in Oaxaca in the late 1940s. This gives credence to

Cortés Ruiz's assertion that the game was invented during the 1960s. We could explain the appearance of pelota esponja by looking at developments that took place in pelota mixteca de hule, the only modality of the game played in central and southern Oaxaca in the first half of the twentieth century.

During the 1930s and 40s the gloves and rubber balls for pelota mixteca de hule grew in size and, as a result, became more and more expensive. This development had its origin in Ejutla de Crespo, where the inventor of the pelota mixteca de hule gloves lived (see below). Quite probably, many players of pelota mixteca de hule did not have the resources to afford this new equipment. As a result, players that could not, or did not want to, buy these expensive implements created their own game, in which they only needed a relatively cheap ball and a wooden board that they could manufacture themselves. This would also explain why, in the regions in which pelota mixteca de forro is the main modality that is played, esponja did not spread as widely, since there was no need to invent a new game when the balls and gloves became expensive.

Pelota esponja is gaining ground on the other varieties of pelota mixteca, and is especially popular amongst younger people, most notably in the coastal regions. The main reason for this growing popularity is the fact that it is easy and cheap to buy a ball used for pelota esponja and to manufacture the wooden board that is used for the game. In contrast, the gloves and balls used for hule have to be made by a specialist and the gloves cost up to 3000 pesos/200 euros (in 2011). Esponja was introduced as the official sport of the Colegio de Bachilleres del Estado de Oaxaca (COBAO) in 2011, which means that it will be taught during physical education classes at Oaxaca's largest institution for secondary education. Of course, this will dramatically influence the number of players of pelota esponja and might result in pelota esponja becoming the most popular variety of pelota mixteca, rather than hule which historically has always been the most-played variant. In chapters 6 and 7, I will analyze this development in more detail.

## ***Court and Rules***

Although pelota mixteca has three different modalities, the rules for hule, forro and esponja are similar, if not the same.

### *The Court, or Pasajuego, and the players*

Generally, a court (or *pasajuego*) for pelota mixteca measures about 100 x 11 meters and consists of packed earth (Fig. 6). However, court sizes vary between 80 to 110 meters, because the court does not have well-defined end zones. The playing field is divided into three zones: the *zona de saque*, the *zona del resto*, and the *cajón*. The *zona de saque* covers about three quarters of the length of the

playing field (ca. 70 m.). The *cajón* makes up the first 8 meters after the *zona de saque*, the rest of the playing field is referred to as the *zona del resto* (Fig. 7). The playing field is outlined by lines drawn in the sand, which are often accentuated by chalk or cords. The lines that are drawn on both sides of the playing field are called *escase lateral*. The lines that mark the *cajón* are drawn across the court and are called *escase transversal*. Teams normally consist of five players and stand on opposite sides of the playing field. Sometimes teams will consist of fewer than five players, but this is only the case when not enough players are available.

Teams are simply referred to by the name of the section of the court that they are standing on - the team in the *zona de resto* is referred to as *resto*, while the team on the opposite side is called *saque* or *contraresto*. A slightly slanted stone, called the *botadera*, is placed in the *zona de saque*, about 30 to 40 meters from the *cajón*. The exact placement of the *botadera* depends on the strength of the player. The player that will effectuate the service bounces the ball on this stone, before hitting it to the other team on the rebound. The different positions in the field have different names. The player that starts the game by serving is called the *saque*, while the players that have to return the ball after the serve are called *bolea* (Inzúa 1985:80) or *cuide* (Cortés Ruiz 1992). The players that play in front of the *saque* or the *cuide/boleas* are called *rayas* (Inzúa 1985:80), *atajes* or *rayeros* (Cortés Ruiz 1992). The players that play in the end fields behind the *saque* or the *cuide/boleas* are called *resto/contraresto* (Inzúa 1985:80) or *largos* (Cortés Ruiz 1992).

### *Scoring points*

There are several ways of scoring a point (or *tanto*) in pelota mixteca, some of which are more complex than others. Nonetheless, the basics of the scoring system are quite simple – whenever the ball falls out of bounds on its first bounce, the team that hit the ball loses the point. A short ‘play-by-play’ of a possible game might aid in understanding how pelota mixteca works. If at some point the explanation of the ways of scoring points seems to become incomprehensible, keep in mind that both the scoring system, and the way of scoring a point are very similar to tennis.

As mentioned, the game starts when a player from the serving team, called the *saque*, drops the ball on the *botadera* and hits it towards the opposing team. This *saque* or service has to fall inside the *cajón*. If it fails to do so (goes out of bounds), the *resto* gain a point. If the serve does fall inside the *cajón*, the ball has to be returned by one of the players of the opposing team (*resto*). If the *resto* returns the ball and it goes out of bounds, the *contraresto* or *saque* team gains a point. If the ball is returned by the *resto*, falls inside and bounces once, it has to be returned by the *contraresto/saque*. In this way the game goes up and back with both teams hitting the ball and trying to force the other team to make a mistake. Except for the esponja variant, in which scores are simply counted ‘1 – 2 – 3

– *juego*’, scores are counted in *tantos* or *quinces*, following the pattern 15, 30, 40, *juego* (game), like in tennis. The first to win three or five *juegos*, depending on the arrangements made beforehand, wins the *partido* (match).

There are multiple ways to score a *tanto* or point. The simplest way is if the opposing side hits the ball out of bounds. A more complex way to score a point is to win a *raya*. A *raya* (line) is drawn either when the ball goes out of bounds after having bounced once inside the playing field, or when a ball bounces twice inside the playing field. In the first case a *raya* is drawn at the place where the ball crosses the sideline or *escase*, after having bounced. In the second, a *raya* is drawn at the place where the ball bounces for the second time. A *raya* represents a ‘pending game’, meaning that it does not directly reward a point to the team that made the *raya*. If the score of a game is 15-0 and the team that has 0 scores a *raya*, the score becomes 15-0, 1 *raya*. When a second *raya* is scored, the two teams change sides – the *saque* team becoming *resto* and vice versa – and the *rayas* are ‘disputed’.

A *raya* is a line that is drawn transversally on the playing field between the *botadera* and the *cajón*. This line effectively reduces the playing field for one of the teams, making it harder for the opposing team to score. Rather than being drawn in the sand of the playing field, a *raya* is signaled by a *raya* marker, a small object that is placed on the sideline of the court. Disputing a *raya* means that the opposing team has to hit the ball past the *raya*. If they fail to do so, the team that won the *raya* is awarded a point. So if the score is 15-0, 1 *raya*, and one of the teams makes a second *raya*, the teams change sides and dispute the *rayas*. If the team that had 0 points wins both *rayas*, the score becomes 15-30. If both teams win one *raya*, the score becomes 30-15, and if the team that had 15 wins both *rayas*, the score becomes 40-0. In all cases, after disputing the *rayas*, they are erased and the game continues as normal, without *rayas*. When one *raya* exists, and one of the teams reaches 40 – or if one of the teams has 40 and a *raya* is drawn - the teams change sides and the *raya* is disputed immediately, because *rayas* can never be ‘left over’ as would be the case if one of the teams wins the *juego*, without having disputed the *raya*.

#### *The coime, the chacero and the apostadores*

Every court, at least in Oaxaca, has a caretaker called *coime*, who makes sure that the court is kept clean, the lines are clearly visible and any fences around the court are in good shape. This maintenance work is mainly financed by the players of the game themselves. For every game that is played, the competing teams together pay 150 pesos (in 2011) to the *coime*. Of these 150 pesos, 100 go to the *coime* for the maintenance of the court, the other 50 pesos go to the *chacero*, the referee. In addition, the *coime* receives about ten percent of the bets that are made during games.



Sometimes the work of the *coime* is supported by local governments who provide funds for the maintenance of the court. *Coimes* are elected by a democratic process, whereby players vote for the *coime* they support. If the playing community is not satisfied with the work of the *coime*, or if other conflicts arise, *coimes* can be replaced on the basis of a new vote. In California, where many courts are less formalized than in Oaxaca, not all courts have a *coime*. If a court does not have a *coime*, the players cooperate to keep the court in good shape.

The referee in pelota mixteca is called *chacero*. As referee, the *chacero* not only keeps track of the score, but also marks the *rayas*. They do this by drawing a line in the sand with a stick at the side of the playing field. Sometimes these lines are marked by a *raya* marker, a plastic or iron token that has the number 1 or 2, for the different *rayas*, on it. Often the *chaceros* hold sticks of about three meters long, which are used to single them out from the crowd and to enhance the visibility of the *rayas* (Fig. 8). The role of *chacero* is mostly performed by experienced players who referee other teams' games. Another important duty of the *chacero* is to keep track of the bets that are placed on games. As we will see further on in this chapter, betting is a characteristic feature of pelota mixteca; money is always bet on a game. Those that bet are called *apostadores*.

Like in every sport, the decisions of the *chacero* are not always respected. For example, during the tournament for the *fiesta patronal* in Nochixtlán in 2011, the final was not finished due to a dispute that arose over a *chacero's* decision. At a decisive point in the match, with one team leading the other by one *juego*, the *chacero* did not count an important point for the losing team, because he argued that the ball had fallen on the wrong side of the *escase*. This decision was disputed by players of the losing team, who asked the *chacero* to go over and look at the place where the ball had made an impact in the dirt, hoping this would prove that the ball had actually fallen on the inside of the *escase*. After the *chacero* had looked at the spot where the ball had fallen, he changed his mind and ruled that the ball was in. This upset the winning team, who thought that the ball was out, and who accused bystanders of having moved the steel cords that outlined the playing field. A large discussion ensued in which not only the teams argued their points, but the *apostadores*, who had bet large amounts of money on the result of the match, also participated very actively. Since the *chacero* was not prepared to change his opinion, in the end, one of the teams refused to continue playing and the match was not finished. The result was that the prize money was split between the two teams and the money that the *apostadores* had bet on the game was returned to them.

This anecdote demonstrates the large influence that the *apostadores* and the money that they bet can have on the outcome of matches, as well as on the participants. If there are large sums of money bet on a particular match, bettors will push the players to perform and players will not only feel the pressure of wanting to win a match for themselves, but also experience the added pressure that is

put on them by the bettors, who stand to gain or lose substantial amounts of money on the basis of the performance of the individual players.

## ***Where is it played?***

### *Geographic extension*

Pelota mixteca is mainly played in the Mexican state of Oaxaca, Mexico City, and some parts of the south-western and southern United States of America. In the past it was also played by Mixtec immigrants in the state of Puebla, most notably in the cities of Puebla and Orizaba. According to some authors (Cortés Ruiz 1992: 213) it is still played there, or at least it was at the time that they wrote. To my knowledge, there are no longer any active players of pelota mixteca in the state of Puebla.

Interestingly, even though pelota mixteca is now played in places as far removed from Oaxaca as Fresno, California, it is not played in all regions of the state of Oaxaca. According to the Enciclopedia de los Municipios de Mexico<sup>1</sup> (EMM), 55 municipalities in the state of Oaxaca have at least one pelota mixteca court. This number of 55 municipalities is far from exact since, on the one hand, a municipality may not list a pelota mixteca court despite having one and, on the other, a municipality might still list a pelota mixteca court even when the game is actually no longer played. Of the 55 municipalities that did report having a pelota mixteca court, twenty-two are located in the Mixteca region, twenty-one are in the Central Valleys, five are on the coast, two are in the Sierra Norte, and five are in the Sierra Sur. In the regions Cañada and Papaloapam there are no municipalities that list a pelota mixteca court within their boundaries. This does not necessarily mean that the game has never been played in these regions. In addition to the municipalities that list the presence of a court for pelota mixteca, there are two municipalities that list a court for pelota esponja. One of these is located in the Juchitán district of the Istmo region, the other in the Ejutla district of the Central Valleys region. All the aforementioned municipalities are spread over what could be considered the “Mixtec-Zapotec heartland”. The areas that have traditionally been inhabited by Mixe, Chinantec, and other peoples do not have any communities with pelota mixteca courts mentioned. Though the absence of these courts, and the people playing pelota mixteca on them, is no evidence that pelota mixteca was never played in these regions, it does at least seem to point to a less well-established tradition.

Up until the 1990s, Mexico City used to be the main center for pelota mixteca outside the state of Oaxaca, as migrants used to move from communities in Oaxaca to Mexico City to find work. More

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<sup>1</sup> Available online at [http://www.e-local.gob.mx/wb2/ELOCAL/EMM\\_oaxaca](http://www.e-local.gob.mx/wb2/ELOCAL/EMM_oaxaca)

recently, with the main migration flows moving to the United States, the game is played less and less around Mexico City, to the extent that teams from Mexico City now have to travel all the way to Oaxaca to be able to participate in tournaments. On the other hand, the number of players and teams is slowly increasing in the United States, giving rise to pelota mixteca associations and tournaments there. Traditionally, pelota mixteca was mostly played in California, since it had the largest concentration of Oaxacan migrants in the United States. Recently, however, pelota mixteca players in Dallas, Texas have started organizing matches, showing that pelota mixteca is still a growing sport in the USA.

### *Within Communities*

Many pelota mixteca courts are now located in so-called *polideportivos*, in which a *pasajuego* is constructed next to a football field, a basketball court, or a baseball diamond. Some courts, however, are still found in what was probably their traditional location: in front of the village church. For example, in Magdalena Zahuatlán, a small town in the north of the state of Oaxaca, the pelota mixteca court is located in front of the church. In Chalcatongo, in the Mixteca Alta, pelota mixteca used to be played to the side of the church (Maarten Jansen personal communication 2015). In Nochixtlán, up until the 1950s, the game was played in front of an old church which, after the building of a new edifice, has fallen into disuse. Until September 2005 – when the local authorities forbade it, because of danger to the passing public - pelota mixteca was played on the central plaza in Tlaxiaco (Doroteo Arvea, personal communication 2008). Pelota mixteca can, however, also be played without an official court. For example after September 2005, the players in Tlaxiaco simply moved to a wide street away from the center of town, where they continued playing. According to the EMM (see above) in San José Estancia Grande, people play pelota mixteca “en las calles o espacios baldíos ya que no se cuenta con un lugar adecuado para este deporte tan antiguo.” Likewise, in the United States *pasajuegos* are often located in public parks or on abandoned agricultural fields (Fig. 9). Since, in the USA, players often do not have government permits, or funding, to create official *pasajuegos*, they use any space that suits their needs and is available.

## ***When is it played?***

### *Partidos de compromiso and partidos libres*

While pelota mixteca training can take place on any day of the week, depending on when players have the time to play, most matches are held on Sundays. The main reason for this is that most people work six days a week and so only have the Sunday off to play a match. This is especially the case for matches that are played *de compromiso*. Playing a match *de compromiso* (‘by commitment’)

means that the teams make arrangements beforehand, establishing the date and time of the game (normally some weeks in advance), the *pasajuego* at which it will take place (in most cases the 'home ground' of one of the two competing teams), the exact rules that will be followed (amount of games that will be played, etc.), and the amount of money that will be placed on the game. In games that are played *de compromiso*, a certain amount of money is bet on the outcome of the whole *partido* and on the separate *juegos*. The amount of money that is bet can range from a little - 500 pesos/50 USD per *partido* - to a lot - over 10,000 pesos per *partido*, in addition to 500/1000 per *juego*. The bets are essential to pelota mixteca. An elder man even went as far as to state, "Si no hay apuesto, no hay juego" - 'If there's no bets, there's no game'. Betting in pelota mixteca is definitely not a modern feature. Catarino 'El Oficial' Perez, a well-known pelota mixteca player from the city of Oaxaca, who stopped playing in the early 2000s at the age of 79, told me a story about how, in the 1940s, he once won 5,000 pesos with his team, during a match in Orizaba. With the earnings of this one match he was able to buy a house and a plot of land. Not only the players of the team bet money on the outcome of the game, the public is normally also involved in the betting. Matches that are not played *de compromiso*, are called *libre*. These are matches are not arranged beforehand, but are simply arranged on the day of the game. These games do, however, also involve bets, though normally in lesser amounts than the *partidos de compromiso*.

### *Tournaments*

Apart from the *partidos de compromiso*, the most important pelota mixteca matches take place during the tournaments that are held throughout the state of Oaxaca. Many of these tournaments form part of the festivities that take place in Oaxacan communities to celebrate the *fiesta patronal*. The number and quality of the teams that participate in the tournaments and where they come from depends on the importance of the tournament. Teams from all over the state of Oaxaca, and sometimes also from Mexico City, take part in the bigger tournaments, while the smaller ones may only be visited by some local teams. Teams, and by extension tournaments, are organized in three categories (*primera, segunda* and *tercera fuerza*), depending on the strength of the teams, the teams of *primera fuerza* being the strongest.

As a general rule, though naturally there are exceptions, the teams of the *primera fuerza* are composed of players between the ages of 20 and 35 (players which are at the top of their physical abilities), in the *segunda fuerza* teams of players between the age of 35 to 45 compete, and the *tercera fuerza* consists of players younger than 20 and older than 45. As such, it seems that for the continuation of the tradition and the learning process of younger players, the *tercera fuerza* is the

most important category. In this category, younger players learn to play competitive matches and develop their skills and can benefit from the knowledge of the game that the older players have. The most important tournaments for the hule variety are the ones held in February for the *fiesta patronal* of Bajos de Chila, in the Costa region near Puerto Escondido, and the Torneo Estatal, which is organized annually during the Guelaguetza festival in the city of Oaxaca. Additionally, there is the *Encuentro Internacional de pelota mixteca*, which is held annually in the city of Fresno, California (Fig. 10). For this tournament a selection of players from Oaxaca travels to Fresno and plays games against pelota mixteca teams from all over California.

Tournaments are organized by one or more persons from the community where the tournament is to be held. Prize money is always awarded to the winners, but often all participating teams earn some money to cover a (small) part of their expenses. This money can be supplied by the *gobierno municipal*, affluent inhabitants of the community and/or other sponsors. During a tournament different modalities of the game can be played. Thus, it is not unusual to have a tournament that features both pelota de hule and pelota esponja.

Since tournaments are generally held on specific Catholic feast days, there is a tournament cycle that follows the same pattern every year. Players tend to know in advance which town will have the next festival and organize a tournament. Invitations to the teams are spread by the organizing committee during tournaments through word-of-mouth, but also through newspaper announcements, posters and, more recently, also through the internet (Fig. 11). Still, it happens frequently that several tournaments are held during the same weekend. For example, during the weekend of August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008, tournaments were held in Nochixtlán, Pochutla, and a smaller town in the Valles Centrales of Oaxaca.

### ***How does one learn to play?***

Since pelota mixteca is not a sport that is as widespread and commonplace as baseball, basketball or football, most young people who start to play follow family traditions; their father, uncle or older brother gave them a glove to practice with when they were young. Children start learning to play somewhere between the ages of 10 and 14, though there is no standard and children can start learning earlier or later. Practice, at least for pelota mixteca de hule, is done with a normal ball (of about 920 grams), but with a smaller glove that is designed especially for children. By hitting the ball against a wall, children develop a feel for the ball and as they grow older they start using heavier gloves. They play training matches until they are ready for the real game, forming teams either with friends, or joining their family's team. Since 2011 pelota mixteca has been taught at the Colegio de Bachilleres de Oaxaca (COBAO), the state's largest institution for secondary education. Pelota

mixteca classes are taught at the COBAO throughout the state of Oaxaca. This means that, in addition to the traditional transmission of the game within the family, young people start to play the game at school. Of course, this has a significant impact on how the game is learned by youngsters and changes the locus of cultural reproduction from the family to a state-sponsored institution. I will discuss this development in more detail in the final chapters of this work.

## CHAPTER 2. Pelota mixteca history and origin

Attempts to study the origins and historical development of pelota mixteca are complicated by the fact that the name pelota mixteca only came into use in the beginning of the twentieth century. Before then the game was called pelota a mano fría or simply juego de pelota or juego de pelota a mano. Hence, to my knowledge, the earliest known document that describes pelota mixteca is a *reglamento*, a rule book, for the game that was written by Espiridión Peralta in 1901 and is called *Reglamento del Juego de Pelota de Hule a “Mano Fría”*<sup>2</sup>. Similarly, a rule book written by Tomás Pérez Bazán and Adolfo Manterola and published in Oaxaca in 1936 is called ‘Disposiciones y reglamento para el juego de la Pelota a mano’. However, players and fans of pelota mixteca, nowadays, know that the game is derived from the game of Mano Fría. Looking at the *reglamento* of Peralta (1901) it is very clear that he is indeed describing pelota mixteca, only under a different name.

To my knowledge, the first time that the name pelota mixteca appears in official documentation is in a *reglamento* from 1947 written by Raúl Bolaños Cacho, as mentioned, the secretary of physical education in the Oaxacan state government. This *reglamento* was published as part of a program that aimed to promote the state’s indigenous sports. At what point the name of pelota mixteca was introduced is not quite certain, but it is probable that the change of the name coincided with the change of the implements used for the hule variety of the game. But what were these changes and what caused them? Below I will give a short overview of the development from pelota a mano fría to pelota mixteca.

### ***From Pelota a Mano Fría to pelota mixteca***

The change of the name from Pelota a Mano Fría to pelota mixteca is probably tied to the change of the implements used in the hule variant of the game, which consisted of the creation of a glove used in the game and a change in the size of the ball. These changes were instigated by Daniel Pacheco Ramírez (Fig. 12), a butcher and Pelota a Mano Fría player who lived in the town of Ejutla de Crespo in the southern Sierra region of Oaxaca. In 1911, after having injured his hand while working, Daniel

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<sup>2</sup> Taladoire (2003: 320) refers to this *reglamento* as Peralta (1903), Inzúa (1985: 102) says that the document was written/published in 1905. I follow Pérez (1997), because that publication includes a copy of Peralta’s *reglamento*.

Pacheco sought a way to protect his hand while playing, so that he could still participate in important pelota matches. He found the solution when he cut off two pieces of leather from his saddle and sewed them together. He added two strings to be able to tie the pad to his hand, and this way the first rudimentary glove for pelota mixteca de hule was created (Fig. 13). After playing with this pad on his hand for a while, Daniel Pacheco noticed that he could strike the ball with greater force, giving him an advantage in the game. Appreciating the difference, Daniel Pacheco created a more sturdy leather glove, which consisted of three layers of leather and weighed about 200 grams (Fig. 14). This glove was first introduced around 1915. Because of the advantages that the gloves afforded Daniel Pacheco, other players also started using them, enabling Daniel Pacheco to become a fulltime artisan, producing gloves for pelota mixteca. Around 1920, Daniel Pacheco started to add *pulseras*, little iron rings, to the glove to improve the strength with which the ball could be hit. The next step, around 1930, was to add nails to the glove. This was possible because the glove now consisted of so many layers of leather that short nails could be hammered into it. By this time, the glove weighed around 1500 grams and the small ball made of natural rubber, which weighed about 150 grams, was hit with such force that a bigger ball was needed. Therefore, the ball was made larger and heavier, about 200 grams (Fig. 15).

Until the 1950s, the ball was made of natural rubber and had to be kept in a sock or legging, to prevent it from flattening out. Eight days before a game would be played, the ball would be taken out of the sock and rolled between the hands, to make sure that it would be perfectly round. This all changed when the process of vulcanizing rubber became more widespread and Agustín Pacheco Morga, the son of Daniel Pacheco who had started to help his father in the workshop at a very young age, devised a 'vulcanizadora' with which balls of vulcanized rubber could be produced. The decorations on the gloves (Fig. 16) started around 1960 and were an idea of Agustín Pacheco. He was inspired by the 'grecoas prehispanicas' that he saw in archaeological sites such as Mitla. Ironically, these decorations have sometimes been taken by archaeologists to be indications of the pre-Columbian origin of the gloves used in pelota mixteca.

Because of the advantages that the big glove afforded the players, pelota mixteca gloves kept growing in size until around 1980, when the glove reached a weight of five to six kilograms. With this weight the gloves had reached their limit, since heavier gloves could hardly be lifted to strike the ball and no longer provided an advantage in the game. With these bigger gloves also came bigger balls. A standard contemporary glove weighs around 5.2 kilograms. A standard ball weighs around 920 grams. Still, the weight of the glove depends on the preferences of the individual players, as well as their positions on the court.



At the moment, there are only two people who are skilled in making gloves for pelota mixteca de hule, these are Agustín Pacheco Morga and his son Leobardo Pacheco Vásquez. Even though Agustín Pacheco still visits the workshop from time to time, he has retired due to old age. Around Oaxaca and in the city of Mexico some players of the game have rudimentary knowledge of how to repair the gloves but the only artisans creating the gloves are Agustín and Leobardo Pacheco, following a family tradition. Recently, some artisans outside the Pacheco family have started creating pelota mixteca de hule balls, incorporating new, non-traditional designs (Figs. 17, 18). These 'newcomers' have been rather successful in that many of the balls that are currently used in the USA are made by an artisan from Mexico City. Players have also started to decorate their own gloves in 'modern' ways, especially in the United States. Gloves are now sometimes decorated with the logos of well-known sports teams, for example the Los Angeles Raiders, or with brand logos, such as Nike (Fig. 19). Whether other artisans will start making gloves as well is a question of whether the Pacheco family will be able to pass on the knowledge of how to manufacture these truly unique objects.

Since Pelota a Mano Fría, as the name already indicates, was played barehanded - though Peralta (1901) mentions the wrapping of the hand with a cotton band for protection - the shift to the use of gloves meant that the game could no longer be called Pelota a Mano Fría and thus it needed a new name. If this analysis is correct and the change of the name was caused by the introduction of gloves for the game, the name pelota mixteca was probably introduced somewhere between 1920 and 1930. Why this name became pelota mixteca and not Pelota Oaxaqueña or Pelota Zapoteca, which seems equally probable since the game is played in different areas of Oaxaca and by several indigenous Mesoamerican peoples, is unknown. An explanation is suggested by Leobardo Pacheco Arias (n.d.), who links the choice for pelota mixteca to the prevailing view of Oaxacan archaeology in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Pacheco Arias, after the 1932 discovery of the Mixtec Tomb 7 at the famous archaeological site Monte Albán, the central valley of the state of Oaxaca was thought to have been conquered by Mixtecs at the end of the Late Postclassic period (1300 – 1521). This conquest was thought to have led to a hybrid culture called Mixteca-Zapoteca, based on the introduction of Mixtec cultural elements. As a result, Pacheco Arias suggests that pelota mixteca may have been thought to have been introduced by the Mixtecs at the start of the Mixteca-Zapoteca period, which itself was the result of Mixtec invasions in the central valley of Oaxaca. While this scenario is interesting in view of the attitude of the Mexican state towards pelota mixteca as a 'deporte ancestral' (see chapter 6 and 7), it is not entirely clear why pelota mixteca would have been thought to have been introduced during the 'Mixtec invasion'. In the 1930s, the game was played enthusiastically in many parts of Oaxaca. The invention of the pelota mixteca gloves even took place in Ejutla de Crespo, in the Zapotec part of the state, rather than in the

Mixteca. Additionally, there was no evidence of a Mixtec pre-Columbian ballgame in the archaeological record that would have made archaeologists believe that the game would have originated there. Still, as Pacheco Arias implies, it is quite possible that the name pelota mixteca, rather than being a bottom-up invention, was a top-down imposition by archaeologists or anthropologists, or by members of the Oaxacan state legislature who wanted to promote indigenous and autochthonous culture after the Mexican Revolution.

The hypothesis that the change in name of the game was caused by the change in implements is partly confirmed by an intriguing mention of Pelota a Mano Fría in the extensive ethnographic work of Basilio Rojas 'Miahuatlán, un pueblo de Mexico' (1958-64). In his section on games, Rojas notes that "el juego de pelota a mano fría es el que más adeptos tiene" (1962: 401), followed by a description of the game. Since this work was compiled in the 1950s and 60s, it is interesting that the game is still called Pelota a Mano Fría, instead of pelota mixteca. Additionally, Rojas mentions that "la pelota de guante se jugó mucho en Miahuatlán, teniendo las mismas reglas que la de mano fría, con la diferencia de jugarse con unos guantes que tenían la figura de un ovoide hueco cortado longitudinalmente, y con él aventaban la pelota como se hace con la cesta vasca" (ibid.: 402). This other 'gloved game' was played with a ball made of rubber, which had a lead bullet in its center, to give extra weight to the ball. Rojas notes that Miahuatlán produced some legendary players in this game and that games would be played between Miahuatlán and Ejutla, drawing large numbers of spectators. From Rojas' description it seems that this game is not the same as pelota mixteca. The description of the gloves used for this game make one think, as Rojas mentions, of the 'basketgloves' used for the Basque game of *Cesta Punta*, or *Jai Alai*. These gloves were first introduced at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by a player of Basque origin living in Buenos Aires called Melchor Guruceaga (Méndez Muñiz 1990:32). It seems that Rojas is describing a variety of *Pelota Vasca* here, which apparently gained popularity over the whole of Latin America. In any case, he mentions that "cayó este juego cuando los trastornos guerreros dividieron a las gentes de nuestro pueblo en el segundo decenio del siglo actual, quedando sólo su recuerdo en la mente de los supervivientes de aquel tiempo" (Rojas 1962:403).

### ***Documentation on the historical development of pelota mixteca***

#### *The reglamentos*

Apart from the name change, the study of pelota mixteca's historical development is complicated by the fact that there is no documentation of pelota mixteca/pelota a mano fría predating the early twentieth century. The earliest documents concerning the game are *reglamentos*, rule books that describe the way in which the game should be played. These *reglamentos* were written by players,

for players and are simple descriptions of the way the game is played. They also form the only primary sources, if we can call them that, on the game. Naturally, however, they do not tell us anything about the origins of the game, its historical development or about the way the game spread over the state of Oaxaca. In any case, the historical moment in which these documents were drafted and published might be significant for two reasons. A first point is that, in the late nineteenth- and the early twentieth centuries Western sports were introduced in Mexico (see also chapter 7). As opposed to traditional sports and games, which often had rules that differed from place to place and which had no codified regulations, these Western sports were clearly regulated and were played according to standardized rules. The introduction of these sports might have inspired players of *pelota mixteca*/*pelota a mano fría* to come to a clearer standardization of the rules of their game. A second factor that might have influenced the creation of *reglamentos* is that the early twentieth century marked the beginning of labor migration that brought (indigenous) inhabitants of small communities in the Oaxacan countryside to places far removed from their hometowns. When describing the creation of the regulations of American football, a mixture of European football and rugby, Maarten van Bottenburg (1994: 119) has argued that the rules for this game needed to be better-defined and circumscribed than those of its European precursors. According to van Bottenburg, the rules of football (soccer) and rugby were clear enough to English players of these games, because they were based on a long tradition of negotiation and compromise within playing communities. In contrast, for American students who wanted to play these games, the rules were open for interpretation. They had no older, more experienced players to whom they could turn for an explanation of the rules. As a result, the rules needed to be set down clearly, so that all players could agree on the way the game was played. There might be a parallel here between the formation of American football and *pelota mixteca* being played outside of its traditional communities. The start of larger-scale migration in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century ensured that similar groups of migrants started playing the game in new locations, and met other players from different source communities, who might not have agreed on the rules. In this new context, clear and uniform regulations for the game were needed in order to be able to play together in a new social setting. Significant in this respect is the fact that the oldest rule book for *pelota a mano fría* that has been found to date, written in 1901, was kept in Mexico City rather than in Oaxaca (Perez 1997).

#### *Anthropological and archaeological studies*

Apart from the *reglamentos* that were published in the first half of the twentieth century, which we could term primary sources, several descriptions of *pelota a mano fría*/*pelota mixteca* exist in

ethnographic and archaeological literature. The earliest of these descriptions that I was able to find was written around 1910 by Manuel Martínez Gracida, a well-known author, anthropologist and archaeologist from Oaxaca. In the fifth volume of his extensive publication on the ethnography and archaeology of Oaxaca he describes a ballgame – to which he simply refers as Juego de Pelota – that is played in the city of Oaxaca. From his discussion, in which he uses terms such as *escase*, *botadera* and *raya* to describe the game, it is clear that Pelota a Mano Fría is being described. The court is described as being outlined by cords (*'cuerdas'*), which form the *escases*. Interestingly, Martínez Gracida (1910) remarks that the *pasajuego* of Oaxaca “tenía el suelo enladrillado y tres paredes: la del oeste y sur altas y la del este más baja”. This description refers to a type of court which is outlined by walls, rather than by *escases*. Two variations of this type of court existed, one which only had a wall at the end of the field, which was called *frontón*, the other which also had one or two lateral walls, which were termed *piquete* (cf. Bolaños Cacho 1947; see Fig. 20). Nowadays, these variations of pelota mixteca are no longer played. However, in the first half of the twentieth century, there were at least three pelota mixteca courts in the city of Oaxaca, one which had no walls, one which had only a *frontón* and one which had both a *frontón* and a *piquete* (Juan Rodríguez, personal communication). This type of court was still in use in the 1950s (Grace 1954, quoted in Taladoire 2003), but its use has died out since then. These features are important when examining the possible pre-Columbian or European origins of pelota mixteca, a discussion to which I will return a little further on.

In addition to Martínez Gracida's work, there are only a few mentions of pelota mixteca in ethnographic literature. For Mitla, where pelota mixteca is played today, Elsie Parson's (1936) mentions that no organized ballgames were played in the town before the introduction of basketball in 1935. However, she does mention a game in which boys played with a ball that skipped off their wrist. While it is impossible to determine from Parson's brief mention whether she is talking about pelota mixteca, she might be referring to the game here. Taylor (1960) notes that pelota mixteca was played in Teotitlán del Valle in 1956/7, saying that “there is a game played by the men on Sunday afternoons on a large, dirt court at the southern edge of town. A small, black ball is employed, but the rules of the game were not learned. Informants say that it was learned from the Mixtecs.” Sadly, this information on the possible spread of pelota mixteca from the Mixtecs to the Zapotecs is not elaborated upon. Hence, it is not clear whether this was presented to Taylor as an historical fact or whether it was assumed that the game was learned from the Mixtecs because of its name.

The Handbook of Middle American Indians (1967) mentions that, together with basketball, pelota mixteca was a favorite game among the Chocho, an indigenous people linguistically related to the

Mixtecs living in the north of Oaxaca. For the Chatino, it is mentioned that “a form of handball common in rural Oaxaca is still played, but schools have introduced basketball and volleyball, and teams of older boys compete at these sports” (HMAI 1969: 365). It seems probable that the handball game referred to is, in fact, *pelota mixteca*. Interestingly, the entries for the Mixtec and the Zapotec do not mention any specific sports being played. The only mention of sporting activities that is made in the Mixtec entry states that “group sporting events are limited to acculturated settlements” (1969: 396). Of course, it is no surprise that mid-twentieth century ethnographic descriptions of (indigenous) Oaxacan communities mention that *pelota mixteca* is played, since we know that the game was played by Oaxacan migrants in Mexico City as early as the 1930s or 40s. The lack of interest on the part of anthropologists in the specifics of the game, considering for example the lack of detailed description by Taylor (1960) or the only cursory mention of the game for the Chatino in the HMAI (1969) is, however, noteworthy.

While *pelota mixteca* is not mentioned in many ethnographic studies of the daily life of (indigenous) Oaxacan communities, it is often included in works that focus primarily on the pre-Columbian Mesoamerican ballgame. Mostly, these works are concerned with the architectural, ritual and political aspects of the Mesoamerican hip ball game but do also include a section on ‘the surviving varieties’ of this pre-Columbian game. Apart from *pelota mixteca*, these chapters on contemporary games generally include *ulama*, a hip ball game still played in western Mexico, *pelota tarasca*, a handball game very similar to *pelota mixteca* played in the Tarascan region in Michoacán and Guerrero, *pelota p’urépecha*, a game similar to hockey also played by the P’urépecha (Tarascans), and *rarájpuami*, a sort of race with a ball which is played by the Rarámuri (Tarahumara) of northwestern Mexico (see for example Cortés Ruiz 1986, 1992; Inzúa C. 1985; Sweezey 1972; Turok 2000). While a few of these publications mention that these indigenous ballgames might have been influenced by European games in a general manner (e.g. Turok 2000), the inclusion of these games in volumes on the pre-Columbian game implies that these games are generally seen as being of pre-Columbian origin. Nonetheless, authors working on topics other than the archaeology of Mesoamerica have argued that *pelota mixteca* is actually a game form of European origin, introduced after the Spanish Conquest. Below, I will present a brief overview, in chronological order, of the different views on the origins of *pelota mixteca* that have been set forth in the literature.

### ***Spanish, pre-Columbian, or mixed origin?***

#### *Pelota mixteca as a ‘pre-Columbian survival’*

Most archaeologists who have dealt with *pelota mixteca* in the past have regarded the game as a tradition of purely pre-Columbian origin. The first archaeologists to mention *pelota mixteca* - apart

from Martínez Gracida (1910), who does not try to relate Pelota a Mano Fría to the pre-Columbian ball game - are Hugo Acosta and Jorge Moedano Koer (1946:366-7). When discussing the present-day survival of the Mesoamerican ballgame, they mention that “los [que juegan pelota mixteca] cuentan el partido por tantos y rayas como en la época precortesiana” (*ibid.*:366), implying that they consider pelota mixteca to be a game of pre-Columbian origin.

Arguably, the scholar most convinced of the pre-Columbian origin of pelota mixteca was Ignacio Bernal, who worked at the site of Dainzú and linked the iconography of that site directly to pelota mixteca. In chapter 3, I will present a more detailed treatment of Bernal’s arguments, for now it suffices to say that Bernal considered the Late Preclassic relief carvings from Dainzú to be representations of an ancient version of pelota mixteca.

The first archaeologist to consider the relationship between European games and indigenous Mesoamerican games is Stéphane de Borhegyi, who, rather than postulating any European influences on Mesoamerican games, notes that “such sixteenth century, European hand-protecting equipment as the loophandled and spiked wooden hand and knee protectors [...] used in the Pallone games in [Europe] were undoubtedly derived from or modified after the Mesoamerican loophandled, spike-studded stone manoplas” (1969:510). He also mentions that some contemporary indigenous games played in Mexico still use a kind of manopla, implicitly referring to pelota mixteca. Clearly, de Borhegyi considered pelota mixteca to be of pre-Columbian origin, having influenced European handball games after the Spanish conquest.

William Swezey (1972) was, to my knowledge, the first archaeologist to publish a research article devoted solely to pelota mixteca. This article contains a description of pelota mixteca and mentions some similarities that Swezey sees between the pre-Columbian ballgame and the 20<sup>th</sup> century game. Sadly, most of these similarities seem to be inspired more by Swezey’s wish to ‘find something old’ in the game, than by actual research into the details and historical development of pelota mixteca. Some possible analogies between pelota mixteca and the pre-Columbian ballgame that Swezey mentions are the use of *rayas* in pelota mixteca and their similarity “to the ball court markers found in association with the ball courts in Copan and Xochicalco [...], the serving stone of the pelota mixteca [*botadera*] and the circular stone uncovered in the center of the ball court at Monte Alban, [and] the receiving area in the pelota mixteca court and the ends of the Classic ball courts found in Mesoamerica” (*ibid.*: 473). While it is possible that some of these features indeed served comparable functions in their respective games, we will see below that the *rayas* and the *botadera* are typical features of European handball games, and were most probably introduced by the Spaniards after the conquest. Furthermore, Swezey, considering the *manoplas* (or knuckle-dusters) depicted on several Olmec monuments, states that “it is feasible to equate in form, some functions

and some uses the gauntlets used by the player of the pelota mixteca today with the “knuckle-duster” represented by the Olmec “knuckle-duster”” (*ibid.*: 474). However, I have shown above that pelota mixteca actually evolved out of pelota a mano fría, which was played without the use of a glove/gauntlet, and that the glove that is used for pelota mixteca de hule today was invented by Daniel Pacheco in 1911. Hence, we can be sure that this analogy is incorrect.

Lilian Scheffler and Regina Reynoso (1985: 48) also see pelota mixteca as a pre-Columbian game, mentioning that pelota mixteca is one of “los juegos de Pelota de origen prehispánico que subsisten hasta la actualidad”, and that it might be related to a ballgame depicted on the murals of Tepantitla in Teotihuacan. Similar to Scheffler and Reynoso, Cortés Ruiz (1992: 169) hypothesizes the existence of a pre-Hispanic Mesoamerican handball game, from which pelota mixteca must be derived.

Cortés Ruiz’s hypothesis of the existence of a pre-Columbian handball game was inspired by Eric Taladoire’s work on the archaeological evidence for the existence of an ancestor of pelota mixteca (1977, 2003). In his most recent work on the topic, Taladoire (2003) has related pelota mixteca to the *palangana* type ballcourts, which are found in parts of Mesoamerica, most prominently in Guatemala and parts of Oaxaca (also see chapter 3). Even though Taladoire accepts the value of more recent work on the possible European origin of pelota mixteca (see below), he does state that “we can [...] assert with reasonable security that the *Pelota mixteca* can be traced up to late pre-Hispanic times” (*ibid.*: 329).

#### *Pelota mixteca as an import*

In contrast to the views presented above, some authors have argued that pelota mixteca is a game of European origin, rather than a continuation of a pre-Columbian handball game. The first to state that pelota mixteca was not a game of pre-Columbian origin was Theodore Stern. In his classic “The Ballgames of the Americas” (1949) Stern mentions that handball games played in contemporary Mexico – like pelota mixteca – are all of European origin, on the basis of linguistic evidence. He argues that, because not one of these ballgames has the word ‘olli’, Nahuatl for rubber or rubber ball, in its name in a 16<sup>th</sup> century dictionary compiled by Fray Alonso de Molina, they cannot be of pre-colonial origin. We will treat the 16<sup>th</sup> century dictionaries in more detail later, but I must say that I find myself in agreement with Swezey, when he says that: “this is analogous to saying that today linguistic evidence alone would indicate that football, baseball, and basketball are obvious ball games since the word ball is contained within their rubric, but soccer, rugby, and polo are games that do not employ a ball” (Swezey 1972:471).

A second objection to seeing pelota mixteca as a direct pre-Columbian survival, one which finds its basis in more elaborate research than Stern’s hypothesis, is made by Heiner Gillmeister (1988,

1998). While Gillmeister has not made an in-depth study of pelota mixteca, he argues, on the basis of an exhaustive study of the handball games played in Europe in the Middle Ages, that pelota mixteca is actually a game of European origin. According to Gillmeister (1998), pelota mixteca is part of a family of handball games that originated in Europe in the Early Middle Ages and that evolved into different local varieties, one of which is modern-day tennis. Below, I will test Gillmeister's hypothesis by comparing pelota mixteca to two European games; 1. a detailed description of *pilota valenciana*, a traditional handball game played in Spain today, and 2. a description of a traditional handball game played in The Netherlands in 1430, as described by a 15<sup>th</sup>-century Dutch writer.

## ***Pelota mixteca and Pilota Valenciana, a comparison***

### *The Rules*

Several traditional ballgames still exist in modern-day Spain. One of these games is Pilota Valenciana, which is played in the region around Valencia, in the eastern part of the country. Like pelota mixteca, Pilota Valenciana has several different modalities that vary in playing style, court, and rules. García and Llopis (1991) in their *Vocabulari del joc de Pilota* mention 40 different modalities of play, but for my purposes I will concentrate on three modalities of the game: *Llargues*, *Galotxa* and *Perxa*. The first is normally played outside, the latter two can be played either inside in a court – called *trinquet* in Valencian – or outside on the street.

The most interesting of the three games for comparative purposes is the game of *llargues*. To be able to appreciate the resemblances between *llargues* and pelota mixteca the description that Garcia and Llopis give in their *Vocabulari* is worth quoting at length. This description also includes two definitions of the word *llargues*, both of which are relevant to our purposes. To facilitate understanding, I have translated the text from Valencian into English:

*Llargues*: 1. A modality of the ballgame, which was more popular in the past and which formed the basis for several other variants of the game. It is practiced on a court of 8 to 10 meters wide, which is divided transversally by three lines, two that mark the limits of the playing field, that of the *traure* [service] and that of the *quinze*, and the third one, the *ratlla de falta*, which is placed between 50 and 60 paces from the service line, depending on the *pacte*. It is played by two teams of four players, among whom the player who effectuates the *traure* is the most important one. The game consists of hitting the ball, always directly from the air or after the first bounce, until one of the teams wins a *quinze* when the other hits the ball outside the *ratlles de quinze*. Its most important and interesting characteristic is the system of the *ratlles* [lines]. The whole game revolves around these *ratlles*, one team



trying to win them, the other trying to defend them. This variety of the game follows the scoring system of *quinze*, game, and match.

2. *a llargues*: general term used to describe the pilota valenciana games, in contrast to the Basque pelota games, which are played against a *frontó* [wall/*frontón*].

(Garcia and Llopis 1991:137)<sup>3</sup>

Several characteristics of the *llargues* game are very similar to pilota mixteca. In the first place, the size of the court; with a width of about 8 to 10 meters the *llargues* court is about as wide as a pilota mixteca court. The court is outlined by three transversal lines: the *ratlla del traure* (service line) and the *ratlla del quinze* (line of the *quinze*) at both ends, and the *ratlla de falta* (fault line) in between. The distance between the service line and the line of the *quinze*, is said to be around 80 paces, giving the whole court a length of about 60 to 80 meters, equivalent to the older pilota mixteca courts. The fault line that splits the court into two zones is about 50 to 60 paces from the service line, giving us approximately the same division as in pilota mixteca.

Interestingly, Garcia and Llopis remark that the *ratlla de falta* can be drawn somewhere between 50 to 60 paces from the service line, depending on the *pacte*. The *pacte* is described in the same vocabulary as an “agreement in which the two teams establish the conditions of a game, in regards to the rules of the game and the bets that will be placed” (*ibid.*:151)<sup>4</sup>. This is very reminiscent of the *juegos de compromiso* that are played in pilota mixteca, in which the *botadera*, the ‘service stone’, is placed at different distances from the *cajón*, depending on the rules agreed upon beforehand. Also interesting in this context is the mention of bets (*travesses*) that are agreed upon beforehand in the *pacte*, an indispensable element in Pilota Valenciana and pilota mixteca alike.

When comparing the rules of the game, some similarities with pilota mixteca are directly evident. The game is played by two teams of four players. Pelota mixteca is played in teams of five players in the case of *compromiso* games, but can also be played one-on-one, or in teams of two to four

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<sup>3</sup> *Llargues*: 1. Modalitat del joc de pilota, més estesa en temps passats, que ha donat origen a unes altres, que es practica en un carrer de 8 o 10 metres d'amplaria i que ve delimitat longitudinalment per tres ratlles, dues que en marquen els límits, la del traure i la del quinze, entre les quals solen haver-hi 80 passes, i la tercera, la ratlla de falta, la distancia de la qual respecte a la primera pot oscil·lar, segons el pacte, entre 50 i 60 passes. Hi participen dos equips de quatre pilotaires, entre els quals qui trau és el jugador més important i consisteix a colpejar la pilota, sempre a l'aire o al primer bot, d'un equip a l'altre, de tal manera que s'aconsegueix quinze quan s'ultrapassen les ratlles de quinze.

<sup>4</sup> 1. Tracte de paraula en el qual els dos equips estableixen les condicions d'una partida, tant pel que fa al joc com a les travesses, directament o per mitja dels padrins o apoderats.

players<sup>5</sup>. A second similarity is that the game consists of hitting the ball ‘directly from the air, or on the first bounce’, as in *pelota mixteca*. Also, Garcia and Llopis mention that *Llargues* is played ‘using the scoring system of *quinze, joc, and partida*’, reminding us of the *quinze, juego, and partido* in *pelota mixteca*.

One last point is that - as Garcia and Llopis already mention – most interestingly, there are the *ratllas* (or *rayas*, lines). According to Garcia and Llopis the whole game revolves around these *ratllas*, ‘one team trying to defend them, the other trying to gain them, in order to win the service’. As we have seen earlier, this system of scoring points by winning *rayas* is one of the characteristic elements of *pelota mixteca*. Looking at the description that Garcia and Llopis give of the way of scoring *ratllas* in *Pilota Valenciana*, there can be no doubt that both games use the same scoring system:

“*Ratlla*: [...] characteristic of the games of *llargues* and *raspall amb ratlles*, modalities that are sparsely played today, that came about when the ball was stopped before reaching the end of the playing field. At this point a marker was placed and a line was drawn that served as the dividing line in the *disputa de les ratlles*. If the team that played as the *rest* made to two *ratlles*, or one of the teams had *val* [40] and a *ratlle* was made, they would change to the *traure* [service] side. From this moment, the *ratlles* had to be disputed before anything else.”<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, this complicated *raya/ratlla* system is the same in *pilota valenciana* and *pelota mixteca*. While the way a *raya* is formed differs somewhat between the two games, the rule in *pilota valenciana* being a somewhat antiquated version, the way the *rayas* are disputed is, undoubtedly, the same. In this description we also see the use of the words *rest* and *traure*. In *Pilota Valenciana* the team that receives the service is called *rest* (cf. *pelota mixteca resto*). The team that effectuates

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<sup>5</sup> A *reglamento* from 1977 (Plazola 1985), states “son cuatro los jugadores que deben integrar cada equipo”, especially for the games *de compromiso*. This *reglamento* seems to come from Mexico City, and it might be that the rules were different there around 1977. One player from Oaxaca, who played the game in the 1950s and 60s, told me that *pelota mixteca* was played with four people per team, others, however, told me that teams had always consisted of five players.

<sup>6</sup> “*Ratlla*: [...] 2. a. Situacio del joc a *llargues* o a *raspall amb ratlles*, modalitats molt poc practicades actualment, que es produia quan la pilota, sense arribar al fronto contrari, es deturava en un punt que s’assenyalava amb una marca i servia en la disputa de les ratlles com a linia divisoria del terreny de joc, amb la particularitat que, si l’equip que era al *rest* feia dues ratlles, encara que no s’hagues produït *quinze*, o una *ratlla* quan tenia *val* (40, MB), passava a *traure* (service, MB), de tal manera que a partir d’aquest moment s’havien de resoldre en primer lloc les *rattles*”

the services is called *contrarest*, and the player that serves the ball is sometimes called *saque*, though *saque* is actually a Spanish loanword in Valencian (cf. pelota mixteca: *contraresto*, *saque*).

#### *Galotxa, Perxa, and the Dau*

The games of *galotxa* and *perxa* are variations on the game of *llargues* that generally follow the same rules, but have one important characteristic that sets them apart. In *galotxa* and *perxa*, an extra line is drawn on the field, creating a zone that is called the *dau*, in which the service has to fall and which has a length of five to six meters. The *dau* in the Valencian games is thus the same as the *cajón* in pelota mixteca. Interestingly, Bolaños Cacho in his *reglamento* (1947), mentions that, “en dos formas se puede llevar a cabo la competencia “partido a largo” [Spanish for the Catalan/Valencian word *llargues*] y “partidos a raya”, esta última es la más usual y se diferencia estriba en el trazo de una línea más en el campo de juego que limita el terreno en donde forzosamente debe ir la pelota al ser lanzada en ‘saque’”. Here we see the same difference between ‘partido a largo’ and ‘partido a raya’, as between the games of *llargues* on the one hand and *galotxa* and *perxa* on the other. The games without the use of the *cajón* (largo) are, to my knowledge, not played anymore in Mexico.

#### *The service and the architectural setting*

Whereas the normal service in the Valencian game is called *traure* (or *saque*), varieties of the game that use the *dau* have a different kind of service that is called *ferida*. Apart from the fact that it has to fall inside the *dau*, the *ferida* is distinguished from the *traure* by the fact that the ball has to be bounced on the *pedra* before being hit to the other side. The *pedra* is a square that is marked on the ground on one lateral side of the court, which is placed in approximately the same position as the *botadera* in pelota mixteca and serves the same function.

The *ferida* is mostly used in games that are played outside, as opposed to the *traure* that is generally used in variants of Pilota Valenciana that are played in a court, called *trinquet*. The *trinquet* is an enclosed court that is between 7,58 and 9,90 meters wide, and between 56 and 58 meters long (Garcia and Llopis 1991:103). The walls at the back of the court are called *frontóns*, and the walls at the lateral sides are called *muralles*. Both Peralta (1901) and Bolaños Cacho (1947) mention that pelota mixteca courts can have no walls, only a *frontón*, or a *frontón* and *piquete*, reminding us of the aforementioned description by Martínez Gracida (1910) of the court in the city of Oaxaca. As we can see in figure 12 the *frontón* is the wall at the back of the court, like in the Valencian game. We do not find the name of the *piquete* anywhere in the vocabulary of Pilota Valenciana, but in the description of the *ferida* Garcia and Llopis (1991:118) do mention that “in the trinquet, after having

bounced the ball on the *pedra*, the service has to touch the wall to the right side of the *pedra* in such a way that it hits the wall [*pique* in Valencian] above the *ratlla de la ferida*<sup>7</sup>. This could be a possible origin of the name *piquete* for the lateral wall in pelota mixteca.

### *The Escases*

The lines delineating the playing field in pelota mixteca are called *escases*. Though there is no term resembling *escase* in the Valencian Pelota games, the Basque-Spanish dictionary does have the entry *eskas*, with the meaning “línea en el frontón” (Lopez-Mendizabal 1977). The frontón is a variant of the same family of European handball games. Pelota mixteca, thus, does not only have linguistic resemblances with Pilota Valenciana, but also has traces of the Pelota Vasca/Euskal Pilota games.

### *Pelota mixteca and Pilota Valenciana, similar games*

From the comparison made above, it is clear that pelota mixteca and pilota valenciana are essentially the same game. They use the same scoring system, are played on a court that has similar dimensions and divisions and both games use similar terms for special characteristics of the game. Naturally, some changes have occurred over time which have changed some aspects of the games, causing some difference in the exact court size, some details of the scoring system and, of course, the equipment used for the game. Still, I am certain that pelota mixteca players could easily play a match against players of Valencian *llargues*, without too much confusion. Hence, the question arises, if both games are indeed descendants of the same original game, should we search for the origins of this game in Europe? Or do they share a common pre-Columbian origin, having spread from Mexico to Europe after the Spanish conquest, as was suggested, for example, by de Borhegyi (1969)? In order to answer this question, I will briefly examine the history of handball games played in Europe around the time of the Spanish conquest, arguing that these formed the basis for the modern-day game of pelota mixteca. In the next chapter I will have a more detailed look at the ballgames that were played in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, in order to determine whether any elements of these games might still be present in pelota mixteca or might even have influenced European ballgames.

## ***European ballgames of the Middle Ages***

### *Ballgames in general*

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<sup>7</sup> “al trinquet, després de botar la pilota contra la pedra, l’haura d’enviar contra la muralla que té a la dreta, de tal forma que hi pique per dalt la ratlla de la ferida.”

Pilota Valenciana forms part of a group of handball games that have been played in several parts of Europe since the Middle Ages (Gillmeister 1988, 1998; de Bondt 1993, 1997; Breuker 1997; Stemmler 1988). These games share three defining features, which are also characteristic of pelota mixteca: 1. the scoring system; i.e. four winning strikes earn a 'game', 2. the rule of the *raya/ratlla/chaza/kaats/chase*, as explained above, and 3. the game is played by two teams opposing each other, one team being the serving team, the other the receiving team (de Bondt 1997:37). Modalities of this family of sports can nowadays be found in Spain (the different varieties of Pilota Valenciana and Pelota Vasca/Euskal Pilota, and the *pelotamano* of the Canary Islands), Italy (*palla bracciale, tamburello*), Sweden (*pärkspele*), France and Belgium (*jeu de pelote*), and The Netherlands (*kaatsen*) (Gillmeister 1998; Breuker 1997a). The best-known member of this family of sports, though quite recent and not retaining the important *chase/chaza* characteristic, is the game of tennis.

The origin of this family of games lies in northern France where, somewhere around the year 1000 CE, a handball game was played by monks in the cloisters of their monasteries (Gillmeister 1998:ch.1; de Bondt 1997:37; Stemmler 1988; see Fig. 21). This ballgame consisted of hitting a ball back and forth between two persons or teams, trying to score points by getting the ball into the typical arcaded galleries of the cloisters. There is no room or need to go into the history of the way this particular game evolved to become a popular game around the whole of Europe, played by kings, noblemen, monks, and commoners alike<sup>8</sup>. The fact is that, around 1500 CE, a ballgame very similar to Pilota Valenciana was played from Spain to the Netherlands, and from England to Italy. One of the defining characteristics of these games is the so-called *chase* rule (cf. pelota mixteca *chacero*, one who administers the *chases*). This *chase* rule was the basis of the rule of the *raya* or *ratlla*, outlined above. Until approximately the start of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, this *chase* rule entailed that a *chase* (line) would be drawn at the point at which the ball was stopped after the second bounce. This rule is still used in some modern varieties of the handball game, such as the Italian *pantalera*. The more recent *raya* rule, which is used in pelota mixteca - in which the line is drawn at the point where the ball bounces for the second time, as opposed to at the point where the ball is stopped by a player - originated somewhere in the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century in France, and spread to Spain from there (Gillmeister 1998: 41). This complex defining characteristic of both *llargues* and pelota mixteca, is thus of European origin. Clearly, pelota mixteca is part of a family of handball games that originated in Europe around the year 1000 CE. A brief comparison between a 15<sup>th</sup>-century

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<sup>8</sup> For an excellent treatment of the history of these games, see Gillmeister (1998)

description of one of these games and modern-day pelota mixteca shows that pelota mixteca is formally of European origin.

### *Dat Kaetspel ghemoralizeert*

In *Dat Kaetspel ghemoralizeert*, a document written around 1430 by Jan van den Berghe and published in Bruges, the traditional Dutch handball game *kaetsen* is used as an allegory to write about the judicial system of the day (Roetert 1915). While van den Berghe does not provide many details about the way the game is played, some interesting passages in the book give us hints as to the game's rules. Firstly, van den Berghe mentions that the game is administered by a referee who should draw the *kaetsen* (lines/*rayas*) – “so they need two types of servants / one to honestly and well draw the *kaetsen* / and he should not draw unfair / more for the good of one party / than of the other”<sup>9</sup> (Roetert 1915:9). This passage perfectly describes the role of the *chacero* in modern pelota mixteca, who should keep track of the *rayas* that are made. We are also informed about the arrangements that are made for the game beforehand. These are reminiscent of the *compromisos* about bets and rules that are made in pelota mixteca – “the players tend to agree on how they will play / and what the game will do / and how much one will win or lose by playing / and all the like / and to be sure / that one really wants to play / so they tend to wager money or deposit”<sup>10</sup> (Roetert 1915:18). The most significant passages in the work of van den Berghe are found on Folio 20b. and 33b. On fol. 20b. van den Berghe writes, “so they begin their game [...] and the one who wins four *kaetsen* / wins the game”<sup>11</sup> (Roetert 1915:42). On fol. 33b., van den Berghe describes the way in which teams change sides, after having drawn two *kaetsen*, like in pelota mixteca – “and when two *kaetsen* have been made / so those that were in go out / and those that were out go in / to win the two *kaetsen* that have been made”<sup>12</sup> (Roetert 1915:XXVII). Finally, concerning the scoring system, van den Berghe mentions that, “before it is said how the game is won by four *kaetsen* / but there it

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<sup>9</sup> “so es hemlieden van nooden te hebbene twee manieren van dienaers / den eenen omme te teekenen wel ende ghetrouwelike de kaetsen / Ende ne behoort niet dat hij onghetrouwelike teekene / meer ter bate van der eenre partije / danne van der andere”

<sup>10</sup> “de kaetsers pleghen overeen te draghene hoe diere dat zij spelen willen / ende wat tspel doen sal / ende hoe vele dat men winnen of verliesen sal metten spele / Ende als zij dies eens sijn / ende van accoorde / daer men zekere spelen wille / zo pleecht men ghelt of pant bij te stellene”

<sup>11</sup> “zo beghinnen sij haer spel [...] Ende so wije die vier kaetsen wint / die winnet spel”

<sup>12</sup> “Ende als twee kaetsen ghemaect sijn / zo gaen buten diere binnen waren / ende die buten waren gaen binnen spelen / omme die twee kaetsen diere ghemaect sijn te winnen.”

is not said how [much] the players win with one strike / XV. And this is a little strange that they count or win more / than one / with one *kaetse* / but they win with one *kaetse*. XV. And with two *kaetsen*. XXX/ and with three *kaetsen* XLV. And with four *kaetsen* LX. And then the game is won”<sup>13</sup> (Roetert 1915:63). All the above mentioned passages could have been taken from a rulebook written for pelota mixteca.

Given that van den Berghe’s description of *kaetsen* dates to around 1430, there is no possibility that the game that he describes was influenced by any Mesoamerican game. Instead, all the evidence points to the fact that pelota mixteca is played according to a set of rules that are of European origin. Apart from the peculiar 15-30-40-game count, the similarity of names of positions and the court size, the *chase/raya*-rule is of such complexity that it seems quite improbable that it would have been invented independently on two different continents (cf. Gillmeister 1988:25).

### ***Concluding remarks***

Over the past few pages, I have attempted to show that pelota mixteca is a member of a family of handball games that originated in Europe in the Middle Ages. While this means that the way pelota mixteca is played is of European origin, it does in no way mean that pelota mixteca is not a traditional, indigenous Mexican game. While we know little about when pelota mixteca was first played by people of Mixtec heritage, we do know that it was already considered a pre-Columbian game in the 1940s (Bolaños Cacho 1947), and the name pelota mixteca – obviously indicating a local heritage – was introduced sometime in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Implements used in the game - such as the glove used for pelota mixteca de hule, the board used for pelota mixteca de esponja, and the balls used for both of these games – are unique items, that were developed locally, and have no equivalents in Europe. I am adding these nuances to avoid the impression that I am suggesting that the formal European origin of pelota mixteca means that it is not a traditional Mexican game. Pelota mixteca is by all standards a traditional Mexican game, the existence of which can be traced back in documentation at least 100 years. Nonetheless, it was definitely played by indigenous and non-indigenous inhabitants of the state of Oaxaca long before its first mention in the literature. Over the course of these many years, pelota mixteca has become a traditional indigenous sport, with unique elements that were all developed locally. The origins of the way the game is played, however, should be sought in Europe, rather than in Mexico.

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<sup>13</sup> “Voren es gheseyt hoe dat tkaesspel ghewonnen es met vier kaetsen / maer daer en es niet gheseyt hoe dat de speelders winnen met eenen slaghe / XV. Ende dit es een ghedeelkin vreemde dat sy meer rekenen of winnen / dan een / met eenre kaetse / maer zy winnen met eenre kaetse. XV. Ende met twee kaetsen. XXX/ ende met drie kaetsen XLV. Ende met vier kaetsen LX. Ende danne zo es tspel ghewonnen.”

But if pelota mixteca is indeed of European origin, how, when, why and by whom was it introduced, why did it become so popular among the indigenous inhabitants of Oaxaca, and how did it come to be seen as an indigenous game, rather than a European import? While none of these questions can be answered in much detail, because of the lack of historical documentation on the game, in the next chapter I will attempt to come to an understanding of the social and cultural processes and conditions that led to the 'creation' of pelota mixteca.



## CHAPTER 3. Pelota mixteca and the Pre-Columbian Ballgame(s)

### *Introduction*

Considering the arguments presented in the previous chapter, we can assume that pelota mixteca – or, better said, Pelota a Mano (Fría) – was introduced to Mexico by Europeans, most probably Spaniards, sometime during the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Given that the 16<sup>th</sup>-century European hand-ballgame originally developed mainly in monasteries in Europe, and was played by monks and since an important part of the initial colonizers were friars and missionaries, the spread of this game may have occurred relatively early in the Colonial period. In Chihuahua, for example, a form of Basque handball was introduced in the 1560s by Francisco de Ibarra, who had received the encomienda of the province. Somewhat further afield, pelota a mano was played in Chile as early as 1536. Franciscan friars introduced the game of pelota in Occopa, Peru in 1725, where the game quickly gained popularity throughout the whole province and developed into a local game with specific rules, called *pelotaris* (Urza 1995).

In this context, the phrasing used by early 16<sup>th</sup>-century chroniclers while describing the way in which the pre-Columbian ballgame is played is significant. For instance, Fray Juan de Torquemada, in his *Monarquía Indiana*, refers to the owner of a pre-Columbian ballcourt as “El Dueño del Trinquete” (1969 [1615]:553) and notes on the *ollama* court that “llámase el lugar adonde se jugaba tlachco, que es como entre nosotros trinquete” (1975-1983 [1615], lib. XIV:342). To this day, the court in which Spanish handball games are played is called *trinquete*, or, in the case of *pilota valenciana*, *trinet*. When describing the rules of the indigenous game, Torquemada, who copied some of his information on the ballgame from the work of Motolinia, also explicitly compares *ollama* to Spanish handball games: “los que echaban [la pelota] por cima de la pared de frente o a tapar en la pared, ganaban una raya [...] y a tantas rayas primeras iba todo el juego, no hacían chazas” (1975-1983 [1615], lib. XIV: 342). The chronicler Motolinia (1971[1858]:381-2) refers to the stopping of the ball in *ollamalitzli* as making a “chaza”, the term used for stopping a ball in the traditional Spanish ballgames. It is clear that both Spanish chroniclers use European parallels to describe indigenous phenomena and concepts, in order to explain them to their European audiences. Torquemada equates the I-shaped ball court in which *ollama* was played with the traditional arena for Spanish handball games and both Torquemada and Motolinia use the concept of the *chaza* from the Spanish games to explain the scoring system of the Mesoamerican game. Clearly these 16<sup>th</sup> century

chroniclers, who were both Franciscan monks, were familiar with the European handball games, as were other Spanish missionaries, and could have taught the indigenous Mexicans how to play. The introduction of this new Spanish handball game was probably motivated not only by the Spaniards' love of the game, but especially by the prohibition of indigenous (religious) customs that took place after the Spanish Conquest. After the Spaniards had conquered the Aztecs, a process of conversion began in which anything that was even remotely related to indigenous rituals was banned and replaced by customs of which Christianity approved. Many Spaniards were deeply impressed by the qualities of the rubber balls that they saw for the first time, as well as by the ability of the players. In the words of Fray Diego Durán: "si ver jugar á la pelota con las manos á los de nuestra nación nos da tanto contento y espanto de ver la destreza y ligereza con que algunos la juegan quanto mas alabaremos a los que con tanta maña y destreza y gentileza la juegan con las asentaderas" (Durán 1967[1581]: 242). Still, one of the things that the Spanish missionaries forbade was the playing of the Mesoamerican ballgame, not only because of the cosmological and religious importance of the sport, but also because of the physical danger that it presented to the players, and the conflicts that arose within and between communities because of the games (Bushnell 1970:1, 17). As Juan de Pomar puts it in his *Relación de Texcoco* (1582), "al presente no lo juegan porque al principio de su conversión se les prohibió por los frailes, pensando que en él había algunos hechizos o encomiendas y pactos con el demonio."

However, around the time of the Conquest the hipball game was by no means solely a ritual game. It also had important social functions in a profane setting and was rooted firmly in the social structure of Mesoamerican societies. It was played as a regular pastime by the elites (Sahagún 1977[1569]:299) – and probably also by commoners (Durán 1967[1570]:209) -, during non-religious festivals, such as at markets (Durán 1967[1570]:200), and a formal court for playing was not even a necessity (Durán 1967[1570]:206). Many chroniclers, (e.g. Durán (1967[1570]:207-209), Sahagún (1977[1569]:299), Torquemada (1975-1983 [1615]: Lib. XIV)) note that, like in today's pelota mixteca, betting on the outcome of the games was an integral – if not constitutive – part of the actions surrounding the ballgame. Durán (1967[1570]:208) even mentions that professional players were supported by the elite to compete in matches against the players of other rulers. It seems that, more than being only a game played at religious festivals with a profound cosmological and religious significance, the hipball game was a social act. The game ranged from some people getting together and playing on a dirt court to a spectacle inside a *tlachco*, in which many people gathered to witness games where valuables and prestige were at stake (Miller and Houston 1987; de la Garza and Izquierdo 1980:333). In this sense, *ollama* was similar to modern-day sports like football or

basketball which can be played by children, amateurs and professionals alike, in widely differing contexts.

As a result, when the Spanish administration banned the playing of *ullamalitzli*, a void was created in the indigenous social structure, especially with regards to indigenous pastimes. While the religious/cosmological void was filled by rituals in church, a space was also created for the introduction of new games and some indigenous individuals and communities adopted the Spanish game of *pelota a mano* or *llargues* as a substitute for the pre-Columbian ballgame. If this hypothesis is correct, it would mean that *pelota mixteca* - while formally being a Spanish game – takes a similar place in the social structure of today's indigenous communities, when compared to pre-Columbian society. As such, it can in some way be seen as a continuation of a pre-Columbian practice, since there is a significant experiential continuity. Since the adoption of the game took place at an early moment during the Colonial period, the game has been played by many generations of Mixtecs and Zapotecs, and is by now an original indigenous game.

A possible implicit confirmation of this hypothesized early (16<sup>th</sup> century) adoption of Pelota a Mano by indigenous communities, is the difference in modern-day Mexico in the social status of *pelota mixteca* and the different modalities of Pelota Vasca, which are formally very similar. While Pelota mixteca is played by *indígenas*, and is considered to be an indigenous game which is confined to the social sphere of (rural) communities, Pelota Vasca is played both in rural and urban settings and by members of different social classes. We also see this divide in the description by Basilio Rojas (1958) of games played in Miahuatlán, a town in the Zapotec area of southern Oaxaca, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While Pelota Vasca was popular before the Mexican Revolution but disappeared after peace returned to the country, *pelota a mano fría* (*pelota mixteca*) was continuously played from long before the Mexican Revolution up to the present day. This implies that *pelota a mano fría* was much more firmly rooted in rural/*indígena* society at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century than Pelota Vasca, which was probably introduced sometime in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. While this is no proof of the early introduction of Pelota mixteca, it does suggest that Pelota mixteca – or, actually, Pelota a Mano Fria – was already a well-established sport among *indígenas* at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; this suggests that Pelota mixteca has been an indigenous game for at least 200 years, and probably more. But how did this Spanish introduction come to be seen as an indigenous game, especially since the Spanish games still exist and are still played in Mexico?

## ***From pelota to pelota mixteca***

When discussing the consequences of globalization for the creation of new (hybrid) cultures, Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2009: 86) asks “are cultural elements different merely because they originate from different cultures?” In the case of *pelota a mano* and *ullamalitzli* we could indeed question whether they are. Of course, the way of playing the games is widely different, and the profound religious significance of the Mesoamerican ballgame gave this game a dimension that did not exist in the European context. Nonetheless, as we have seen, the ‘profane version’ of the Mesoamerican ballgame was largely socially comparable to the Spanish games, which also included bets and were played by commoners and elites alike. Because of this “transcultural compatibility” (*ibid.*: 84), the introduction of *pelota a mano* may have taken place relatively fluidly. But how did *pelota a mano* come to be seen as *pelota mixteca*? To my mind there are four main factors that are particularly important in this process of *indigenization*

1. the early adoption of the game by indigenous peoples,
2. the unfamiliarity of researchers and players with traditional European games,
3. the local developments that took place, and
4. the change in the name of the game.

Because *pelota a mano* was introduced to Mexico at an early point in the Colonial era, the game has been played by indigenous Mexicans for hundreds of years and has become an indigenous game. Despite its formal Spanish origin, it has become firmly rooted into the social lives of indigenous, and non-indigenous, rural communities in Mexico. When modern sports and games such as football, basketball and volleyball were introduced, *pelota a mano fría/pelota mixteca* was positioned as the traditional alternative against which these modern games were contrasted. This automatically led to a view of *pelota mixteca* as a traditional, if not an indigenous, game.

At the same time, the traditional Spanish games, which formed the basis from which *pelota mixteca* developed, have lost their popularity over the past 100 to 150 years. Whereas, up to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Spanish games were the only sports/games that were played on a large scale in Mexico, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century introduction of modern sports like baseball, basketball and soccer, has driven the more traditional European sports to the background, to the point that they are in the same marginalized position in Europe as *pelota mixteca* is in Mexico. Since most players of the game (as well as most anthropologists and archaeologists) are not familiar with traditional European sports, the obvious similarities between the games were not recognized.

An interesting parallel in this respect can be seen in the game of *taladxi*, which is played in the southern Isthmus region of the state of Oaxaca. *Taladxi* is a form of baseball (the most popular sport

in lowland, tropical Mexico) in which exactly the same rules are used as in regular baseball, but which is played with bare hands and a soft ball, instead of a baseball bat and a regular baseball. Players of *taladxi* are all aware that the sport they are playing is but a modified version of baseball, since baseball is a sport many of them are avid fans of. However, if baseball were to lose its popularity in the US and become a little-known sport in Mexico, the knowledge of the rules (and existence) of baseball would be lost. As a consequence, it is quite probable that, over the course of several centuries, *taladxi* would come to be seen as a purely indigenous game, especially because the word *taladxi* is related to the 16<sup>th</sup> century Zapotec name *làchi* for the pre-Columbian rubber ball (Córdova 1942[1578]). *Pelota mixteca* followed this specific historical trajectory, from a sport that was played by many Europeans and adopted by indigenous members of Colonial society, to a sport that has been all but forgotten by Mexican mainstream society, but is a lively tradition inside Mexico's indigenous communities. This fact also accounts for the lack of descriptions of *pelota mixteca* in pre-20<sup>th</sup> century historical sources. Since traditional European sports were widely known and practiced before the early 20<sup>th</sup> century introduction of North American sports cultures, no chronicler or traveler would consider describing the game as a rarity of the land.

Regardless of the general lack of knowledge on the finesses of traditional European games, even a spectator with knowledge of these games might not immediately identify *pelota mixteca* as a game of European origin, because of the developments in playing equipment that have occurred over the last 100 years. The gloves for *pelota mixteca de hule*, as well as the rubber balls that are used in the game, have no direct equivalents in Europe. The introduction of the gloves has significantly altered the general style of play of *pelota mixteca de hule* from a fast-paced game in which a small ball is hit between two teams over shorter distances, to a somewhat slower game in which balls can easily fly distances of over 50 meters. Similarly, the boards and balls for *pelota mixteca de esponja*, which were introduced as a reaction to the creation of the gloves for *pelota mixteca de hule*, are local inventions that have significantly altered the way the game looks to outsiders.

A last, relatively obvious reason that *pelota mixteca* is seen as a game of indigenous origin in today's society is the name of the game. However, whether we should see this as a cause or a consequence is debatable. Clearly, the name of the game is a marker of its indigenous status and can be seen as one of the factors contributing to *pelota mixteca's* 'indigenous representation'. However, the name *pelota mixteca* only originated at the beginning of the twentieth century and was chosen because the game was already seen as an indigenous tradition at the time. As such, while the name of the game strengthens its representation as a purely indigenous tradition, it is actually a consequence of the game's indigenous status in the early twentieth century.

## ***Pelota mixteca and pre-Columbian ballgames***

In the foregoing I have tried to outline why I think that *pelota mixteca* is a game of European origin, which was indigenized over the course of the past five centuries. However, there is no clear consensus within the archaeological community on *pelota mixteca*'s origins and its relationship to the Mesoamerican ballgame. Most recently, Eric Taladoire has argued that, though it exhibits obvious traces of European games, *pelota mixteca* can be confidently traced up to "late pre-Hispanic times" (Taladoire 2003:329). While Taladoire accepts Gillmeister's (1988) arguments for the European influences on Pelota mixteca, he does not see these as an argument against a pre-Columbian origin. On the contrary, he states that "accepting Gillmeister's arguments reinforces, and almost implicitly confirms, the pre-Hispanic origin of the Mixtec game" (*ibid.*: 328). Taladoire has suggested that the only possible answer to the question "why would a Spanish game become so popular in several areas of Mesoamerica – specifically in Oaxaca?" would be that "at the time of the Conquest, a local game existed that was already similar to the European games and was further influenced by them, giving birth to the present *pelota mixteca*" (*ibid.*: 328; see also Stoll 2014: 57). For this assertion to be true, a game similar to *pelota mixteca* – or, more accurately, to the game of *pelota a mano* as played during the 16<sup>th</sup> century – has to be attested for. While the hip-ballgame *ullamalitzli* is well-known, other ballgames of the Mexico are less well researched and described. In the following section, I will examine pre-Columbian and early colonial sources to determine if any game can be identified that would be remotely similar to Spanish *pelota a mano* and would be a good candidate for Taladoire's hypothesized pre-Columbian local game.

### *Pre-Columbian ballgames*

The three most significant edited volumes on ballgames in Mesoamerica are called "The Mesoamerican Ballgame" (van Bussel, van Dongen, and Leyenaar 1991), "The Mesoamerican Ballgame" (Scarborough and Wilcox 1991), and "The Sport of Life and Death: The Mesoamerican Ballgame" (Whittington 2001). The titles of these books all imply one thing: that only one ballgame was played in Mesoamerica, the well-known hip-ballgame, called *ollamalitzli* by the Aztecs. This idea has been questioned repeatedly since the 1940s (Stern 1949), and multiple authors have suggested the existence of other types of pre-Columbian ballgame, mainly on the basis of iconographical, ethnographical, and ethnohistorical data (Cohodas 1991:251; Hellmuth 1991: 135; Greene Robertson 1991:107; Pasztory 1976; Taladoire 1981, 2003:319; Taladoire and Colsenet 1991:162, a.o.). Among the examples that have been given are a stick-ballgame represented in the murals of Tepantitla (Pasztory 1976; Uriarte 2006), and a possible hand-ballgame depicted at the archaeological site of Dainzú in the state of Oaxaca (Bernal 1968; Bernal and Seuffert 1979; Bernal

and Oliveros 1988; Taladoire 2003; Urcid n.d.). Since this last game has repeatedly been linked to *pelota mixteca* in the archaeological literature, it will form the primary focus of this chapter.

#### *A note on sources, methods and scope*

The following discussion takes a rather simplistic question as its main focus – ‘was there or wasn’t there a pre-Columbian handball game in Mesoamerica, that could be the precursor of modern-day *pelota mixteca*?’ Because of the narrow scope of this question, many ballgame-related questions and much related material will not be discussed in this work. Some sources of information that have formed the basis for our understanding of the pre-Columbian hipball game, such as the Popol Vuh for example, are not discussed, exactly because they are clearly related to the ‘classic’ pre-Columbian game and will not provide any additional insight into the possible existence of a handball game. Because of the clear visual presence of the hipball game in Maya material, Maya culture is relatively underrepresented in this work, despite the prominent attention that the ballgame among the Classic Maya has received in the literature. While I will make reference to some material from the Maya area, such as ceramic figurines from Lubaantún, a stela from the site of El Baúl and several painted vases, I will only do this when this material is relevant to the question of the existence of a handball game. Since much of the iconographic material that has been interpreted as depicting a handball game comes from Central Mexico and Oaxaca, and because *pelota mixteca* originated in Oaxaca, these regions will be the primary focus of the discussion. As a result, it may seem like I have not taken into account any source material from the Maya area. This is not the case, however. I did study ballgame-related iconography from the Maya area, both in vase painting and in sculptural programs from archaeological sites, but this research was not included in the following discussion, due to the fact that I only found examples of the hipball game represented. Having said this, it is clear that two different types of hipball are depicted in the Classic Maya corpus (Cohodas 1991; Fox 1996; Coe 2003). There is a marked difference between those players depicted wearing the traditional yugo around their waist, and those that wear a much larger barrel-like type of gear that covers a large part of their upper body. In addition, the architectural context for these two types of games might have differed (see Miller and Houston 1987). However, since none of these games is considered a handball game, a discussion of the possible differences in form and meaning of these games falls outside the scope of this work.

For the same reason, the ritual content of the hipball game is not discussed in this work, despite its obvious importance to Mesoamerican cultures in general. From the indigenous codices that show important religious and political events taking place inside I-shaped ballcourts (e.g Codex Bodley/Ñuu Tnoo 10, Codex Borgia/Yoalli Ehecatl 21r., 42r.), to the 16th-century chroniclers that

described the rituals that took place in relation to the ballgame (e.g. Sahagún 1977[1569]) and contemporary archaeologists and anthropologists who have worked on interpretations of the meaning of the ballgame, the cosmological, socio-political and religious significance of the hipball game has been amply documented and studied. However, as has been noted by several authors before (e.g. Cohodas 1991: 253; Taladoire and Colsenet 1991: 162), it is an illusion to speak of ‘the Mesoamerican ballgame’, considering the temporal and regional variety that must have existed. The ballgame has been variously interpreted as related to fertility rituals (e.g. Gillespie 1991), the Venus cycle and the Underworld (e.g. Wilkerson 1991), a metaphorical representation of the movement of the sun across the sky (e.g. Stern 1949), the death and rebirth of the Maize God (e.g. Miller 2001), and an interface between the world of man and Xibalba (e.g. Fox 1991), to name but a few interpretations. Basic themes that are generally considered to characterize the ritual significance of the hipball game are duality – between life and death, wet and dry, darkness and light, etc.– and fertility, related both to the cycle of the sun and the life cycle of maize (Bradley 2001; Gillespie 1991; Stevenson Day 2001; Taladoire and Colsenet 1991; Parsons 1991; Uriarte 2001).

Undoubtedly, the ritual significance of the ballgame changed over the course of the 3,000 years that it was played across Mesoamerica. Hence, it is impossible to argue for one specific meaning of the ballgame to all Mesoamerican cultures across time. Moreover, as has been remarked by Marvin Cohodas (1991), if a handball game indeed existed in Mesoamerica before the Spanish invasion, it would be highly unlikely that this game had the same cosmological/ritual significance as the hipball game. As a result, a thorough discussion of the ritual aspects of the Mesoamerican ballgame in general, or even the significance of the hipball game in Late Postclassic Oaxaca, falls outside of the scope of this work. For more information on these important aspects of the game, the reader is referred to the classic collections of essays on the topic (van Bussel, van Dongen and Leyenaar 1991; Scarborough and Wilcox 1991; Whittington 2001), as well as to Eric Taladoire’s (2012) recent excellent bibliography on the ballgame and ballcourts.

With these limitations in mind, in the following I will focus on sources that are either spatially or temporally related to pelota mixteca’s introduction (i.e. around the time of the Conquest and/or from Oaxaca), as well as material for which others have suggested that a handball game is depicted. Concretely, I will examine early Colonial chronicles, 16th century dictionaries of indigenous languages, Mixtec and Aztec codices, the Tepantitla murals from the archaeological site of Teotihuacan and the iconography of the site of Dainzú, Oaxaca. In the course of treating this material I will also take into account other examples of ballgame iconography, where applicable. Ultimately, the aim of this discussion is to determine whether any pre-Columbian game can be identified that might be considered pelota mixteca’s precursor.



## ***16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish sources***

Many 16<sup>th</sup>-century missionaries that wrote chronicles on life in late pre-colonial and early colonial Mexico describe a selection of games that the indigenous population played. Among these, two games are consistently mentioned as the most important ones: *patolli* and *ulamaliztli/ollama* (e.g. Durán (1967[1570]), Sahagún (1977[1569]), Torquemada (1975-1983 [1615]), Motolinia (1971[1858]); see de la Garza and Izquierdo 1980, and Taladoire 1981 for an excellent treatment of 16<sup>th</sup>-century sources on *ollama*). Apparently, these were the games that were played most at the time and that were considered most interesting by the Spaniards. In all the chronicles, *ulamaliztli* is the only ballgame that is described. The only handball game that is mentioned in all these sources is the Spanish *pelota a mano* which, as we have seen, is used as an analogy to explain the way *ulamaliztli* is played. There is, therefore, no indication of the existence of any indigenous handball game in the 16<sup>th</sup>-century descriptive sources.

While the descriptions of games do not make mention of any type of handball game, the illustrations that accompany some of these works do show indigenous players of *ulamaliztli* who hold rubber balls in their hands. These pictures are more accurately described as depicting the start of a game of *ulamaliztli/ollama*, which is effectuated by a player throwing the ball towards his opponent. Not only are these actions depicted inside a pre-Columbian I-shaped ball court, Durán, in the text which accompanies this illustration, clearly mentions that he is depicting a game of *ollama*. The confusion surrounding these images might have arisen from the fact that they were drawn in European style, by artists who were quite probably familiar with the Spanish handball game. As a result, the drawings are somewhat reminiscent of similar depictions of the initial service in European handball games (see for example Figs. 21 and 22).

Apart from the 16<sup>th</sup> century descriptive sources, early colonial dictionaries of indigenous languages provide a wealth of information on life in Mexico in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. An analysis of the wealth of terms used for balls, ballgames and ballgame related acts can shed more light on the types of games that were played. Below, I will examine the *Vocabulario en lengua çapoteca* by fray Juan de Córdova (1942 [1578]), the *Vocabulario en Lengua Mixteca* by fray Fransisco de Alvarado (1962 [1593]), the *Bocabulario en Lengua de Mechuacan* by fray Maturino Gilberti (1962 [1559]), and the *Vocabulario en Lengua Mexicana y Castellana* by fray Alonso de Molina (1945 [1571]). I will first treat the dictionaries separately, followed by a synthesis of what these dictionaries tell us about the possible existence of an indigenous Mesoamerican handball game.

*Nahuatl, Molina*

In his vocabulary of 16<sup>th</sup>-century Nahuatl, Molina (1944 [1571]) lists several terms for different types of ballgames. Since the dictionary is both Spanish-Nahuatl and Nahuatl-Spanish, there are some differences in orthography – for example, *ullama* vs. *ollama* or *netetemiuiliztli* vs. *netetemilhuiliztli*. Taking into account these different spellings, three different types of games are mentioned:

<i>ollama</i>	jugar a la pelota con las nalgas
<i>ollamaliztli</i>	juego de pelota desta manera
<i>nomatotopeuiliztli</i>	juego de pelota con la mano
<i>neteteminiliztli</i>	juego de pelota con la rodilla

As for types of balls, Molina (1944 [1571]) mentions:

<i>Tapayolli, matotopetli</i>	pelota como quiera
<i>Ulli, ullamalon</i>	pelota para jugar al batey
<i>Olli</i>	cierta goma de arboles medicinal, deque hazen pelotas para jugar con las nalgas
<i>Tlayhyotentli tapayolli</i>	pelota de viento
<i>tlayhiotemaliztli</i>	el acto de hinchar o héchiz de viento de bota o la pelota de viento

In this dictionary we see entries for three different types of ballgames: a game played with the hips, a game played with the hands, and a game played with the knees. The hipball game is named after the material used for the ball and the kneeball game is clearly named after the Nahuatl term for knee, *tetepontli* (Simeon 1885). The handball game, according to Simeon (1885:262), is formed of the roots *maitl* – for hand – and *totopetli* – for ball. However, Molina only lists *matotopetli*, not *totopetli*, for ball, in which case the *ma*- prefix might not refer to hand. Just from the entries for the games we cannot deduce if they are of Spanish or Mesoamerican origin. What is clear from the entry *olli* is that the use of rubber for balls only pertains to the hipball game. Other balls are referred to as *tapayolli*, or *matotopetli*. It should be noted that *tapayolli* refers to round things in general, as is clear from Molina's entry for *Repollo de Berça.Coles* (cabbage), which is also translated as *tapayolli*. Additionally, we see that balls of the Spanish type, which were often blown-up animal organs called *pelota de viento* in Spanish, are simply referred to as round things (*tapayolli*) that have been filled with air/blown-up, (*tlayhyotentli*), an apt description. While there is no certainty about whether these balls were used in Mesoamerica before the conquest, the lack of a specific word for this type

of ball, as opposed to balls made of other materials, might indicate that this description only applied to, newly discovered, Spanish balls.

### *Zapotec, Córdoba*

The Zapotec dictionary by Córdoba (1942 [1578]) lists the following terms that are related to ballgames:

Jugar ala bola o bolos	<i>Tochijcuàya, tochijcuèa, tochijco, tochijcaya</i>
Jugar ala pelota de los yndios con las nalgas	<i>Tiquija làchi, cotija, quiqijaya</i>
Jugar a la pelota nuestra con la mano	<i>Tigàapayapitipi, pelòlo, cotàapaya</i>
Pelota de las nuestras jugar	<i>Vide palmada. Tigàpaya, cotàpa</i>
Pelota de los Indios jugar	<i>Tiquija yalàchi, cotija</i>
Batey, juego de pelota de los yndios el lugar	<i>Quèye, quiya</i>
Botar pelota	<i>Tiquijaláche, cotija.   . nalòlo, ca, tigápay, cotàpa</i>
Rechazar pelota o lo que me arrojan	<i>Tiquija, cotija, ca, ticèquija, cocequija</i>

For the different balls, Córdoba mentions:

Bola o pelota de viento	<i>Láchipee, pitipipee</i>
Bala de viento o bola	<i>Pellòlopee ti guijni.   .làchi, que es pelota de Indios.   . petipepij</i>
Pelota como quiera	<i>Pitipi, pellòlo, pallòlo, natòbi</i>
Pelota antigua de los Indios para su juego	<i>Làchi</i>
Pelota de las nuestras para jugar	<i>Pitipi</i>

As in the case of Molina, here we see three different types of games. However, the first one that is mentioned – jugar ala bola o bolos – refers to bowling, rather than a ballgame in our sense of the word. Apart from bowling, Córdoba mentions a hipball game played by the indigenous population and contrasts this with a handball game, which he describes as ‘our game’ or a ‘ballgame like we play it’. This clearly indicates a European origin for this handball game. Córdoba translates this European game as *tigàpaya, cotàpa*. It should be noted that *tigàpaya* also translates as *amasa tortillas de mayz hazerlas como hazen las indias* and that to hit something with the hips (*nalguear, dar nalgadas*) is translated as *tigàpaya xigòhueni, cotàpa xigòyeni* (*xigòhueni* is hip), indicating that *tigàapayapitipi*, the name of the European handball game, might simply have been translated as ‘to hit a ball (with the hand)’, as also implied by the Córdoba’s addition of *vide palmada*. Likewise, the

term used for the indigenous hipball game, *tiquija làchi*, seems to be a combination of the words for ‘to hit’ or ‘to contest’ *tiquija/cotija* and *làchi*, the word for the rubber ball of Mesoamerican origin. As in Molina’s dictionary, in Zapotec there is a difference in the terms used for the balls for the hipball game and the handball game. These differences probably result from the fact that the hipball game was played with a rubber ball, while the handball game was played with the use of a different type of ball, the *pelota de viento* that is also mentioned by Córdova. This *bola o pelota de viento*, is translated as *láchipee* or *pitipipee*. In the dictionaries of Molina (see above) and Gilberti (see below) we also find the entry ‘pelota de viento’, clearly referring to a (probably European) ball that was inflated. In both these cases the term used (*tapayolli* for Nahuatl, *apantzequa* for Tarascan) is different from the one used to describe the rubber ball used for the hipball game. In Zapotec, however, we find the entry *láchipee*, which combines the word *làchi*, used by Córdova as a term for the rubber ball, and *pee*, which means wind. It seems quite unlikely that a rubber ball could be inflated and how this term relates to *pitipipee*, which incorporates the term *pitipi* that Córdova uses for Spanish balls, is unclear. The entry for *bala de viento o bola* includes the term *petipepij*, which also is a literal translation of *pelota de viento* (*pij* is wind).

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the term *làchi* was still in use. A description of ballgames played by Zapotecs during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Juchitán, in the south of the state of Oaxaca (Mendieta 1949) describes two different ballgames that were played during the 1940s. These games were played either with a rubber ball, or a ball made of rags of cloth. The rubber ball is called *talaatchi*, while the ball made of rags is called *tapuuh*. While the term *tapuuh* is absent from the 16<sup>th</sup> century dictionary, the term *talaatchi* is derived from the 16<sup>th</sup> century *lachi* for rubber ball. The word *pitipi* is also absent from Mendieta’s work, an indication of the enduring importance and status of rubber as a material.

#### *Mixtec, Alvarado*

The *Vocabulario en lengua Mixteca* by fray Francisco de Alvarado (1962 [1593]) lists:

<i>yocotondi ñama</i>	jugar a la pelota de los yndios
<i>yocatundi ñama</i>	jugar a la pelota como dizen de boleo
<i>yochihi nduundi</i>	jugar a los bolos

Alvarado (1962[1593]) mentions only generic term for balls, not giving any more defining features:

<i>tiñama, tinduu, ñama</i>	pelota
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The information in the Mixtec dictionary is quite scant. Again, there is a mention of a bowling game, in addition to a term for the indigenous hipball game, and a third game referred to as *como dizen de boleo*. Considering that *pelota mixteca* is, to this day, sometimes referred to as *bolear* and that the term *volea* (which can also be spelled *voleo*, *bolea*, *boleo*, or *voleia* according to Garcia and Llopis [1991]) is a main form of play in Valencian *llargues*, it seems probable that this is a reference to the game that the Spaniards brought with them. At first glance, it might seem odd that the terms for the indigenous *ollama* game, and an imported Spanish pastime would be the same, but since *yocotondi ñama* translates literally as “I play ball” (M. Jansen personal communication, 2008), this equivalence of terms is not surprising.

As for balls, there is only a general entry which does not clearly differentiate between balls used for indigenous games or for Spanish games. This general entry does include the terms *ñama* and *tindua*, which imply that different words for balls – or round objects – may have been in use.

#### *Tarascan, Gilberti*

Finally, the *Bocabulario en lengua de Mechuacán* by fray Maturino Gilberti (Gilberti 1962 [1559]), lists:

<i>Taranduni</i>	jugar a la pelota con las nalgas
<i>Apantzeti</i>	jugar a la pelota con la mano
<i>Taranduqua hurincxtaqua</i>	juego de pelota con la rodilla
<i>Taranduquaro querehtaro</i>	Batei, juego de pelota con las nalgas
<i>Querehta</i>	lugar donde juegan a la pelota

For balls, we find:

<i>Taranduqua</i>	pelota para jugar al batey
<i>Xepandequa, apantzequa</i>	pelota como quiera
<i>Apantzequa</i>	pelota
<i>Apantzequa tariata hatzinacata</i>	pelota de viento
<i>Tariata, tariyata</i>	viento
<i>Tariyatahatirani</i>	hinchar soplando
<i>Tariyata hatziraqua</i>	hinchamiento assi

In this dictionary, we see the same games that we have seen before in the other languages: a game played with the knees, a game played with the hips, and a game played with the hands. We also see the same recurring difference between balls used for the hipball game and the balls used for the

handball game. In Tarascan, like in Nahuatl, the name for the hipball game seems to be derived from the ball that is used, or possibly even from the material. Sadly, no translation for rubber is given in Gilberti's dictionary. Also like in Nahuatl, the term for *pelota de viento*, the Spanish kind of ball, is simply a description of a ball filled with air. Again, the lack of a specific word might be an indication that such balls did not exist in Mesoamerica before the Conquest.

### *Synthesis*

On the basis of these four dictionaries we can distinguish at least three main types of games that were played with balls, and that were known throughout central and southern Mexico in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

1. The well-known hipball game of *ollama/ullamaliztli* in Aztec, *tiquija làchi*, *cotija* or *quiquijaya* in Zapotec, *yocatundi ñama* (?) in Mixtec, and *taranduni* in Tarascan.
2. A ballgame played with the hand called *nomatotopeuiliztli* in Aztec, *Tigàapayapitipi*, *pelòlo*, or *cotàapaya* in Zapotec, and *apantzeni* in Tarascan.
3. A ballgame played using the knees, called *neteteminiliztli* in Aztec, and *taranduqua hurincxtaqua* in Tarascan.

While we cannot say anything about the specifics of these games, we can determine certain characteristics on the basis of these dictionaries. Firstly, looking more closely at the terms themselves, it is clear that the hip-ballgame and the hand-ballgame are both named after the type of ball that is used (*ulli* vs. *matotopetli*, *làchi* vs. *petipi*, and *taranduqua* vs. *apantzequa*). Among the Aztecs, Zapotecs, and Tarascans the ball used for the hipball game (*ulli*, *lachi*, *taranduqua*) clearly had a special status and had a linguistically unrelated name. In Nahuatl, we know that this name was derived from the material of which the ball was made. In Zapotec and Tarascan we cannot be sure on the basis of these dictionaries, but it seems possible that the rubber balls received their name in a similar way.

As mentioned before, Stern (1949:72) has argued that contemporary handball games played in Mexico are of non-Mesoamerican origin because they lack the root *ulli* in the Nahuatl terms given by Molina. While I do not fully agree with this reasoning, because I do not think there is any evidence that all pre-Columbian Mesoamerican ballgames were played with rubber balls, I do think that it is probable that the hipball game was the most important game that was played with a rubber ball. Other games may have been played with a ball made of different materials. I base this idea mainly on the fact that the entry for *olli* in the Molina's Nahuatl dictionary ("*olli* – cierta goma de arboles medicinal, deque hazen pelotas para jugar con las nalgas") explicitly states that rubber was only used for the manufacture of balls for the hip-ballgame. Additionally, the fact that the names for the

other games in Nahuatl do not contain the root *ulli* or *olli*, and the fact that, as we have seen, this difference is a recurrent aspect in 16<sup>th</sup> century Mesoamerican languages seem to imply that rubber was specifically used for the hipball game. Furthermore, rubber was not readily available in all parts of Mexico and had a special, ritual meaning and function, making it unsuitable for games that, in all probability, did not have the same ritual significance as the hipball game. According to M. S. Edmundson (1967:198), based on a survey of the 16<sup>th</sup> century chronicles and dictionaries, “a variety of balls was used in Middle America: the leaf or rag or cornhusk ball in volleying games and sometimes in hockey (*totopetli*), wooden pucks, marbles or bowling balls (*momotla*), a hide or hair ball for throwing and catching games (*telolotl*), the juggling ball of wood, rubber, stone or clay (*tapayolli*), and the rubber balls in handball and hip-ball games (*olli*).”

Interestingly, while the hipball game and the handball game are differentiated in all dictionaries by the type of ball that is used, the ballgame played with the knees (*neteteminiliztli*, and *taranduqua hurincxtaqua*), seems, in both Aztec and Tarascan, to be named after the way of playing, since *tetepontli* is Nahuatl for knee (Simeon 1885), and *hurinxqua* is Tarascan for knee (Gilberti 1962[1559]). The addition of *taranduqua* in Tarascan might indicate that a rubber ball was used for this game as well. In this context, it is worthwhile to note that Diego Durán (1967[1570]) in his description of *ollama* mentions that the ball is primarily hit with the hips, but that sometimes the use of the knees is also allowed. If rubber balls were indeed used for the kneeball game, it could mean that rubber was not only used for ritual ballgames, or that the kneeball game also had a ritual component.

In conclusion, it is clear that terms describing a ballgame played with the hands were in use in sixteenth century Mexico. This ballgame is referred to by Córdova as ‘our (Spanish) handball game’ and by Alvarado as ‘the ballgame called *boleo*’, clearly indicating a European origin at least for the Zapotec and Mixtec terms. In Nahuatl and Tarascan, there is no explicit mention of the origin of the game, but it is clear that a different type of ball is used for this game than for the ballgames of Mesoamerican origin. Together with the lack of descriptions of an indigenous handball game in the sixteenth-century chronicles, this seems to indicate that any handball game that was played in sixteenth-century Mexico was of European origin.

### ***Pre-Columbian indigenous codices***

Above we have seen that no specific term is mentioned for an indigenous handball game in Alvarado’s dictionary of sixteenth-century Mixtec. However, this is of course a Spanish colonial source, not an indigenous one. In contrast, pre-Colonial and early Colonial pictographic codices present us with an indigenous vision on life in Mexico around the time of the Spanish conquest. If

any type of handball game is depicted in these documents, this would be indisputable evidence of the existence of a pre-Columbian Mesoamerican handball game.

Since the main aim of this chapter is to determine whether any form of indigenous handball can be identified in pre-Colonial sources, my treatment of these codices will be concise and will focus, rather superficially, on the formal aspects of ballgames that are represented, rather than on their context.

Broadly speaking, the ballgame-related iconography in the codices can be divided into three categories. The first, and by far the largest, category is the representation of I-shaped ball courts as part of toponyms. Examples of this are the infixing of ball courts into mountains or hills, or the combination of ball courts with other iconographical elements, such as bird or fire, to form place names like “Hill of the Ball court of the Eagle” (Fig. 23). This type of iconography is found in the majority of the extant pre-Columbian codices. Important to note is that all the ball courts that are pictured are of the I-shaped variant (which is associated with the hipball game).

The second, rarer, type of ballgame-related iconography is the representation of an I-shaped ball court in the personal name of characters appearing in the codices. This type of iconography functions in the same way as the toponyms, although this category is concerned with the naming of persons, rather than places. This type of iconography only seems to appear in Codex Selden/Añute. Again, we only have representations of I-shaped ball courts, related to the hip-ballgame.

The third, rarest but also most interesting, category of ballgame-related iconography is the depiction of actions within ball courts (Fig. 24). These actions portrayed within the ball court range from the actual playing of a ballgame (Codex Bodley/Ñuu Tnoo 10), to a meeting of two persons (Codex Nuttall/Tonindeye 80r.), or just the representation of one person sitting inside a ball court (Codex Nuttall/Tonindeye 45r.). Apart from these, apparently, more profane contexts in which actions in the ball court appear, in the Codex Borgia/Yoalli Ehecatl (21r., 42r, a.o.) we see the depiction of ritual/ceremonial actions. In all of these instances, I-shaped ball courts are portrayed, implying a connection with the hip-ballgame. Additionally, in one of the Codex Nuttall/Tonindeye examples, a yugo is clearly brought to the main protagonists by an assistant.

While it would be interesting to study the role that the ball court and the ballgame play in these codices in more detail, the aim of this chapter restricts a more in-depth analysis at this time.

Therefore, I will limit myself to noting that in all the pre-Columbian Mixtec and Aztec codices only scenes related to the hip-ballgame are depicted. This is not only true for the actual depictions of the game being played – like in Codex Bodley 10 and Codex Borgia 35r. – but also for the representations of I-shaped ball courts and ball court paraphernalia (like yugos) that all seem to indicate that at the



time of the Conquest the hip-ballgame was the only ballgame with ritual importance in Central Mexico and the Mixteca. In any case, a handball game is not depicted in any of these codices.

## ***Tepantitla***

The Tepantitla compound is a residential complex located in the ancient metropolis of Teotihuacan. As in other residential complexes of Teotihuacan, the inner walls of the houses at Tepantitla are fully adorned with mural paintings. Most elaborate among these mural paintings is the so-called Tlalocan Complex, located in the main building of the Tepantitla compound. The Tlalocan Complex received its name from its original analysis by Alfonso Caso (1942), who claimed that the main mural painting of the Tepantitla Complex depicted what the Aztecs called Tlalocan, the paradise of Tlaloc, “the afterworld of those who died through the agency of the water god” (Pasztory 1976:104). Caso based this interpretation mainly on a comparison with the different types of paradises that existed for the Aztecs, as described by the Spanish chronicler Torquemada (*ibid.*:104). This interpretation was first challenged by Esther Pasztory (1976) who suggested that the ‘Tlalocan complex’ depicts a “composite bisexual or female deity and [...] a series of rituals apparently related to its cult” (*ibid.*:252). Most recently, Maria Teresa Uriarte (1996, 2006) has proposed that the main topic of the Tlalocan complex is the representation of the ballgame as a central theme in the cult of the rain god Tlaloc. While there is no room here to present a more profound analysis of the Tlalocan complex murals, it is clear that different types of ballgames are omnipresent in the murals of Tepantitla. According to Uriarte (1996: 258-259) eight ballgames can be discerned in the Tlalocan Complex murals.

1. A game using a stick, hitting the ball above the head.
2. A game using a stick, hitting the ball on the ground.
3. A hip-ballgame, using a *yugo*.
4. A football game.
5. A hip-ballgame played inside a formal court, probably representing *ulama*.
6. A hip-ballgame played inside a formal court with specific markers.
7. A game using a stick and movable markers.
8. A ballgame played on a stepped court.

Though I have my doubts about certain parts of Uriarte’s analysis, I will limit my treatment of Tepantitla to a few notes on the specificities of some of these ballgames, and their relation to modern-day ballgames played in Mexico today.

### *Handball games at Tepantitla*

Clearly, for my purposes, one of the most noteworthy aspects of the Tepantitla iconography is that, even though a variety of ballgames is represented in these murals, a handball game is not one of them (in contrast to what Taladoire [2003:340] claims). It should be noted that there is no certainty about whether the Tepantitla murals depict games that were played in Teotihuacan, or whether they represent games that Teotihuacanos knew were played all over Mesoamerica. If the first is the case, we can only assume that the hand-ballgame was not played at Teotihuacan proper. If the latter is the case, it seems highly doubtful that a type of hand-ballgame was played in Classic period Mesoamerica, at least around the time of the construction of the Tepantitla complex (ca. 500-600 A.D.).

#### *Stick-ballgames and pelota tarasca*

The different types of stick-ball, which Uriarte has termed game 1 and 2, have been related by Eric Taladoire (2001:113) to the modern-day game of pelota tarasca, since the few ethnographic descriptions that have been made of this game state that pelota tarasca is played with the use of a stick (Cortes Ruiz et al. 1986; Turok 2000). Pelota tarasca is played in the states of Guerrero and Michoacán, and in Mexico City. This game has not received as much attention from anthropologists and archaeologists as have Ulama and Pelota mixteca. As such, detailed studies by anthropologists are lacking. As a consequence, archaeologists who have never actually seen the game being played, construct theories on the basis of a very limited corpus of information about the sport (as has also been the case with Pelota mixteca). However, the 'sticks' that are actually used for Pelota Tarasca are small wooden sticks of about 15 cm. in length and about 2-3 cm. in diameter (Chaves Peralta n.d.), in no way resembling the sticks that are shown on the Tepantitla murals. Looking more closely at the rules of pelota tarasca (Chavez Peralta n.d.), it is clear that pelota tarasca is also a sport of European origin: the court is divided up into the *zona de saque* and *zona de resto*, the playing field has about the same dimensions as the Pelota mixteca courts (100 x 13 meters), the *raya* rule exists, the person in charge of the field is called *coime*, and the score is counted 15-30-40-juego. Pelota tarasca, then, is very similar to pelota mixteca and seems to be another local variant of the European Medieval handball game, unrelated to the Teotihuacan stick-ballgame.

#### *Tepantitla Football and Talaatchi*

The fourth game that Uriarte (1996:258) sees in the Tepantitla murals is one in which a player seems to kick the ball with his foot. According to Uriarte (1996:227) this is a unique type of game that was not played at the time of the Spanish Conquest, nor is it played at present. In chapter two, I mentioned games that were played by the Zapotecs from Juchitán during the 1940s: *talaatchi*, *guiipi*

and *tapuuh* (Mendieta 1949). These games could be played with the use of a rubber ball or of a ball made of rags. In both games, the players had to keep the ball in the air, making sure that it did not hit the ground. This was achieved by bouncing the ball on the feet, knees, elbows, head or shoulders. The games were differentiated by whether they were played competitively or not. *Guiipi* was played competitively between two individuals, who always made a bet on the outcome beforehand. The aim was to keep the ball in the air for as long as possible, with as many bounces as possible. Some expert players are said to have reached scores of more than 1500 (*ibid.*). *Tapuuh*, on the other hand, was a non-competitive game in which up to ten or more people participated, hitting or kicking the ball from one person to the other, trying to keep the ball from touching the ground. Without wanting to over-interpret the iconography – in the end, all we see is a person kicking a ball – it could be possible that the game depicted in the Tepantitla murals is in some way similar to those described by Mendieta (1949).

## ***Dainzú***<sup>14</sup>

### *Introduction*

The archaeological remains most associated with Pelota mixteca are undoubtedly those of Dainzú and surroundings. While the site was inhabited almost continuously from the Formative to the Postclassic, Dainzú, located in the Central Valley of the state of Oaxaca, had its apogee in the Terminal Formative period (200 BC – 200 AD)<sup>15</sup> with the construction of a large civic-ceremonial center (Bernal and Oliveros 1988: 51-52; Bernal and Seuffert 1979; Orr 2003: 73-75; Urcid 2014). This ceremonial center was constructed on the sides of the Cerro Dainzú, a hill located about 35 kilometers south of the modern city of Oaxaca, and the archaeological site of Monte Alban. Excavations at the site were started by Mexican archaeologist Ignacio Bernal in 1966, after the discovery of an incised stone during a survey (Bernal and Seuffert 1979: 11; Orr 2003: 74). At its heyday, the site contained sixteen monumental buildings, and had an estimated population of a little under 1,000 inhabitants (Urcid 2014:3). Even though the site has a ‘traditional’ I-shaped ball court for the hip-ballgame, dating to the much later Late Classic (around 900 AD, Monte Alban IV) period (Bernal and Oliveros 1988:23) this is not my main point of interest for the site of Dainzú. My focal

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<sup>14</sup> An earlier version of this chapter was published as Berger (2010).

<sup>15</sup> While it is customary in Oaxacan archaeology to use Monte Alban chronology, in which the Dainzú reliefs would fall in the late Monte Alban I and Monte Alban II periods, for comparative purposes, I prefer to use the Formative-Classic-Post Classic terminology.

point will be the large sculpted and incised stone slabs that Bernal and his co-workers found at the site, surrounding the so-called Complex A (Fig. 25).

Complex A is an L-shaped building, consisting of three platforms that reach a total height of 7.6 m. (Taladoire 2003:323). The lowest of these three platforms is 54 meters wide and 42 meters deep, the south side of which was covered by incised slabs depicting human figures. On the north side of the building, only one incised slab was found (Bernal and Seuffert 1979:12). Bernal's excavations uncovered a total of forty-one stones. While the dating of these slabs, or reliefs, was complicated by the lack of datable context, they have generally been ascribed to the first and second periods of construction of Dainzú, around 300 – 100 BCE (Bernal and Oliveros 1988: 50). Since the slabs were placed in the wall in two rows, one on top of the other, only the lower row, consisting of twenty slabs, was found *in situ* (*ibid.*: 12). However, according to Orr, these twenty slabs also show evidence of reuse, indicating that "they are not located in their original architectural context" (2003:75; see also Urcid 2014: note 3). The rest of the slabs were found on the ground surrounding the structure, having either fallen out of the upper row, or possibly never having been placed in the wall at all (Bernal and Seuffert 1979:12). Originally, according to Bernal (1973:14), there must have been about fifty slabs surrounding Complex A.

Bernal divided the forty-one slabs into three groups: A, B, and C. The first group (A) consists of thirty-three relief carvings that depict human figures holding a ball. They have been identified by Bernal as a group of ballplayers. The second group (B) contains four slabs that display seated human figures with human or animal heads, which Bernal saw as Gods of the Game. It is important to note that none of the slabs of group B were found *in situ* (Urcid 2014:fig. 4). The third, and last, group (C) represents a rest category, and consists of four remaining slabs that Bernal could not classify (*ibid.*:15). Two of these stones represent hieroglyphs, one represents a skull, and the last is unintelligible. Since group A is the only of the three groups to actually show individuals identified as ballplayers, I will concentrate my analysis on this group of reliefs, and the related petroglyphs found at the summit of Cerro Dainzú, which we will discuss later.

Group A consists of thirty-three stones that depict human figures. Except for slab 23, which depicts two figures, all the slabs depict one human figure in a contorted, and sometimes even unnatural, position. According to Bernal these postures, "portray the gestures and movements typical of the game" (1973:17). All the figures wear the same basic attire: a helmet with a visor, and a type of short pants that reach to the knees (Fig. 26). They all seem to wear a type of footwear, since the toes of none of the individuals are shown, but what kind of footwear this was remains unclear. All the figures have their arms protected by bands wound around the lower arm and tied at the elbow (*ibid.*:15). A few of the figures seem to be wearing some kind of cape that flows down to around the

knees. Additionally, some of the figures (13, 19, 21, 23, 41, and 43; for all of the figures mentioned here, see the appendix of Bernal and Seuffert 1979) wear protective padding around the knees. Nineteen of the *visor helmets* are decorated with what seems to be a jaguar ear, while on others the motif can either no longer be identified, or the helmet is decorated with feathers or other adornments. Some of these adornments have reminded researchers of the 'long teeth' associated typically with the Zapotec Rain-Lightning deity Cociyo (Orr 2003:85), while others have seen this motif as an allusion to maize (Urcid 2014). Except for stone 1 and 3, all of the figures are portrayed in right profile view, and none are depicted in direct relation to the ground. Most of the figures appear to be falling backward or reclining (i.e. 4, 7, 8/9, 11, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 26, 31, 32, 34, 39, 41, 42; Fig. 27), while others seem to be kneeling, or possibly falling forward (3, 13, 14, 15, 36, 47; Fig. 28 ORIGINEEL Fig 30).

Possibly the most interesting slab of group A is stone 1 (Fig. 29), which functions as the right corner stone of the façade of the building. Since the figure on stone 1 is depicted in left profile, all the other figures seem to be facing him. The figure in stone 1 appears to be a man, who is more elaborately dressed than the rest of the figures on the wall, sporting an elaborate headdress on top of his helmet, some type of unidentifiable garment or pectoral, and what seem to be feathers hanging from his belt. He seems to be holding a ball of the same type as the other figures in his left hand, while in his right hand he holds an object that is hard to identify because of the erosion to the stone. Bernal (1973:17; 1979:17) has identified this object as some kind of sword or knife, on the basis of a comparison to stone 5 at Cerro Dainzú (Fig. 30), the hilltop above Complex A which I will treat later on. As mentioned before, the figure on stone 1 is one of only two of the group A figures that is not depicted as floating in space. He seems to be standing on some kind of platform, connected to a hieroglyph, the meaning of which is unknown. According to Orr (2003:83) this difference in posture signifies the defeat of the falling or reclining figures at the hand of the standing figures. Additionally, she believes that the blades imply that the falling figures are to be sacrificed as a result of their loss in a particular ballgame. We will return to these points later on. Next to the elaborately dressed figure on stone 1 is a series of curvilinear lines, which have not been identified definitively.

Apart from the slabs recovered from Complex A, Bernal and his team found a large collection of petroglyphs, incised on natural rocks on Cerro Dainzú, the hill above Complex A. A large part of these petroglyphs depict helmets, detached from a body, identical to the helmets seen on the human figures on the slabs around Complex A. Bernal identified these helmets as human heads, separated from the body by a decapitation ritual, performed after the hypothesized ballgame. As a consequence, Bernal (1979:22) has termed this group the *tzompantli* group, after the Aztec wall of skulls, found sometimes in association with ball courts. This *tzompantli* group consists of thirty-eight

helmets or heads. Next to this *tzompantli* group, the main monument on the top of the hill is a large slab (stone 5) that Bernal has termed the 'Wall of Sacrifice' (Fig. 30). On this 'Wall of Sacrifice', we see a man very similar to the one depicted in stone 1 of the Complex A slabs. He sports an elaborate headdress on top of his helmet, has feathers hanging from his belt, holds a small ball in his right hand above his head and what is probably a knife, as Bernal calls it, a type of sword in his left hand. Additionally, he is depicted standing on top of a stepped platform that is decorated with what, according to Bernal (1973:17), is a jaguar head, possibly naming the location "Hill of the Jaguar". The man is holding a knife that is pointed towards a figure who is falling backwards, and who is dressed exactly like the figures from the Complex A slabs. This figure seems to be falling down the stepped platform that the other is standing on.

In summary, we have the following scenes:

1. The façade of Complex A shows several figures holding a type of ball and dressed in protective gear that all appear to be kneeling or falling. These figures all face one particular figure, who is more elaborately dressed, is the only one that is standing, and who points some kind of weapon in their direction. Possibly related to the falling figurines are seated personages, that are differently attired, and some of whom are wearing masks.
2. The hilltop of Cerro Dainzú, which was possibly originally connected to the lower lying Complex A by a ceremonial pathway, has depictions of several helmets identical to the ones worn by the figures on the Complex A slabs. These all seem to face the main scene, depicting a standing man, who looks very similar to the standing man in the Complex A group.

The first of these scenes has traditionally been termed the "Wall of the Ballplayers" (Bernal 1968, 1973; Bernal and Seuffert 1979; Orr 2003; Taladoire 2003). What are the reasons for this interpretation, and is this interpretation correct? Or are there any other possible interpretations for the carvings?

#### *History of analysis*

Ever since the first excavations at Dainzú in 1966, Bernal (1968, 1973, 1979) has argued that the figures depicted at Dainzú represent ballplayers. According to Bernal these figures represented ballplayers because "each of them carries a ball in one hand as identification, [...] the protection of arms and knees and the mask reinforce this interpretation." (Bernal 1979: 16). While Bernal (1968) initially argued that these balls could have been made of stone or rubber, he later decided in favor of the interpretation of a rubber ball, since otherwise the ballgame would have had little attractive

value (Bernal and Seuffert 1979:27). Heather Orr (2003: 83), rejecting Bernal and Seuffert's analysis, has preferred to view the balls as some kind of stone balls or spheroids (see below). As noted above, the postures of the players, which according to Bernal (1979:17) "could result from an especially active sport" strengthened Bernal in his view that the figures represented ballplayers.

The main line of interpretation of the slabs has always been that of a ballgame. The nature of the game played at Dainzú, however, has been debated over time. Bernal (1968; Bernal and Seuffert 1979:26), Swezey (1972: 475), and Oliveros (1997:24) identified the game depicted at Dainzú with Pelota mixteca, considering the former to be a pre-Columbian variant of the latter, mostly based on the gloves used for Pelota mixteca (see also Borhegyi 1980). Swezey (1972:477), like Bernal (1968, 1973, 1979), convinced of the Olmec origin of the culture present at Dainzú, took this analogy even further by claiming that the gloves used in pelota mixteca were derived from the so-called *manoplas* or 'knuckledusters' found in the Olmec area. Urcid (2014:10) has not related the Dainzú reliefs to pelota mixteca but notes that the slabs might represent a game played with a small rubber ball that was thrown or hit with a glove around the hand. Heather Orr (2003), on the other hand, has preferred to see the figures at Dainzú as depicting a type of "institutionalized form of ritual combat" (*ibid.*:73) in which stone balls were thrown at or used to hit the opponent. Nonetheless, while Orr argues that the balls used in the Dainzú game or 'mock combat' were made of stone so that they could inflict as much damage as possible, she does refer to the combat or game as a ballgame and state that "the Dainzú game might be a Pre-Columbian variant of the *Juego de Pelota mixteca* played in the Oaxaca Valley today" (*ibid.*: 95). She does this on the basis of conversations with a pelota mixteca player from the Etlá Valley, who argued that the Dainzú reliefs depicted *Pelota a Mano Fría* (see chapter 1). However, since pelota mixteca is not a combat sport and does not make use of stone balls, the relationship between Orr's hypothesized ritual combat and modern-day pelota mixteca is unclear.

Eric Taladoire (2003) follows Bernal and sees the Dainzú iconographic program as the depiction of a game similar to pelota mixteca. Taladoire argues that the Dainzú reliefs represent a pre-Hispanic ballgame that was played inside the so-called *palangana*-type ball courts. According to Taladoire, "[pelota mixteca] developed during the Late Preclassic and early Classic periods, when influences from Mexico were important in the Guatemalan highlands". In the Late Classic period, with the decline of Teotihuacan's, such influences lost their importance, and the *pelota mixteca* and related *palangana* courts disappeared from many regions, remaining in use only in central and northern Oaxaca" (Taladoire 2003:339). Taladoire suggests that the traditional hip-ballgame lost popularity during the Early and Middle Classic period, because this game was not played at Teotihuacan,

thereby implying some relation between pelota mixteca, Dainzú, and Teotihuacan. I will treat this argument in more detail later on.

In contrast to the authors mentioned above, who refer to the Dainzú game as a ballgame, others have denied the existence of a relationship between pelota mixteca and Dainzú. According to Nicholas Hellmuth (quoted in Taladoire 2003:326) the denial of the representation of a ballgame at Dainzú is based on three arguments: “the long chronological gap between pelota mixteca and the Dainzú reliefs”, “the lack of any representation of a ballgame resembling that of Dainzú in the Mixtec codices”, and “the lack of positive evidence of the Dainzú reliefs as representing a game, let alone a ballgame.” Most recently, Karl Taube and Marc Zender (2009), in an impressive study of possible examples of Mesoamerican ritual boxing, have proposed that the Dainzú reliefs depict a form of boxing that was performed throughout pre-Columbian Mesoamerica. Taube and Zender illustrate many examples of ‘boxing-related’ imagery from Oaxaca and the Maya area, including murals from the Middle Classic tomb 5 of Cerro de la Campana (Miller 1996), some *danzante* type figures from Monte Alban (Orr 2001; Scott 1978), painted Classic Maya vases (Kerr 1989:13; Robicsek and Hales 1981:116), and figurines from the site of Lubaantun in Belize (Joyce 1933; Orr 2001:84; Taladoire 2003:326), among other things. Since this corpus of iconography is central to the identification of the game/combat/ritual depicted in the Dainzú slabs, I will treat it in somewhat more detail.

### *Iconographic context*

One of the most notable aspects of the iconography of Dainzú is its apparent uniqueness. Iconographical depictions similar in style and subject matter have been found in the villages of Tlacoahuaya and Macuilxóchitl (Bernal and Seuffert 1979:fig. 52, 56). However, these villages both lie only a small distance from the site of Dainzú and these stones are found in the foundation or façade of houses. Hence, it is probable that these slabs were taken from the site of Dainzú and reused in the construction of the Colonial houses in Macuilxóchitl and Tlacoahuaya. Apart from the several carvings found in, on and under houses in Macuilxóchitl and Tlacoahuaya, one stone from Monte Albán is known, depicting a helmet identical to those represented at Dainzú (Orr 2003: fig. 6a). This monument, however, is so far unique in the whole corpus of Monte Alban iconography. The abovementioned monuments are the only ones that are related to Dainzú without any doubt. However, a considerable corpus of comparable iconography has been related to the Dainzú reliefs.

### *El Baúl Monument 27*

One of the monuments that has most often been compared to the Dainzú corpus is monument 27, from the site of El Baúl in the Guatemala Highlands (Bernal 1968; Cohodas 1991:251; Parsons 1986;



Taladoire 2003:329). The monument depicts two figures: one standing upright, the other falling on his back at the feet of the standing individual (Fig. 31). Both seem to wear attire that looks similar to the figures of Dainzú - gloves, short pants and helmets. They also hold balls of the same size of those at Dainzú. The helmets are different from the visored helmets of Dainzú, but seem to represent either a jaguar, opossum (Taladoire 2003:329), or monkey head. As mentioned before, some of the helmets of the Dainzú figures have an element that resembles a jaguar's ear at the back. The similarity in attire between this monument and the reliefs of Dainzú – especially the 'sacrifice scene' from Cerro Dainzú – has led many researchers to believe that El Baúl monument 27 and the Dainzú reliefs both depict a type of handball game, played in both Guatemala and Oaxaca (e.g. Taladoire 2003).

While I acknowledge that the gloves, balls, and overall attire of the figures on the El Baúl monument are reminiscent of the Dainzú complex, I do not agree with this particular interpretation on several grounds. First, there is a large temporal and geographic distance between monument 27 and the Dainzú corpus. The first is a Late Classic (600 – 900 A.D.) monument from the Guatemalan coastal Pacific region, while the latter is a Late Formative (ca. 100 BC – 100 A.D.) monument from the Valley of Oaxaca. Second, and more significantly, the Cotzumalhuapa region – of which the site of El Baúl forms a central place - has a well-established tradition of the classic Mesoamerican hip-ballgame, including I-shaped ball courts, and the ceremonial stone yoke-hacha-palma complex at the time of construction of El Baúl Monument 27 (Parsons 1991:205). The site of El Baúl itself has an I-shaped ball court for the hip-ballgame (Parsons 1991:202). In this context, it seems improbable that an alternative tradition of ritual handball games would be present at the site during the same time period (see Chinchilla Mazariegos 2009). Lastly, on a more detailed note, the figures of monument 27 both seem to hold two balls in their hands, in contrast to the Dainzú figures, who hold one ball.

#### *Lubaantún ceramic figurines*

Marvin Cohodas (1991:251), following Bernal (1973:19) has grouped together the Dainzú reliefs, El Baúl monument 27, and ceramic figurines from the site of Lubaantún in modern-day Belize, arguing that they represent a type of handball game. While the connection between El Baúl and Dainzú is not surprising, in the context of a ballgame the inclusion of the Lubaantún figurines (Joyce 1933: plate 7, 8; Fig. 32) is more problematic. While these figures do wear helmets and gloves, they seem to have absolutely no association with balls, or a ballgame. Rather, these figurines are very reminiscent of the boxers that we encounter on a Late Classic Maya vase (Fig. 33), sporting the same kind of helmet and a glove that looks very similar those worn by Classic Maya boxers (see Taube and Zender 2009).

### *Tomb 5 of Cerro de la Campana*

Both Heather Orr (2003:78-79) and Eric Taladoire (2003:329), while disagreeing on their interpretation of the nature of the game/ritual depicted at Dainzú, have proposed that mural paintings from Tomb 5 of Cerro de la Campana depict the same kind of ritual/game as that of Dainzú. The site of Cerro de la Campana is located in the Etla valley, some 30 kilometers northwest of the city of Oaxaca, and dates to the Classic period (around 700 A.D.; Miller 1996: 164; Orr 2003:78). The most striking element of the attire of the figures depicted in these murals, when comparing them to the reliefs at Dainzú, are the visored helmets that are worn by many figures in the procession. Apart from the helmets, the figures in the Tomb 5 murals hold objects that have been described as *manoplas* (Taladoire 2003:329), or balls (Orr 2003:95). They also wear capes or robes, which are decorated with different motifs. According to Taladoire (2003:329) “the presence of both the helmets and the *manopla*, instead of a glove, allows one to regard them as ballplayers.” According to Orr (2003:79, following Miller 1996) the murals of Tomb 5 depict “ceremonially dressed handball players parading in a (funerary?) procession.” Personally, I doubt both of these interpretations.

A first objection concerns the identification of the *manoplas*. While in Miller’s (1996) drawings, to which both Orr and Taladoire refer, the objects held indeed look like balls or *manoplas*, photographs of the murals (De la Fuente 2008), clearly show that the members of the procession are holding oversized beans<sup>16</sup>. Obviously, the lack of a representation of a *manopla* is problematic when attempting to relate these figures to Dainzú. Be this as it may, even if the objects that the individuals in the murals of Tomb 5 of Cerro de la Campana are holding would have represented some kind of *manoplas*, it is clear that these objects are absent from the Dainzú corpus. Heather Orr (2005:95) has tried to account for this absence by suggesting “a substitution ... in handball iconography between *manoplas* and (stone) balls, that indicates a link between mock combats using “knuckledusters” and those which employed hand-sized balls.” This way, Orr creates a link between the murals of Cerro de la Campana and the imagery of several Late Classic Maya vases representing boxers participating in a ritual fight (Robiscek and Hales 1981:116; Kerr 1989:19 [K500]; Taube and Zender 2009). According to Orr, the boxers from Maya vases K500 and K700 (the identification numbers from the Kerr archive at [www.famsi.org](http://www.famsi.org)) are related in “formal posturing” (Orr 2003:84), and “by the evidence of human sacrifice, processions, and one-on-one confrontations involving implements intended to cause physical injury” (*ibid.*:84). Additionally, both “share the use of protective helmets” (*ibid.*: 84).

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<sup>16</sup> I thank Dr. Alexander Geurds for drawing my attention to this aspect of the murals.

Regardless of whether Orr is correct in identifying a relationship between the Cerro de la Campana murals and the Maya vases K500 and K700 – and I think she might well be – it seems to me that this relationship does not prove any link between the Cerro de la Campana murals and the reliefs of Dainzú. Rather, I would ask: does this comparison place whatever is depicted at Dainzú apart from the presumed combat rituals depicted at Cerro de la Campana and on the Maya vases? I argue this especially in light of the iconography of a Late Classic Maya vase, identified as K8545 in the Kerr database (Fig. 34). Since this vase has no known archaeological context whatsoever, its place of origin and date of manufacture are unknown. The depictions on K8545 are much more similar to the Cerro de la Campana murals. Four of the figures wear helmets, not of the characteristic visored type, but helmets nonetheless. They also hold something in their hands that looks like the beans or *manoplas* from Cerro de la Campana, are richly attired and adorned with feathers, and are walking in a procession or dancing. They are accompanied by two figures who wear different attire, most probably musicians (Taube and Zender 2009:167). Like in the Cerro de la Campana murals, no actual fight, combat, or ballgame is depicted in this scene. The similarities between this scene, coming from the Maya area, and the Cerro de la Campana scene, from the state of Oaxaca, are undeniable, but we cannot determine the direction of influence. Contacts between Oaxaca and the Maya area were relatively intensive during the Middle and Late Classic periods (Whitecotton 1977:57). Monte Albán phase IIIb (500-700) is even largely distinguished from Monte Albán phase IV (700-1100), not on the basis of significant stylistic differences, but on the fact that Monte Albán IIIb deposits contain significant amounts of Maya pottery sherds (Marcus and Flannery 1996:193, 224). The contact between these two regions could have led to the spread of similar ceremonies or rituals. If we accept that the Dainzú reliefs do not depict the same game or ritual as the iconographic programs discussed above, we are left with Dainzú as a virtually unique phenomenon. A game that is only represented at the site of Dainzú – apart from one isolated stone at Monte Alban – but that was so important at this particular site that it merited the construction of a whole complex of architecture in its honor. Is it probable, then, that the Dainzú reliefs actually depict a game, and if not, can we give an alternative interpretation of the Dainzú program? In the next section, I will argue that these reliefs do not necessarily depict a type of ballgame, or another kind of game whatsoever, and that other interpretations are possible. One of these interpretations could be that the Dainzú reliefs depict a military conquest scene, in which the ruler of Dainzú is shown conquering warriors from another place.

#### *Possible alternative interpretations*

Which reasons are there to interpret the Dainzú reliefs as the outcome of some kind of ritual game, be it a ballgame or a combat sport? As we have seen before, according to Ignacio Bernal these figures represented ballplayers because “each of them carries a ball in one hand as identification [...].The protection of arms and knees and the mask reinforce this interpretation” (Bernal 1979: 16). Javier Urcid (2014) has agreed with this interpretation, seeing the balls as a form of synecdoche, identifying the figures as ballplayers. Moreover, in the movements and postures of the figures, Bernal saw the movements of players engaged in an active kind of ballgame (Bernal 1973:17, 1968:248). As a result, the Dainzú corpus has traditionally been identified as a type of (ball)game or game-related ritual. Urcid (2014) believes that the reliefs represent a game played with a small rubber ball,. Orr (2003) argues for a type of combat sport, which she still prefers to call a ballgame. Taladoire (2003) envisions a type of handball game played with rubber balls that spread from Guatemala to Oaxaca, bringing with it the peculiar *palangana* type ball court (which has not been found at Dainzú), and Taube and Zender (2009) identify the Dainzú figures as boxers. I will consider the main arguments for these identifications and attempt to provide an alternative interpretation.

### *Balls and Attire*

The most obvious reason to associate the Dainzú reliefs with a ballgame, are the balls that the figures seem to hold in their hands. What type of ball they are holding, however, seems impossible to establish. As we have seen, Bernal (1979:27), Urcid (2014), and Taladoire (2003), have proposed that the ball the figures are holding is a rubber ball, since they prefer an interpretation of the reliefs representing a type of rubber ballgame. Heather Orr (2003:83) and Karl Taube and Marc Zender (2009) propose that the ball was made of stone, since they see the Dainzú ‘game’ as a type of combat ritual, in which more damage would be inflicted by a stone than by a rubber ball. While I do not think it is very probable, the balls could also have been made of copal incense, tobacco, or any type of other material that was used to be burned in ritual offerings. In any case, it seems unlikely that we will ever be able to determine the material of which the balls in the Dainzú reliefs were made with any certainty.

Another important reason for seeing the Dainzú reliefs as the representation of a kind of game is the attire of the players. The sturdy helmets, gloves, and knee protection suggest to most authors the need for protection in a type of rough game (Bernal 1968: 250; Orr 2003; Taladoire 2003). However, if we see the Dainzú reliefs as a type of rubber-ball game, similar to pelota mixteca, it seems that there is no need for the use of helmets. Of course, it could be that the game was so rough that players ran the risk of being injured in the head, but this also goes for modern-day pelota mixteca,

and probably also for the traditional hip-ballgame. The necessity of using a helmet in the Dainzú type game, while it is absent in other Mesoamerican rubber-ballgames, then, does not seem obvious. On the other hand, if we accept Orr's (2003:92) and Taube and Zender's (2009) hypothesis that the Dainzú reliefs depict a type of combat sport, in which helmets were used to protect the head from injuries occurred in fighting, the use of helmets seems more appropriate.

### *Postures and Team Affiliations*

Since the Dainzú reliefs have traditionally been identified as a type of game, and games usually comprise competing individuals or teams, it has been customary to hypothesize the existence of two different teams represented on the slabs. While Heather Orr (2003:84), for unclear reasons, sees evidence for one-on-one competition in the slabs, according to Eric Taladoire (2003:327) "there is little doubt that the Complex A slabs [...] represent two opposing teams." Javier Urcid (2014) has proposed that the losing team was comprised of those players of the corpus that have the so-called 'buccal mask' related to the Rain-Lightning god Cociyo, since the only stone from Monte Alban representing a Dainzú-type helmet has this type of buccal mask (Fig. 35). Therefore, he reasons that the losing team came from Monte Albán, and the Complex A scene depicts a victory of the Dainzú ballgame team over the Monte Albán team.

Two objections seem pertinent to this analysis. First, as has already been noted by Taladoire (2003:326), if we see the ornaments on the helmets as the main criterion to separate the teams, one team would be comprised of eight players, while the other team has a total of twenty-one players. Second, and in my view more significantly, the postures of all of the individuals in the Dainzú reliefs seem to be those of defeat (cf. Orr 2003:83). Some are falling backward, while others are lying on the ground. Some are kneeling as if begging for their lives, while others seem to be falling flat on their face. These postures are not those of persons actively engaged in play, but rather people being hit, falling to the ground wounded, or maybe even dying. If we accept the two-team hypothesis, this would mean that both teams are losing. For not only the figures with the buccal Cociyo masks are falling over, some of the figures with the 'jaguar' masks also seem to be in quite a dismal condition (for example 47, 36, 42, 27 a.o.; Fig. 36). It seems more likely that all the figures belong to the same group, be it a sports team, an army, a group of dancers, or whatever other type. In the way that they are represented, the Dainzú figures are more reminiscent of the *danzantes* from Monte Alban. These figures are thought by some to represent sacrificed war captives (Scott 1978), while others have suggested that they represent noblemen engaged in bloodletting from their genitals (Urcid 2011). On the basis of the interpretation of the figures of Dainzú as defeated persons (whether they are players, warriors, or something else), we might assume - in contrast to what Taladoire (2003:327),

Urcid (2014), and Bernal and Seuffert (1979: 26) have argued - that we are not seeing a depiction of two different teams here. Rather, it looks more like all the figures are shown in defeat, facing the one standing figure (stone 1) who appears to have conquered all of them.

### *Sacrifice*

Another argument that has been used to relate the Dainzú reliefs to the ballgame is the presumed sacrifice associated with the game, as possibly depicted on stone 1 from Complex A, stone 5 from Cerro Dainzú, and the so-called *tzompantli* group from Cerro Dainzú. For the first two, it has been argued that the blades that the standing figures appear to be holding “imply the impending sacrifice of the defeated players in both scenes” (Orr 2003:83). In the case of the latter, Bernal and Seuffert (1979:22-23) have proposed that the *tzompantli* group might represent the decapitated heads of a team of players that had lost a game. In addition, they suggested that the curvilinear element shown under the helmets of the figures represents blood spewing from the necks of the individuals, suggesting decapitation (*ibid.*:16). This, however, seems improbable since the two standing figures of stone 1 from Complex A and stone 5 of Cerro Dainzú also have this element, and these two figures were certainly not sacrificial victims. It seems more probable that the curvilinear elements represent a type of necklace or cord that attaches the helmet to the neck.

It is possible that the Dainzú corpus alludes to human sacrifice, possibly by decapitation. However, a few things should be noted. First, even if the *tzompantli* group really depicts an actual *tzompantli* and the Complex A stone 1 and Cerro Dainzú Stone 5 refer to sacrifice, this is no proof for the existence of a (ball)game. While it is possible that human sacrifice was an integral part of the ceremonies and rituals surrounding the traditional *ollama*-type hip-ballgame, human sacrifice was in no way restricted to the ballgame. Second, it seems to be a pan-Mesoamerican convention to depict sacrificial victims barely clad, mostly just wearing a loincloth, or sometimes even nude. A case in point in regard to both issues raised above is the *danzantes* corpus from Monte Albán (Scott 1978). These carvings were made in the same region as those at Dainzú, and mostly date to the Monte Albán I period, contemporaneous with or directly preceding the creation of the main Dainzú corpus. The widely accepted interpretation of these reliefs is that they represent war captives that have been stripped of most of their gear, mutilated and killed - presumably in a type of sacrifice (Scott 1978:26). While it has been suggested that these *danzantes* might represent a team that had lost at a ballgame (Bernal and Seuffert 1979), no convincing evidence of this theory has been advanced. As to the second point, the explicit nudity and mutilation of the *danzantes* form a marked contrast to the heavily clad figures of the Dainzú corpus. It should also be noted that the *tzompantli* group

depicts helmets, rather than actual heads. As a result, there is no certainty as to whether these scenes actually represent decapitation or whether they just show helmets.

### *Synthesis and Conclusions*

In the foregoing, I have tried to highlight several aspects of the Dainzú iconographic program:

1. The apparent uniqueness of the Dainzú corpus,
2. The recurrent focus on the representation of the corpus as a type of game or ritual,
3. That the interpretation of Dainzú as a ballgame seems to be based solely on the representation of a ball in the hands of the figures represented.

However, other possible interpretations of the Dainzú corpus exist (see for example Taube and Zender 2009). Below, I will propose that, rather than depicting a type of (ritual) game, the Dainzú corpus represents the result of a conflict or warfare between the rulers of Dainzú and another group or polity.

### *A new perspective on Dainzú?*

Over the course of this chapter, we have seen that several types of ballgames existed in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica. In 16<sup>th</sup> century dictionaries we find a hip-ballgame, a (probably Spanish) hand-ballgame, and a knee-ballgame. Of these games, 16<sup>th</sup>-century chroniclers only mention the well-known hip-ballgame. Likewise, in the pre-Columbian Mixtec and Aztec codices, we have seen that only the hip-ballgame is represented. Finally, in the murals of Tepantitla several games are depicted - a stick-ballgame, a football game, and several modalities of the hip-ballgame.

Since none of these games resemble the hypothesized ritual game that has been thought to be represented at Dainzú, it seems doubtful that an independent ballgame tradition existed at this site. Not only because there is a well-documented tradition of the hip-ballgame around the same time and place, but especially because – as I have tried to show – the Dainzú corpus is unique in its kind. Several sites in the Valley of Oaxaca that are contemporaneous with Dainzú – most notably Monte Albán and San José Mogote - have I-shaped ball courts (Marcus and Flannery 1996:190), indicating that the hip-ballgame was played there. Ball court models found in Western Mexico show that the way of playing the hip-ballgame has remained the same from the Late Formative, the time period to which the Dainzú reliefs date, to the present (i.e. Whittington 2001: fig. 29, fig. 30). Eric Taladoire's argument (2003:339-340) that the Dainzú reliefs represent a type of hand-ballgame that rose to prominence in Highland Guatemala during the Early Classic period when Teotihuacan exerted a heavy influence on this region seems problematic due to the lack of depictions of a hand-ballgame in the Tepantitla murals. In all, postulating the existence of a unique Dainzú hand-ballgame tradition

and relating this to the only other evidence of hand-ballgames – those mentioned in the 16<sup>th</sup> century dictionaries – seems to be an overextension of the evidence.

As a consequence, I would like to propose that the Dainzú corpus, rather than depicting a type of ritual game, represents (the outcome of) a battle between the elite and/or the polity of Dainzú and another polity or group. This interpretation would not change the understanding of the underlying message of the whole iconographic program: a message of political power, glorifying the rulers of Dainzú (cf. Orr 2003: 93 and Urcid 2014). This message might even be more appropriate if we see the Complex A program as a ruler of Dainzú standing victoriously over his fallen adversaries. Of course, stone balls/weapons that can inflict physical damage, protective gear to protect oneself from this damage, and the division of the figures into opposing groups, features which have been presented as indications of the existence of a violent ritual game, are also clearly coherent with the interpretation of the corpus as depicting conflict or warfare.

What is important to note is that only part of the original Dainzú corpus is known today, and that, due to the long occupation of the site from the Late Formative to the Early Postclassic, many of the slabs have been reused and are not in their original position. All of the Complex A slabs – possibly except for Stone 1 - seem to be out of their original context. Some other slabs were found in the nearby villages of Macuilxóchitl and Tlacoahuaya, and others were reused in other buildings of the site. As a consequence we only have a fragmentary insight into the narrative sequence that the corpus once formed. It is possible that other stones from the same original corpus might still be found on or around the site. Especially significant are Dainzú reliefs no. 85 and 86 (D-85, D-86, Bernal and Oliveros 1988: foto 5, foto 6; Fig. 37), that were found in Complex B, one of the oldest buildings at Dainzú. D-85 represents a figure who wears attire similar to, but definitely not the same as, that of the figures of the Complex A corpus, that is, walking over a possible place-sign. D-86 represents a figure identical to the figures from Complex A. He is wearing a helmet, a cape, knee protectors, and the same type of trousers or pants. He also seems to be holding a ball in his upraised right hand and appears to be walking to the right. This suggestion of movement is confirmed by the footprints that are shown under his feet, a Mesoamerican iconographic convention indicating movement from one place to another. This posture is totally different from the figures represented in both the Complex A corpus and the reliefs from Cerro Dainzú. Whereas Complex A and Cerro Dainzú seem to represent scenes that took place as the result of another event, D-86 may well represent a scene taking place as a prelude to something else: a figure walking towards another place to perform a certain action. Since we cannot know how many slabs of the original context we are missing, especially because we do not know which buildings were originally decorated with slabs, we cannot say anything definitive about the original meaning of the slabs. However, taking into consideration D-85 and D-86 –



depicting a figure walking over or possibly conquering a certain place (D-85), and a figure clad in protective gear walking towards a certain place – it seems possible that the original corpus depicted a successful war campaign, ending in the victory of the Dainzú rulers. This victory may have resulted in the execution through sacrifice of the losing parties, depicted in the Complex A and Cerro Dainzú iconography. Whether this conflict was a war for territorial conquest or a different type of warfare, for example ritual warfare or a raid aimed at capturing rival nobles or destroying certain buildings (Workinger and Joyce 2009) is unclear. This type of iconographical program in monumental architecture is in no way unique for the region at that time, considering for example Monte Alban Building J and the *danzante* figures from Building L-sub (Marcus and Flannery 1996: 195-199; Workinger and Joyce 2009).

To conclude, I do not purport that the interpretation of the Dainzú corpus presented above is necessarily correct. However, considering that it is based on less assumptions and conjectures than the postulation of a type of ballgame that is not evidenced anywhere else in Mesoamerica, I think that it warrants further investigation. At the very least, what I have tried to show is that the focus on the representation of some kind of game in the Dainzú reliefs should be thoroughly reconsidered.

### ***Conclusions to Part I***

In the foregoing three chapters, I have presented an introduction to how pelota mixteca is played and have tried to show that pelota mixteca is a game of European origin that has no pre-Columbian precursors. Pelota a mano was introduced in Mexico at some point in the early Colonial period. Between the moment of its introduction and the beginning of the twentieth century the game came to be seen as one of Mexico's *juegos y deportes autóctonos*, one of the indigenous games of the country. Above, I have briefly attempted to sketch how this changing view of the game from Spanish pelota to indigenous pelota mixteca might have come about. Clearly, sixteenth-century globalization heavily impacted Mesoamerican sports cultures in many ways and was also responsible for the creation/invention of pelota mixteca as an indigenous game.

In the following four chapters, I will extend this research into the impact of globalization on Mesoamerican sports cultures, focusing on twentieth-century globalization and its influence on pelota mixteca. How has contemporary globalization influenced the way the game is played? Where it is played and what is the popularity of the game among contemporary Oaxacans? How have the independence of Mexico, the formation of the Mexican nation-state and the Mexican Revolution influenced the interactions between (players of) pelota mixteca and the state? And what does the 'indigenous label' that the game gained as a result of the development of Spanish pelota into pelota

mixteca mean in a globalized world, in which mass media, consumer culture and cultural homogenization exert a heavy influence on individuals worldwide? In the following chapters, I will explore these questions further, starting with an overview of theories of cultural globalization.

## Part 2

Pelota mixteca: globalization, identity and the state

## Chapter 4. Theories of cultural globalization and identification.

The following chapters aim to explore several questions. Why did people start to play pelota mixteca? Why are there less players of pelota mixteca today, than there were a few decades ago? What has been the attitude of the state towards pelota mixteca? How, and why, has this attitude changed over the years and how have players of the game responded? And what can we say about the possible future of pelota mixteca? While these questions might seem straightforward, they can only be answered by examining them within a broader framework that takes into account the social, historical and cultural processes that have affected the game and its players over the past 100 years. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, globalization and the onset of 'modernity' have significantly impacted the lives of Mexico's population and altered the ways in which identities and communities have been formed and maintained. In this chapter, I will argue that the questions raised above can only be sufficiently answered by thinking about them within this framework of a 'globalizing' world and a 'modernizing' Mexico, and by taking into account the role that issues of identity and community formation have played and continue to play in the historical development of pelota mixteca. Additionally, an examination of how globalization has altered the context in which meaning is attributed – and, especially, who has the power to attribute meaning – to select cultural phenomena is essential to understanding pelota mixteca's current situation (see also Tomlinson 1999). As Jonathan Friedman (1994: 117) notes, "cultural realities are always produced in specific socio-historical contexts and it is necessary to account for the processes that generate those contexts in order to account for the nature of both the practice of identity and the production of historical schemes". It is these socio-historical contexts that I will try to outline here, in order to be able to explore questions that might, at first view, appear basic.

This chapter is an overview of prevailing ideas concerning the impact of globalization and the onset of modernity on (cultural) identity. It mostly serves as an attempt to get a grip on the slippery notions of globalization and identity and to understand how, over the course of the past century, global social, cultural and historical processes have changed the ways in which individuals identify themselves and create and sustain new cultural identities. In chapter 5 and 6 I will examine the importance that notions of community and identity hold for players of pelota mixteca. In chapter 7 I will examine the relationship between (players of) pelota mixteca and the Mexican state and try to understand how the global processes explored in this chapter have influenced the game and its players

## ***Globalization***

According to David Held and Anthony McGrew, two of the leading scholars on globalization theory, “the phenomenon of globalization – whether real or illusory – has captured the public imagination. In an epoch of profound and unsettling change, in which traditional ideologies and grand theories appear to offer little purchase in the world, the idea of globalization has acquired the mantle of a new paradigm” (2000: 1). However, while, and probably because, globalization has become the new leitmotif for our current era, no universally agreed upon definition of the word exists. Held and McGrew, themselves, define globalization as a, “shift or transformation in the scale of human social organization that links distant communities and expands the reach of power relations across the world’s major regions and continents” (2000:4). Others define globalization as “the intensification of global interconnectedness, suggesting a world full of movement and mixture, contact and linkages, and persistent cultural interaction and exchange” (Inda and Rosaldo 2002: 2), or “the rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependences that characterize modern social life” (Tomlinson 1999: 2).

While some definitions (such as Held and McGrew’s) may stress the political/power relation aspects of globalization, others (such as Inda and Rosaldo’s) put more emphasis on the cultural side of the phenomenon, or on the changes that globalization brings about in our social lives (Tomlinson). Naturally, this difference in emphasis is an outcome of the extreme diversity of phenomena that globalization can refer to, ranging from the political to the economic, the cultural, or the social aspects of global (and local) life. Globalization can be, and is, conceived of as a phenomenon related to the internationalization of trade, production and financial markets, the erosion of borders and of the importance of the nation-state in political processes, or the global diffusion of cultural elements, any of which can be seen to be or not to be causally related and interconnected (Risse 2007: 126). In this way, globalization can be supplied as a general explanatory framework for, among many other things, tax evasion by multinational corporations, the large-scale migration of African and Latin American football players to other continents, the transfer of decision-making power from nation states to the European Union, and the popularity of Chinese cuisine worldwide. Globalization is, quite obviously, not an uncontested, nor a unified, phenomenon.

Apart from the basic question of what globalization actually entails and in which areas – economics, culture, politics – it has its deepest and most significant impact, one of the basic controversies in the globalization debate is the historical depth that should be attributed to the process. Some think that globalization is an age-old process, with roots going back to Ancient Greece or beyond, arguing that “ overall processes of globalization (and sometimes deglobalization) are at least as old as the rise of the so-called world religions two thousand and more years ago” (Robertson

1992: 7). It has also been put forward that the roots of modern-day globalization go back as far as five thousand years, to connections between populations of 'the Old World' and that there is a continuity of processes of transformation and globalization, through the Middle Ages and the 'modern' period up to the present (Friedman 1994: 18). Others claim that globalization is a consequence of modernity (Giddens 1990), the historical period that started around 1860, that it is a phenomenon that is coeval with the rise of modern capitalism in the 1500s (Wallerstein 1974), or that it is a process that only really took off in the latter half of the twentieth century (Conversi 2010), when global trade and investment really started to take shape. Generally, one could say that, as with the question of where globalization has its biggest impacts, these different definitions of the time-depth of the phenomenon can be accounted for by the different disciplinary backgrounds that their proponents represent. While economists tend to be interested mostly in the rise of global capitalism and multi- and transnational corporations, sociologists focus on 'the rise of modernity', and historians, in turn, are more concerned with cross-cultural contact and trade, as well as with the spread of different cultural elements across the globe (Nederveen Pieterse 2009: 16; Held and McGrew 2000: 3).

Nonetheless, even though many aspects of the phenomenon of globalization are under heavy debate, most scholars agree on some aspects of the globalization process. For instance, that globalization is shaped by technological changes, that it leads to the reconfiguration of states, and that not all areas of the world are affected evenly by processes of globalization and that these processes do not create a 'level playing field' for all concerned (Nederveen Pieterse 2009: 8). The most basic agreement among scholars on the impact of globalization in today's world, is the realization that globalization brings about a 'shrinking of the world'. In the words of Held and McGrew, because of globalization, "distant occurrences and developments can come to have serious domestic impacts, while local happenings can engender significant global repercussions [...], globalization represents a significant shift in the spatial reach of social action and organization towards the interregional or intercontinental scale" (2000: 3). A similar definition of this 'shrinking of the world' is given by Giddens, who defines globalization as, "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distinct localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring miles away and vice versa" (1990: 64). Of course, local happenings have always been shaped by events occurring miles away. One need only think of examples like the Inca or the Roman Empire, in which decisions made in the capital could lead to significant changes in the lives of individuals thousands of miles away. However, it is only with the advent of twentieth century globalization that these processes become truly global in scale.

This shrinking of the world is brought about in large part by the technological advances that have been made over the past century in the field of communication and the media. Radio, television, the telephone, and, more recently, the internet have led to a “fundamental reordering of time and space” (Inda and Rosaldo 2002: 5), as individuals in all parts of the world can communicate in real-time, depending of course on their access to these new technologies. Naturally, these technologies have not only enabled communication between individuals around the world, but they have also revolutionized global business, trade and finance, leading to increased flows of capital around the world. These capital flows are accompanied by global flows of people (ranging from executives of multinational companies travelling to overseas branches to ‘illegal’ immigrants looking for a better life in more affluent countries). Capital flows are also accompanied by global flows of (cultural) commodities and images, which are distributed by global media. This last aspect of globalization, its influence on local and global culture, is not as easily measured in quantitative terms as, say, the increase in global flows of capital. Nonetheless, as Roland Robertson has noted, “globalization does not simply refer to the objectiveness of increasing interconnectedness. It also refers to cultural and subjective matters” (1992: 183). In other words, globalization is not only about the quantitative increase of global flows, but also about qualitative changes in culture and in the way that people understand and envision their own position inside this newly emerging global space. Global cultural flows present individuals with new cultural options and, consequently, with new ways to identify themselves in relation to local, national and global phenomena. In the words of Roland Robertson (1992: 46), “globalization involves pressure on societies, civilizations and representatives of traditions, including both ‘hidden’ and ‘invented’ traditions, to sift the global-cultural scene for ideas and symbols considered to be relevant to their own identities” (see also Hall 1996; Held and McGrew 2000; Nederveen Pieterse 2009; Tomlinson 1999, 2007; Robertson 1992; Featherstone 1990; Friedman 1994; Castells 1997, Hannerz 1992, a.o.). As such, an important consequence of globalization for the anthropological analysis of culture is that culture can no longer, if it ever really could, be seen as belonging to one specific place or group of people. As Jonathan Xavier Inda and Renato Rosaldo (2002: 11) note, “the inclination in anthropology has been to assume an isomorphism between place and culture. Culture has been seen as something rooted in ‘soil’ ... Nowadays, though, it is impossible, or at least rather unreasonable, to think of culture strictly in such localized terms, to view it as the natural property of spatially circumscribed populations. Globalization has radically pulled culture apart from place.”

In this study I will mainly be concerned with the cultural aspects of globalization. However, economic and political dimensions cannot be disregarded. Concretely in the case of pelota mixteca, economics were the main reason for (indigenous) inhabitants of Oaxaca to migrate within and

outside Mexico, and (cultural) politics have significantly influenced the way in which pelota mixteca is/was adopted by the Mexican state and represented in Mexican national discourse, as well as the number of people that play the game. These historical developments can only be understood if we think about them in relation to broader global (cultural) processes. In the discussion below the term culture is used somewhat interchangeably with cultural identification. This might seem to confuse the two terms, but as Friedman (1994: 28) notes, culture change “is primarily a process of change in identity and simply a question of the learning of codes.” In other words, there can be no change in (local, national, global) culture, without a change in the identities that individuals attach themselves to, and that are attributed to them. As a result, the outline of cultural globalization-theory below is followed by a short overview of literature on identity formation.

### ***Globalization and culture***

In 1996, Stuart Hall (1996: 274), in a book chapter that attempts to give an overview of the impact of globalization on processes of cultural identification worldwide, wrote “it is impossible to offer conclusive statements or to make secure judgments about the theoretical claims and propositions being advanced ... The trends are too recent and too ambiguous, and the very concept we are dealing with – identity – too complex, too underdeveloped, and too little understood in contemporary social science to be definitively tested” (Hall 1996: 274). Not surprisingly, over the past two decades, a central concern in sociological and anthropological studies of globalization has been to explore how and to what extent this global phenomenon has impacted and transformed, strengthened and weakened the development of national, regional, and individual cultures and identities.

Within this discussion of the way globalization makes itself felt in the local context and the influence it has on individual, local, national, and global ways of (cultural) identification, three main perspectives have, to some extent, crystallized. The first of these assumes that, under the influence of accelerated globalization during what is termed late-modernity, the strength of (local/national) cultural identities is eroded, which leads to global cultural homogenization (e.g. Latouche 1996). A second perspective on the relation between globalization and the formation of cultural identities is that, rather than bringing about a global uniform culture and cultural identity, particularistic (local) identities are strengthened due to efforts to resist the homogenizing tendencies of (Western/US American) globalized commodified culture (e.g. Barber 2003; Huntington 1996). A third perspective on the same problem stresses the creation of new ‘hybrid’ identities, that are composed of different elements from several source cultures (e.g. Nederveen Pieterse 2009). According to Jan Nederveen Pieterse, these are the only three possible perspectives on cultural difference in a globalized world,



“cultural differentialism or lasting difference, cultural convergence or growing sameness and cultural hybridization or ongoing mixing. ... Each represent a particular *politics of difference* - as lasting and immutable, as erasable and being erased, and as mixing and in the process generating new translocal forms of difference.” (2009: 44, emphasis in original; see also Hall 1996: 300). These three paradigms could be summarized as 1. Cultural homogenization/McDonaldization, 2. A ‘Return to Roots’, and 3. Hybridization.

Despite their prevalence in the literature, however, I feel that these paradigms often tend to focus too strongly on global structures and pay too little attention to the agency of individuals. In the words of Thomas Risse (2007: 128), “many approaches to globalization are committed to an overly structuralist ontology. Structuralists tend to argue that some anonymous forces – be they financial markets, be they global production networks – command the global economy as a result of which [individuals and states] have lost almost all autonomy and freedom of choice.” Cultural homogenization in its purest form, for instance, assumes the imposition of a global culture by hegemonic forces, with individuals worldwide simply conforming and complying. In contrast, in this work I will follow a social constructivist approach, as proposed by Risse (2007), which searches for a middle ground between structure and agency. Apart from the structure versus agency question, but equally as importantly, I feel that it is impossible to argue for just one of these paradigms, since all three of them are applicable to the analysis of pelota mixteca, depending on which lens we use to look at the question (i.e. at the level of government policies, players’ motivations, social status of the game). I hope to clarify and substantiate this claim in the analysis chapters 5, 6 and 7. With the objections raised above in mind, I will present a short summary of the three paradigms, not only because of their prominence in the literature, but also because I feel they all have their specific analytical value and are not as mutually exclusive as they may have been presented.

### *Cultural homogenization*

The view of globalization as cultural homogenization seems to be most widespread in popular culture and media reports on the cultural consequences of globalization. According to this paradigm, which has also been termed ‘McDonaldization’, a homogenization of global culture is taking place, under the economic, political, and cultural influence of the strongest centers of the world economy. Whereas colonialist globalization led to the Europeanization of the world, modern-day globalization would lead to the Americanization of global culture. Globalization, understood as cultural homogenization, according to John Tomlinson (1999: 6) “presents globalization as synchronization to the demands of a standardized consumer culture, making everywhere seem more or less the same.” In short, this view presents cultural globalization as a form of Western ‘cultural

imperialism', which includes the worldwide spread of the icons of Western capitalism (McDonald's, Coca-Cola, etc.), the domination of English as a 'world language', and the global screening of Hollywood movies and North American soap operas. Hence, globalization is seen to function as a steamroller that flattens local cultures and threatens to obliterate global cultural diversity. An academic version of this view is voiced by Latouche, who argues that "the time of one finite world has well and truly begun, and its beginning was the end of the plurality of worlds. If there is only one world it will tend to be uniform" (Latouche 1996: 23). This uniformity will take the form of 'Western' culture, which Latouche describes as "a collection of values whose dominant feature is *universality*" (*ibid.*: 32, emphasis in original). The Westernization of the world will lead to processes of 'deculturation' and the loss of 'receiving' non-Western nation-states of their own culture and cultural identity, as they try to adapt to the dominant globalized Western culture by forms of mimesis of Western cultural practice, since only by 'playing the game of the West' better than others can they succeed in a globalized world. As such, according to Latouche (1996: 73), Western globalization "universalizes loss of meaning and the society of the void." Due to its emphasis on the threats of globalization and the 'Doomsday-rhetoric' of authors that support this paradigm, Ulf Hannerz has referred to this paradigm as "the Alarmist position" (2002).

Naturally, the main reason that this homogenization scenario is popular among the general public is the fact that the cultural icons that originated in the West *are* spread over virtually all parts of the globe. As Inda and Rosaldo (2002: 15) put it, "there is an abundance of evidence suggesting that western cultural forms have a ubiquitous presence in the world. It would thus appear that there is no denying that the world is becoming to some extent homogenized." However, as a wealth of empirical research has shown, the case is not as clear-cut as it might seem at first sight. The McDonaldization of the world can also be understood along the lines of global localization, or glocalization. Again in the words of Inda and Rosaldo (2002: 17), "the influence that foreign programs have on their audiences, is rather more complicated than the discourse of cultural imperialism [...] cultural materials just do not transfer in a unilinear manner. They always entail interpretation, translation, and customization on the part of the receiving subject." In keeping with the term McDonaldization, a concrete example of the products that global localization creates is the country-specific meals that McDonald's have introduced in different nations. In The Netherlands the McKrokiet, a burger that was introduced on the menu of Dutch McDonald's restaurants was served. It consists of a 'kroket', a traditional Dutch snack made of ragout in batter, served on a standard McDonald's bun, combining the quintessential Dutch snack with the quintessential American icon. This creation of local forms of international products - McCamembert, McGoulash, McSushi - is a perfect every-day example of the local reception, interpretation, and translation of globally diffused

commodities. In view of these processes of glocalization, the view of globalization as global cultural homogenization, in the sense of Westernization/Americanization, has been largely discredited on empirical grounds within academia. While the displacement and destruction of local cultures by 'the steamroller of Western culture' is a commonplace in popular discourse, it has been largely discarded as a paradigm in academic circles because of the rise of new cultural identities under the influence of globalization. According to Hall, "cultural homogenization is the anguished cry of those who are convinced that globalization threatens to undermine national identities and the 'unity' of national cultures. However, as a view of the future of identities in a post-modern world this picture is too simplistic, exaggerated and one-sided as it stands" (1996: 304). As such, americanization has not taken place in this extreme form thus far and, considering the enduring power of local cultures, is not likely to come about in the future.

The homogenization-hypothesis, however, is not only concerned with the 'content' of cultural synchronization around the world. Roland Robertson (1992) has argued that global localization is actually an inevitable outcome of a (meta-)form of cultural homogenization. That is to say, even though processes of global localization definitely do occur, they do so within a globally homogenized cultural structure/sphere that creates the categories within which localization can take place (i.e. McDonald's is American, after all, and it is the dominant paradigm within which other things are localized/hybridized). In Robertson's words, "I do not mean that globalization involves in and of itself the crystallization of a cohesive system. Yet I do maintain that globalization involves the development of something like a global culture – not as normatively binding, but in the sense of a general mode of discourse about the world as a whole and its variety" (1992: 135). This homogenized cultural sphere is one that is modeled on Western fundamentals.

In a similar vein, John Tomlinson has argued that "what is being universalized [in the process of globalization and the homogenization of culture] is not any particular set of values, not, indeed, any substantive cultural 'content', but rather an *institutionalized mode of social being*" (2007: 163, emphasis in original). What is universalized or globalized is the framework within which people can live their lives, express themselves, and identify themselves as members of certain groups. Similarly, according to Latouche (1996: 3), this spread of a Western way of life and Western institutions, while not being a form of Westernization or cultural hegemony in the sense of content, is still a form of Western hegemony: "the worldwide standardization of lifestyles, in its main features, is not a 'natural' process springing from a fusion of cultures and histories. It remains domination, with the attendant clashes of views, subjection, in justice and destruction." As such, if we follow Robertson, Tomlinson, and Latouche, even when we consider globalization to be expressed mainly in forms of glocalization, the current flow of globalization, which takes the Western, modernist, capitalist

system as a basic frame of reference or mode of existence, is still one of cultural homogenization – the McKroket or McCamembert is still always served in a McDonald's 'restaurant'.

Thus, there is an important difference between popular views on the outcomes of globalization, generally considered to lead to a situation in which “we are all going to eat at McDonald's, drink Coca-Cola, listen American Rock 'n' Roll, and watch Hollywood movies in the end – from Kampala to Shanghai to Paris” (Risse 2007: 135), as opposed to the more nuanced academic view of the relative homogenization of culture in which it is form rather than content which is being homogenized. A different paradigm suggests that, rather than becoming culturally homogenous, globalization actually brings about a stronger fragmentation in the world because different cultures assert their own identities in face of increasing global complexity. This view can be seen as a counter-movement to the 'global homogenization'-thesis, and could be termed a 'Clash of Civilizations' or a 'Return to Roots'.

#### *'Return to roots' or the 'rise of identity'*

According to Manuel Castells, “our world, and our lives, are being shaped by the *conflicting* trends of globalization and identity” (1997: 1, emphasis added). The general thrust of contemporary globalization, which brings about a certain degree of (cultural) homogenization around the globe, urges people everywhere to reconsider their place in the world, and the way they identify themselves *vis-à-vis* their neighbors, their fellow citizens, and the global system as a whole, and to claim a place for themselves in this complex system. In the words of Paul Gilroy (1997: 312), to many people “identity has come to supply something of an anchor amidst the turbulent waters of ... 'globalization' and 'late-modernity'. ... Discovering, possessing and then taking pride in an exclusive identity seems to afford a means to acquire certainty about who one is and where one fits.”

The 'return to roots'-scenario, which has also been called a 'Clash of Civilizations' (Huntington 1996) or 'Jihad vs. McWorld' (Barber 2003), maintains that, rather than bringing about a global cultural homogenization in which all countries in the world conform to a Westernized uniform model, globalization will lead to increased conflict between different local cultures (or 'civilizational traditions'), which are increasingly brought into contact (and conflict) due to the extension of capitalism around the globe, resulting in an increase of local expressions of identity. According to Robertson (1992: 175), the 'rise of identity (fundamentalism)' can be seen as a reaction to globalization, an outcome of “space-time compression leading to the felt necessity for societies (and regions and civilizations, as well as 'subnational' entities) to declare their identities for both internal and external purposes.” In this sense, the strong contemporary interest in local identities and their creation is seen primarily as a form of resistance to globalization (Hall 1996: 300). However, again

according to Robertson, this rise of identity is not necessarily a statement of resistance against globalization, but rather an inherent aspect of globalization. “Globalization in and of itself also involves the diffusion of the *expectation* of such identity declarations. [...] it is crucial to recognize that the contemporary concern with civilizational and societal (as well as ethnic) uniqueness - as expressed via such motifs as identity, tradition and indigenization – largely rests on *globally diffused* ideas. Identity, tradition and the demand for indigenization only make sense *contextually*” (*ibid.*: 130, emphasis in original).

It should be noted that this creation and emergence of new identities is not restricted to the local level. Not only pre-existing local identities are strengthened or created. New identities also form on a higher level than before (Hall 1996: 302). One can think here of the creation of an identification like that of ‘indigenous person’ as an example. This global category, describing nations, peoples, and communities from Asia, Africa, Australia and the Americas (Europe is often left out in this category) describes an historical state in relation to the colonial experience, both in regards to external and internal colonialism, which has become in many ways also a form of (self-)identification. I will return to this creation of new, broader frames of reference for the creation of identity later, when discussing the emergence of Mixtec identities as a consequence of migration and globalization, and the role that pelota mixteca might play in these new identity formations.

In accordance with Castells, Robertson, and Hall, Friedman also states that “the intensive practice of identity is the hallmark of the present period” (1994: 102). Nonetheless, he finds himself in disagreement with Robertson (1992) when reviewing the origins of this ‘rise of identity fundamentalism’. The main point of difference between the two authors is that Robertson sees globalization as a sort of ‘self-fulfilling’ prophecy: the spread of globalization and the awareness of the world as a whole ‘requires’ self-identification, whereas Friedman sees a decreasing hegemony, a process in which capital accumulation is no longer primarily performed in ‘the center’, as the cause of these new identifications. Friedman, thus, has a more economical view of the matter, whereas Robertson focuses on the socio-cultural/cognitive movers of globalization. (see Friedman 1994: 195-9 for a discussion of the differences between the authors). Still, the basic gist of the argument (that globalization produces new local identities) is quite similar, as we can see when we compare Robertson’s (1992) quote above with Friedman’s assertion that, “the global arena is ... the precondition for the formation of local identities. ... While [these] are localizing strategies, they are globally generated” (1994: 199).

A similar point is made by John Tomlinson, who argues that modernity and globalization lead to the institutionalization of (new forms of) identities. According to Tomlinson, the contemporary concept of cultural identity is essentially modern, since modernity “institutionalizes and regulates

*cultural* practices, including those by which we imagine our existential condition, our personal relations, and our attachment and belonging to a place or a community. The *mode* of such imagination which it promotes is captured in the notion of ‘cultural identity’” (2007: 160, emphasis in original). As such, just like Robertson (1992), who argues that globalization produces a ‘global consciousness’ which requires people globally to culturally identify themselves vis-à-vis the other, and Friedman (1994), who sees the decline of American/Western hegemony as an historic event which facilitates the proliferation of local identities, Tomlinson argues that, rather than creating a global, homogenised culture, “globalization has been perhaps the most significant force in *creating and proliferating* cultural identity” (2007: 161, emphasis in original). Similar to Friedman’s view that the decline of Western hegemony has led to an explosion in the number of new local identities created, Hall (1996: 274) argues that “the old identities which stabilized the social world for so long are in decline, giving rise to new identities and fragmenting the modern individual as a unified subject.” This fragmenting of the individual, unified subject, according to Hall (1996), means a move away from a Enlightenment conception of the subject, to a post-modern conception of the subject under the influence of globalization. In Hall’s words, “in what is sometimes described as our post-modern world, we are also ‘post’ any fixed or essentialist conception of identity – something which, since the Enlightenment, has been taken to define the very core or essence of our being, and to ground our existence as human subjects” (1996: 275).

This move away from the Enlightenment conception of the subject, away from an essentialist conception of identity and culture, has had strong repercussions in academia, in which ‘essentialism’ is nowadays often seen as a kind of cussword or, at the least, a serious analytical shortcoming. In the words of Peter Burke (2009: 1) “one sign of the intellectual climate of our age is the growing use of the term ‘essentialism’ as a way of criticizing one’s opponent in many kinds of argument. Nations, social classes, tribes and castes have all been ‘deconstructed’ in the sense of being described as false entities.” This development is undoubtedly partly a much-needed countermovement to what Jan Nederveen Pieterse has termed the “nineteenth-century parochialism of an ethnically and culturally compartmentalized world” (2009: 98), that long held sway inside and outside of academia. However, this relinquishing of essentialism in academia, in itself a welcome change, is somewhat at odds with what is actually happening in ‘the real world’, in which we see the rise of ‘new nationalisms’ and the power of ‘identity fundamentalism’. It seems here that there is a rift between academic debates and the actual lived experience of both dominant/hegemonic powers and minority/subaltern groups. Many groups fighting for (renewed) national (cultural) independence – ranging from Basques to Catalans, and Scots to Uyghurs, but also indigenous peoples in Latin America and Oceania – construct and ‘essentialize’ (new) identities, in

order to have a stronger political voice, *vis-à-vis* the nation-state. One of the reasons for this use of essentialist images in movements of resistance is quite probably the fact that it seems hardly possible to construct a movement and politics of resistance on what are called 'hybrid identities', a theoretical paradigm that we will treat in more detail below. We will return later to this tension between different forms of essentialism, when discussing the relationship between players of pelota mixteca and the Mexican nation-state.

In the foregoing, I have tried to sketch two scenarios of cultural globalization that are each other's diametrical opposites, one argues that we are on the brink of an era in which local cultures will disappear under the homogenizing influence of Western capitalist consumer culture, the other maintains that local cultures will actually be strengthened in the face of, and because of, the same conditions. However, we have also seen that, in this discussion, there is a 'third way', that of global localization/inter-cultural hybridity/anti-essentialist deconstruction of culture. This scenario is often referred to as 'hybridization' and has caused a significant polemic in the literature. Below, I will present an overview of this third-way-scenario of global cultural development.

### *Hybridity*

As Stuart Hall (1996: 310) notes, "it may be tempting to think of identity in the age of globalization as destined to end up in one place or another: either returning to its 'roots' or disappearing through assimilation and homogenization. But this may be a false dilemma." Hybridization/hybridity theory has been proposed as a third-way scenario between these two opposites, suggesting that globalization leads to the formation of new kinds of cultural identities that are neither the homogenic forms based in consumer culture, nor the 'traditional', local ones that were prevalent before the onset of global interconnectedness. However, this theoretical position, while gaining widespread support, has also attracted severe criticism. Below, I will present a short discussion of the hybridity polemic, drawn mostly from the writings of Jan Nederveen Pieterse (1995, 2009), a very convinced proponent of hybridity theory, and Jonathan Friedman (1994, 1995), one of its (and Nederveen Pieterse's) most vehement critics.

Jan Nederveen Pieterse defines hybridity theory as "a terminology and sensibility of our time in that boundary and border crossing mark our times. [...] hybridization is an antidote to the cultural differentialism of racial and nationalist doctrines because it takes as its point of departure precisely those experiences that have been banished, marginalized, tabooed in cultural differentialism. It subverts nationalism because it privileges border-crossing. It subverts identity politics such as ethnic or other claims to purity and authenticity because it starts out from the fuzziness of boundaries ... Hybridity is to culture what deconstruction is to discourse: transcending binary categories" (2009:

55, 120). As a 'terminology and sensibility of our time', Nederveen Pieterse (2009: 54, 58) stresses the 'newness' of the theoretical approach of hybridity, which is intimately tied to globalization and the large-scale movement of people, the creation of diaspora communities, and the instances of culture-contact that these create. However, saying that hybridity is a 'new' theory seems overly optimistic, as evidenced by Nederveen Pieterse's own assertion that "hybridization goes under various aliases such as syncretism, creolization, métissage, mestizaje, crossover" (2009: 55). Naturally, many of these terms have a long history in anthropological literature, especially with regard to the Mesoamerican culture area. The particular Mesoamerican forms of Catholicism, which combine catholic elements on the surface with significant Pre-Columbian Mesoamerican elements on a deeper level, have for a long time been seen and characterized, both inside and outside academia, as 'syncretist'.

However, even if we consider hybridity 'new' as a paradigm, we can ask if the 'cultural phenomenon' of hybridity – that is, the abundant creation of new 'in-between' identities that are combinations of 'stable'/'established' old ones – is actually a new thing itself. This seems highly doubtful, considering that (probably) every culture is hybrid, having formed as a result of contact between cultures, and that processes of hybridization take place continually (Burke 2009: 66). The fact that all cultures are in some sense hybrid is not contested by Nederveen Pieterse. Rather, he argues that "everything is hybrid, hybridity is an avalanche and discussing examples of hybridity is like drinking from a fire hydrant. It follows that only those forms of hybridity are worth discussing that illuminate the variety, spread, depth and meaning of hybridity, or that shed light on history, past or future" (2009: vii).

It is here that, to me, the essentially self-defeating thrust of hybridity theory, at least as proposed generalist theory to explain cultural globalization, manifests itself. I am inclined to agree with Jonathan Friedman, who sees hybridity as a form of "confused essentialism" (1994: 208). Hybridity posits two 'essentialist' cultures at the start, which are subsequently mixed to form new forms of hybrid culture. But if everything is indeed hybrid, as Nederveen Pieterse suggests, there can be no cultural mixture between two 'original' (read: essential) cultures, since these original cultures are themselves hybrids. What then is the use of studying 'hybrid cultures', which are themselves 'hybrids' of 'hybrid cultures'? This is not to say that I deny the essentially 'hybrid' origin of (probably) all contemporary cultures and many cultural elements. One need only look at pelota mixteca and my contention that the game is of Spanish origin and has been indigenized in Mexico to see that I am firmly convinced of this form of hybridity. However, I feel that asserting that "everything is hybrid" inevitably creates the type of circular reasoning outlined above and, with that, an unusable theoretical and analytical framework.



Nederveen Pieterse apparently acknowledges this problem himself, since he states that “if we accept that cultures have been hybrid *all along*, hybridization is in effect a tautology: contemporary accelerated globalization means the hybridization of hybrid cultures. As such, the hybridization perspective remains meaningful only as a critique of essentialism. Essentialism will remain strategic as a mobilizational device as long as the units of nation, state, region, civilization, ethnicity remain strategic: and for just as long hybridization remains a relevant approach” (2009: 88). My question here is: to whom would this be a relevant approach? Politicians, academics, minority/subaltern movements? Of course, I agree that challenging accepted ‘truths’ of nationalist identities by showing that cultures are hybrid and that no tradition or local cultural trait is age-old can be a powerful, and much-needed, form of critique to essentialist notions of identity. However, as mentioned, many minority groups actually make use of (‘strategic’) essentialism to claim their own place within oppressive societies. They seem to have little use for this kind of hybridity theory. Exactly because of Nederveen Pieterse’s stress on the anti-essentialist potential of hybridity theory, Jonathan Friedman (1999: 242; 1995, 1997) has argued that, rather than being an academic approach to the study of society, “hybridization is a political and normative discourse” (1999: 242). According to Friedman, and other critics of hybridization, hybridity theory is used as a form of self-identification on the part of researchers who see themselves as cosmopolitans, at home in the world, rather than being an actual description of what is going on in ‘the real world’. An example of this clash between ‘hybridity theorists’ and ‘the real world’ is Nederveen Pieterse’s characterization of the historical cultural friction between ‘the West’ and the Islamic world as “one of the most contrived and exaggerated cultural divides ever. What is striking ... is that it is a recent cleavage which follows centuries and millennia of intermixture” (2009: 128). While it is undeniably true that Islamic culture deeply influenced Western (defined basically as European) culture and vice versa, saying that the friction involved is contrived and exaggerated negates the historical reality that shows that, from the spread of Islam and the subsequent conquest of North-Africa and parts of Europe through the Crusades and the Reconquista to the 9/11 attacks, the cultural difference between the West and the Islamic world is real and imminent to the participants in these cultural conflicts (which, naturally, also have economic and political components). Culture, and the forms of self- and other-identification that are attached to it, has real-world political and economic consequences that cannot be neglected.

These consequences possibly derive from the fact that acknowledging oneself as a member of a ‘hybrid’ culture is not a very frequent phenomenon, at least not in the political arena. While certain communities and groups definitely do identify with multiple ‘heritages’, more often, cultural difference, even though superficial and obscuring the actual hybrid nature of the cultures involved,

leads to particularistic self-identification. Jonathan Friedman says, “creole [or hybrid] is a form of identification of others, a form stabilized by hegemonic arrangements that emerged in the global system. The mixed nature of other people’s cultures is only made real by means of establishing, even institutionalizing, social identities” (1994: 209). In this view, then, hybridity/creolization (terms that are used interchangeably in the literature) is something that people tend to say of ‘the Other’. Most people do not consider themselves to be ‘mixtures’, or their culture to be hybrid. They consider their culture to be, simply, their culture, and are not necessarily interested in the identification of the different (hybrid) origins of where the specific elements come from. As I have mentioned before, a partial explanation for this preference for non-hybrid identities might be that (strategic) essentialism awards communities a stronger and unified voice in political debates and struggles. Rights and privileges are often only acknowledged and granted when individuals or groups can make unequivocal claims to certain identities.

An example of this tension between hybridity and essentialism can be seen in the political ambitions and struggles of the Chicano movement in the 1960s and 70s, which aimed to further the interests of Mexican-Americans in the United States. Even though the Chicano label describes a community of people with a dual – hybrid – heritage (Mexicans living in the United States), the goals of the Chicano movement were focused strongly on the Mexican component of this identity, in a reaction to Anglo-American discrimination and the lower social position that Chicanos occupied in the United States. At the start of the Chicano movement in the 1960s/70s, two political positions were prominent. One held that the U.S. political system should be the framework within which resistance was enacted, so that the American authorities would take a more active role in guaranteeing the civil rights of the Chicano population. The other, more radical, position called for Chicano nationalism and was hostile to large parts of the socioeconomic and political order in the United States (Sánchez Jankowski 1999: 201). A good example of this ‘nationalist tendency’ of the Chicano movement is the “Plan Espiritual de Aztlán”, which was adopted by the movement at the landmark First National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference in 1969. The plan, which took its name from the (mythical) Aztec homeland of Aztlan, described the territories that Mexico had lost to the United States in the Mexican War in 1848 as the homeland of the Chicano people and “presented an almost millennial vision of the future, painting an image of a separate Chicano culture and nation that ultimately would be reclaimed by the Chicano descendants of the ancient civilization” (Gutierrez 1995: 185). Thus, the plan presented a “quasi-nationalistic vision of the Chicano people which extolled a pre-Columbian, native ancestry while diminishing or even rejecting their connection with American culture and society” (*ibid.*: 185). While there were and are varying degrees to which members of the Chicano movement adhere to these principles of (cultural) nationalism, it is clear

that describing Chicano identity as hybrid is problematic, at least considering the way it was envisioned by many supporters in the 1960s. Rather, even in the context of communities of people with dual heritage, their new identities will form a new identity/culture which is often essentialized in the political arena. Jonathan Friedman suggests that this phenomenon can be explained by the fact that identification *needs* essentialism: “hybridity is founded on the metaphor of purity. ... the essentialism of identification can easily obliterate all attempts to eliminate purity via hybridity. On-the-ground practices of trans-ethnicity cannot produce anything other than new categories of the same type” (Friedman 1997: 83). Thus, two distinct identities, forming a hybrid identity, will always form a new ‘essential’ identity of the same type. Another, related, factor is the fact that, rather than being an ‘end-point’, hybridity is a point along the way, at the moment when two cultures meet but have not yet joined to form a new culture. In the words of Peter Burke (2009: 46), “it is particularly clear that hybridity is often, if not always, a process rather than a state.” When two cultures meet, and especially in the case of migration and the creation of diaspora communities, individuals live in-between two cultures, it could be said that they live in a ‘hybrid’ cultural situation. However, after several generations, these hybrid identities themselves usually turn into new, independent ones that include cultural elements from different ‘mother-cultures’. In the words of Burke (2009: 66), “it is surely true ... that every culture is hybrid and that the process of hybridization takes place all the time. All the same, some cultures are surely more hybrid than others. There are also moments of particularly intense hybridization, the consequence of cultural encounters. Following these moments, a kind of stabilization takes place, so that when there is another encounter and another wave of hybridization, the traditional hybrid culture is defended against the new mix.” Concretely in the case of pelota mixteca, we could argue that the game was adopted by Mexican indigenous communities during an especially intense moment of hybridization, the Spanish conquest of Mexico. Over the years, it became ‘stabilized’ as part of indigenous culture, and now, at the onset of a ‘new wave of hybridization’ because of globalization and the large-scale cultural changes that this eventuates, pelota mixteca is ‘defended against the new mix’ because it has become a cultural element belonging to traditional indigenous/Mexican culture (and identity). Thus, because hybridity is a process rather than a state, a point along the way rather than an end-point, it is only certain very specific communities and individuals at particular very precise points in time that will self-identify as hybrids. It seems much more common for many people around the world *not* to acknowledge the hybrid roots of their identities, at least in the political arena.

Nederveen Pieterse responds by saying, “hybrid self-identification *is* in fact common: obvious instances are second-generation immigrants and indeed hyphenated identities. ... Creolization in the Caribbean, mestizaje in Latin America, and fusion in Asia are common self-

definitions. In some countries national identity is overtly hybrid. Zanzibar is a classic instance (Gurnah 1997). Mexico and Brazil identify themselves as hybrid cultures” (2009: 105). While I cannot judge with regard to Brazil and Zanzibar, since I simply do not know enough about them, if Nederveen Pieterse’s evocation of Mexico as a ‘hybrid culture’ is indicative of what he conceives to be self-described hybrid cultures, I feel his view is overly optimistic and denies the social realities that are hidden behind official discourse. While it is true that Mexican national discourse since the Mexican Revolution has tried to represent the country (and its history) as an amalgam of indigenous and Spanish, a ‘hybrid’ combination of ‘the best of both worlds’ (see below, chapter 7), in reality the indigenous population of the country has suffered centuries of oppression of indigenous culture and forced acculturation, and has actively tried to resist this forced assimilation into ‘national culture’. As such, hybridization can be a strategy on the part of the nation-state to diffuse indigenous resistance to assimilation and the loss of their own culture. Concretely, in the Mexican case, the mestizo ideal was always presented as *the* model for Mexican post-Revolutionary identity. This mestizo identity was founded on a combination of taking pride in Mexico’s pre-Columbian (primarily Aztec) past with a modernist rejection of living indigenous culture. The forced acceptance of this supposedly hybrid identity discriminated against traditional indigenous cultural practices and taught Mexico’s indigenous population that, while the nation’s ‘founding fathers’ were pre-Columbian indigenous peoples, in modern Mexico there was no room for living indigenous cultures. Of course, the non-indigenous mestizo (elites) of Mexico did identify to some extent with these hybrid identities, taking pride in the splendors of Tenochtitlan and Teotihuacan, but this form of hybridization is more akin to the appropriation of a past that was not really theirs than to the creation of a truly hybrid culture and cultural identity that incorporated all sectors of society. Thus, hybrid identity, at least in this case, is rooted firmly in power structures and actually works to the detriment of minorities.

A similar example is given by Charles Hale in his work on the conflicts between the Miskitu of Nicaragua and the Sandinista revolutionary movement and government. Hale (1994) shows how a hybrid ideology on the part of the Sandinistas, who incorporated the Colonial struggles of the Miskitu against foreign domination into national discourse and into their own identity, was used to actively criticize the Miskitu’s ‘ethnic essentialism’. In the eyes of the Sandinistas, “Indians no longer [existed] as a distinct social group (except on the Atlantic Coast), but the legacy of their struggles [formed] part of an enriched Mestizo national identity. Class, ethnic, and national consciousness [became] fused into one” (Hale 1994: 90). The Miskitu’s calls for autonomy and land rights based on their ‘cultural independence’ from Mestizo Nicaragua were, at least initially, not acknowledged by the Sandinista movement, who considered the Miskitu identity to be a cultural attribute, rather than a political identity, since political identities could only correspond to class and nation (Hale 1994:

93). “To be Nicaraguan Mestizo now meant having Indian roots, celebrating survivals from this Indian past, and actively making use of them to construct a revolutionary future. For Mestizos it was a creative and liberating idea. For those who had shaped their identity in direct opposition to Mestizos, it entailed a call to assimilation and conformity” (Hale 1994: 92). In this case, the active hybridization of the identities of the elite, rather than creating a space of resistance for dominated groups, actually resulted in assimilation and cultural-historical appropriation. By identifying themselves as ‘part-Indian’ – by ‘hybridizing’ their own identities – the government diffused exclusive claims by the Miskitu to cultural independence (Friedman 1997: 81-2). In the case of Mexico, similar things could be said of José Vasconcelos’ work on the *Raza Cósmica*, which tried to incorporate indigenous culture into mainstream Mexican society (and identity), the result of which, rather than creating a true amalgam of the different cultural currents that existed in Mexico at the time, was the forced assimilation and loss of culture (mainly through the education system) of indigenous peoples. I will return to Vasconcelos and the *Raza Cósmica* later in this chapter.

In short, it seems that the value of hybridity theory, as mentioned before, lies mostly in its use as an anti-essentialist discourse. In the words of Nederveen Pieterse, “hybridity entails three different sets of claims: empirical (hybridization happens), theoretical (acknowledging hybridity as an analytical tool), and normative (a critique of boundaries and valorization of mixtures, in certain contexts and particular relations of power)” (2009: 120). However, as we have seen, the (empirical) fact that all cultures are hybrid is of little analytical value, and, similarly, hybridity as a theoretical position, in many cases, will often not bring us closer to an *emic* perspective on the culture we study. Thus, we are left with hybridity as a normative discourse. In the words of Nederveen Pieterse, “boundaries and borders can be matters of life or death and the failure to acknowledge hybridity is a political point whose ramifications can be measured in lives” (2009: 101). While, to me, this seems somewhat overstating the case, hybridity as a critical argument definitely has its merits. Nevertheless, as an analytical/theoretical position, I feel that, considering the wide-spread strengthening of local identities and cultures, hybridity has little to offer but the tautology that all cultures are hybrids of hybrid cultures. John Tomlinson expresses it best when he says, “it seems important that the idea of hybridization is kept close to the broader analysis of culture change ... and used circumspectly to identify *aspects* of this process - rather than being taken independently as a *general* description of the global cultural condition. Apart from anything else, this is important to avoid overstating the cultural flux of globalization and losing sight of the tendency of cultural mixtures to re-embed themselves, however briefly, into ‘stable’ identity positions” (Tomlinson 1999: 148).

After having reviewed the three main paradigms on globalization and culture that are prominent in the literature, I feel that we could take Tomlinson's argument one step further and say that none of these three should be 'taken independently as a general description of the global cultural condition'. Processes of global cultural homogenization, hybridization and 'identity fundamentalism' all take place simultaneously under the influence of ever-increasing global cultural contact. Hollywood movies, Western music and European football clubs are indeed popular worldwide, and form a building block for the self-identification of individuals around the globe. Under the influence of international migration and the creation of new global power structures, new nationalist identities *do* (re)surface worldwide, both on the side of the nation-state and of nations that have never had their own state. And new hybrid identities are indeed formed, as they always were, under the influence of culture contact. These paradigms can all be used as tools to explain parts of real world occurrences. However, what is important to note here is that these forms of culture/identity change are only made possible because individuals in today's world are, to a certain extent, able to choose and create their own identities. As I have briefly touched on before, the possibility to self-reflexively create an identity for oneself, choosing different building blocks from an array of options presented to the individual, is a result of the onset of 'modernity' and globalization. Below, I will elaborate on the issue of how modernity and globalization have altered the ways in which people can (self)identify.

### ***Modernity, globalization and identity***

Identity is a notably diffuse and multi-interpretable term. It is a complicated term not because nobody has ever heard of it, but rather because "more or less everyone knows more or less what it means, and yet its precise definition proves slippery" (Lawler 2008: 1). Nonetheless, over the past decades, 'identity' has become somewhat of a buzzword, both in political rhetoric, in academic debates, and in popular culture, in this last case especially in relation to troubles that individuals experience because they 'are not sure about their identity'. According to Paul Gilroy (1997: 301), the popularity and widespread usage of the term 'identity' even "derives in large measure from the exceptional plurality of meanings that it can harness."

One basic, but much-encompassing, definition of what is meant by 'identity' is given by Kathryn Woodward (1997: 1), who says "identity gives us a location in the world and presents the link between us and the society in which we live, [it] gives us an idea of who we are and of how we relate to others and to the world in which we live." Thus, identity is not simply just 'inside the individual', but is rather a social phenomenon that is determined in the relation between Self and Other and within social relations, constructed using resources such as history, language, and culture

(Hall 1996: 4). Identities carve out a unique place in the world for individuals and social groups by stressing differences that are not primordial or 'given in nature', but that are made and magnified, constructing meaning on the basis of certain cultural attributes that are given priority over others (Castells 1997: 6; Lawler 2008: 4). These identities, then, are created through narratives and discourse that are used to explain and understand the social position of individuals and social groups in the (globalized) world and can function as an antidote to uncertainty or anxiety about where one 'fits in' and what one's place in the world is (Gilroy 1997: 304; Hall 1996: 2; Lawler 2008: 17). This aspect of 'fixation of the individual in the world' also leads to the fact that 'identity' seems to be invoked largely when it is seen to be endangered, in trouble or has lost its fixed context or content (Lawler 2008).

Of course, the onset of globalization and modernity has led and continues to lead to large-scale displacements of people, ideas, and, consequently, identities, leading Homi Bhabha (1996: 59) to conclude that "we have entered an anxious age of identity, in which the attempt to memorialize lost time, and to reclaim lost territories, creates a culture of disparate 'interest groups' or social movements." Individuals across the world are confronted with new possibilities (in the form of foreign cultural commodities, ideas, and ways of life) to use as building blocks for the construction of new forms of their identity. According to Anthony Giddens, this self-reflexive construction of identity, as opposed to living out an identity that is assigned to the individual by outside forces, is a specific feature and outcome of, what he terms, 'high' or 'late modernity'. "In the post-traditional order of modernity, and against the backdrop of new forms of mediated experience, self-identity becomes a reflexively organized endeavor. ... The more tradition loses its hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical interplay of the local and the global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options" (Giddens 1991: 5). Only in the modern age of globalization are we confronted with such a bewildering array of choices of building blocks from which we can take meaning that we have to choose for ourselves which of these we prefer, in order to construct our own identities.

This understanding of identity as a self-reflexive, moldable, personal creation is, as I have mentioned before, a move away from the Enlightenment conception of the subject, which viewed identity as an essential and stable core of the person that was inside the individual from birth to death, ready to be discovered or made to surface. The modern, self-reflexive concept of identity of the age of globalization, on the other hand, "does *not* signal that stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change; the bit of the self which remains always-already 'the same', identical to itself across time" (Hall 1996: 3). Naturally, this changed conception of identity did not only form as a reaction to globalization, in which the array of

choices and possibilities is much larger, it also has significant implications for the way that culture and cultural identities are impacted by globalization and are theorized. Cultural homogenization, a return to the roots, or hybridization become conscious choices, determined by the agency of individuals rather than by the obligations of worldwide structures.

However, saying that identity can be self-reflexively built and constructed, does not mean that there is a sort of 'free-for-all' for anyone to be whatever they want and choose to be, creating narratives that fit with their own self-images. Rather, because 'the self is a social product', individuals "are generally constrained to present images of themselves that can be socially supported in the context of a given status hierarchy" (Branaman 1997: xlvi). As such, in the words of Stephanie Lawler, "the idea that we can 'be whatever we want to be' relies on an illusory eclipsing of the social world, [because identities are always] *embedded within* and *produced by* the social world" (Lawler 2008: 144, emphasis in original). Thus, even though, in a globalized world, identities are often self-reflexively constructed because of our ability to select those cultural items and ideas that fit best with our self-images, these images and identities are always constrained by, and never independent of, the social contexts and the power structures in which we live out our lives. Here, issues of representation and discourse enter into view, since these are important ways through which social differentiation and status hierarchies are created, maintained, and enforced. Representation and discourse present us with symbolic systems through which we can make sense of our experiences and "create the possibilities of what we are and what we can become" (Woodward 1997: 14). However, these symbolic systems also "produce meanings about the sorts of people that would use [certain cultural items, and] the identities associated with [these]" (*ibid.*:2). To give a concrete example from the context of pelota mixteca: the game has always been represented (in national discourse) as a tradition associated with traditional indigenous culture and with Mixtec individuals. As a result, Mexicans who are not of indigenous ancestry would not take up playing the game, due to the fact that it is not represented as something that is fitting for an individual of their social background (considering the discrimination against indigenous peoples that has been prevalent in Mexico for a long time and the fact that even indigenous individuals were, and often continue to be, hesitant to identify themselves as such). I will treat this issue of representation of, and discourse surrounding, pelota mixteca in more detail later.

In line with this idea that identities are not always freely chosen, but are constrained by structural forces, it should be noted that some forms of identity were created not as positive, but as negative distinctive markers of populations, not as self-representations, but as classifications of others. In the words of Kwame Appiah (2005: 112), "some identities were *created* as part of a classificatory system for oppression [...] Black, woman, gay, aboriginal – so many of the identity



categories that are politically salient are precisely ones that have functioned as limits, the result of the attitudes and acts of hostile or contemptuous others. Each of these categories has served as an instrument of subordination, as a constraint upon autonomy, as, indeed, a proxy for misfortune.” Doubtlessly, the category of *indio*, or indigenous person, in Mexico would fall within this group of identities that were created as part of a classificatory system for oppression, and create structures which limit the possibilities for self-identification. One of the most important structural factors that we have to take into account when thinking about the impact that globalization has on processes of identity formation, is the increasing search for roots/authenticity/original identities, which can combine with a self-reflexive approach to identity. These authentic identities/this return to roots are mostly political strategies that resort to essentialism (instead of hybridity) either on the part of the state, trying to (re-)incorporate different cultural groups inside the nation, or on the part of minority groups, trying to liberate themselves from – or at least create a resistance identity *vis-à-vis* – the nation-state. As a result, in the political arena, identity “is more likely to be represented as the function of some pre-political, socio-biological or bio-cultural feature, something genetic [...] that sanctions especially harsh varieties of deterministic or absolutist thinking about identity. In these circumstances, identity ceases to be an on-going process of self-making and social interaction. It becomes instead a thing – an entity or an object – to be possessed and displayed” (Gilroy 1997: 307). These (new) essentialist identities tend to use (‘invented’) traditions to imbue themselves with meaning and history and to create an ‘aura of authenticity’, much in the same way that nation-states have historically tried to create unified national identities for their subjects (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Anderson 1983). These identities are institutionalized and ‘made real’ through discourse, a narrative that individuals can identify themselves with, and representation, an image that arises out of the discourse that is used to represent the self and the other.

Discourse and representation are two key words of Foucauldian social analysis and the study of identity formation has been strongly influenced by the work of this French philosopher. Many of the authors that I have quoted above (e.g. Hall, Woodward, Lawler) follow Foucauldian lines of analysis focusing on issues of discourse and knowledge-power structures, in relation to the creation of the subject. Foucault’s (1980) ideas on the creation of subjects and subject-positions through discourse has done much to influence these narrative/discursive approaches to identity. Subjects, in Foucauldian terms, are “figures who personify the particular forms of knowledge which the discourse produces” (Hall 1997: 56), and who can only make sense of, and take meaning from, these power-knowledge structures if they take up the subject-positions that are created for them through that same discourse (Foucault 1980). Hence, “through subjectivation, people become tied to specific identities: they become *subjects*. But also they become *subject-ed* to the rules and norms

engendered by a set of knowledges about these identities. They take up subject-positions – specific ways of being – available within discourse, understanding themselves according to a set of criteria provided by the experts whose authority derives from rationality and ‘reason’” (Lawler 2008: 62, emphasis in original). As such, self-understanding is never an independent exercise and never outside power relations. A central question in relation to my research that arises from this discussion is whether – and, if so, in what ways – globalization and migration enable indigenous migrants to step outside of the hegemonic power-knowledge structures that have been prevalent in Mexico for centuries and create new discourses and new subject-positions for themselves, in order to empower themselves and reclaim a sense of pride in being indigenous. Or do these categories travel with them to their new homelands and are they only confronted with more discrimination, not just from the part of the mestizo Mexican state, but also by their new US American neighbors? Furthermore, what is the impact of this new social situation on the way that pelota mixteca is appreciated by indigenous peoples themselves, and the way that the Mexican state treats indigenous peoples and indigenous living traditions and heritage, such as pelota mixteca? In short, is there a positive, transformative potential for globalization and migration, or does globalization only impoverish Mexico’s indigenous population and force them to abandon their traditional ways of life and migrate out of their home communities? We will return to these questions in more detail below.

As mentioned before, a narrative approach to identity, as opposed to the essentialist approach, allows more room for individual agency in the creation of self-identity. However, Foucault’s discourse/subject-position approach has been criticized as being overly structuralist, paying more attention to the power structures that individuals/subjects have to conform to, than the power/agency of individuals to create their own stories. In the words of Scott Lash and Mike Featherstone (1995: 13), “both modernists and postmodernists have had as the cornerstone of their theory some notion of the irrelevance of identity, of subjectivity, of the social actor or agency ... Foucault in his inaugural lecture spoke of subject positions which only were created by discourse.” Similarly, Bourdieu’s answer to the question “according to what principles do agents choose between the different sports activities or entertainments which, at a given moment in time, are offered to them as being possible?” (1978: 358) is framed in terms of class habitus, a set of predispositions that is determined by the overall societal structure. While there is no room or need to revisit the whole structure versus agency debate here, I feel it is important to stress here again that, in this work, I will follow a social constructivist approach, which searches for a middle ground between structure and agency. In the words of Thomas Risse, “the fundamental insight of the structure-agency debate [...] is not only that social structures and agents are mutually co-determined. The crucial point is to insist on the mutual *constitutiveness* of (social) structures and

agents. The social environment in which we find ourselves defines (“constitutes”) who we are, our identities as social beings. [...] At the same time, human agency creates, reproduces, and changes culture through our daily practices” (Risse 2007: 128, emphasis in original). Giddens (1991: 2) makes a similar point, noting that, under late-modernity/globalization, “new mechanisms of self-identity are shaped by – yet also shape – the institutions of modernity.” If we try to concretize, in a simple way, this criticism of structuralism within the framework of this research, we could say that a ‘middle-ground approach’ to the study of the migration of indigenous peoples from Mexico to Oaxaca would acknowledge the basic economic (structural) factors that facilitated – or should we say forced? – transnational migration from Mexico to the US, but would also take into account the choice (agency) that migrants make to leave their communities to work elsewhere, and the creative ways in which they use their agency to improve their personal (and collective) circumstances, at home and abroad.

### ***Globalization, identity, and pelota mixteca***

Above, I have outlined three ways in which globalization is thought to have affected and impacted cultures and cultural identities. While these three scenarios have often been presented in the literature as being mutually exclusive, I have argued that all these processes can take place simultaneously, because of the possibilities for individuals to self-reflexively construct their identities and understand and present their cultural traditions. In my view, only a case-by-case study of the ways in which individuals, communities and nations have decided to ‘homogenize’, ‘fundamentalize’ or ‘hybridize’ their own traditions and identities, can explain the particular forces at work in specific instances and create an understanding of how global structures and individual agency have contributed to continuity and change in cultural practices and cultural identities. I will try to substantiate this point in the next chapter by showing how processes of homogenization, identity fundamentalism and hybridity have all impacted pelota mixteca.

As Inda and Rosaldo (2002: 4) note, “anthropology... is most concerned with the articulation of the global and the local, that is, with how globalizing processes exist in the context of ... the realities of particular societies ... It is preoccupied not just with mapping the shape taken by the particular flows... that crisscross the globe, but also with the experiences of people living in specific localities.” It is this dialectical interplay of the local and the global that I will try to understand in the following chapter, in order to sketch how globalization has impacted the players of pelota mixteca and the game itself, and how individuals, groups and the nation-state have used different homogenizing, fundamentalizing or hybridizing strategies. Considering the importance of issues of identity, discourse and representation and the role of the nation-state, I will also ask how the

general attitude of the Mexican state and of mainstream mestizo society towards indigenous people has affected the interaction between the state and indigenous people in the sporting arena. Which discourses were created by the state and by the indigenous players themselves surrounding pelota mixteca, and how do these relate, contrast, conflict, or unite? How does the appropriation by the state of pelota mixteca, or the lack thereof, reflect broader issues concerning the relationship between indigenous peoples and mainstream Mexican society? What role does pelota mixteca play in 'the transnational community', now that the game has been 'internationalized'? How have indigenous peoples themselves used pelota mixteca in processes of identity and community formation, and as a means of resistance to (Post-)Colonial oppression? Is there a positive or negative transformational potential in international migration and globalization for the position of indigenous peoples within Mexican (multicultural) society, and for the chances of survival for pelota mixteca? Below, I will attempt to treat these questions in more detail, starting with the role of pelota mixteca in the formation of (indigenous/migrant) communities.

## Chapter 5. Pelota mixteca and the formation of communities

### *Introduction*

The analysis in this chapter is based on a variety of sources. The most important of these are the conversations I had with players of pelota mixteca, as well as a series of semi-structured interviews I conducted in Oaxaca and California between July 2008 and April 2015. These conversations took place around several *pasajuegos* in Oaxaca, as well as in Mexico City and in the cities of Fresno and Los Angeles in the United States. Some of the interviews were also conducted at an international traditional games festival in Verona, Italy, in 2014 at which Mexico was the featured country and demonstrations of several Mexican games, including pelota mixteca and *ulama*, were given. Over the course of the past few years, I spoke to about fifty to sixty players, spectators, relatives of the players and officials of Mexican organizations that promote traditional games and sports. Longer semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten individuals from Oaxaca, Mexico City and Fresno. Because the informal conversations are documented in my own words in my notes and only the semi-structured interviews were taped, in the text below I quote directly from conversations with only a limited number of individuals. While this might seem a small sample, I do feel that this limited number of individuals is representative of a larger group, because the quotes are representative of the many talks I had with players and spectators that are not quoted in the final text. Quotes from individuals who reside in the USA without official documentation are presented under aliases to protect their identity. This is only the case for 'Jaime', 'Ricardo' and 'Pedro'.

Apart from the direct conversations with players, internet articles, Facebook pages and other digital media reports on pelota mixteca formed an important source of information. Newspaper articles not only provided much basic information on when and where tournaments were to take place but also, more importantly, were a source of information on the way the game was represented in the media. In addition, the comments that were published on websites in reaction to articles distributed online provided useful information. Several *quintas* have their own Facebook fan page, which I regularly used and consulted. E-mail and Facebook messages also provided ways to continue conversations with people I had met in Mexico but was not able to visit on a regular basis. Finally, in addition to the conversations and digital publications, government documents, including laws and motions, were an important source of information in trying to

reconstruct the way that Mexico's federal and state authorities dealt with pelota mixteca, and the official national discourse that was created about the game.

The following chapters follow a loose structure that moves from Mexico to the United States and back, starting off, in this chapter, with an outline of how pelota mixteca has functioned and continues to function in the creation of communities, primarily, but not solely, in the context of migration. Subsequently, I turn my attention to the United States and the way that pelota mixteca was 'internationalized' and the role that it plays within the transborder communities that have arisen because of international migration. From this discussion of pelota mixteca and communities follow questions of pelota mixteca and identity. Do the members of these communities indeed all identify in the same way? If so, what does this identity entail and, if not, why not and what are the perceived differences? In the previous chapter I have shown that the way in which identity is constructed has changed significantly under the influence of globalization and that globalization can have homogenizing, hybridizing or fundamentalizing consequences for local cultural identities. Thus, after having examined these questions related to pelota mixteca and identity, I turn to the impact that globalization has had on these identities. In chapter 6, I examine the historic role that the nation-state has played in the increase or decrease of the number of players of pelota mixteca and the way that globalization might impact government policies related to pelota mixteca. The research for this project was conducted intermittently over a period of almost seven years, from 2008 to 2015. As I will attempt to show in the next three chapters, this particular period marked a time of significant change in the relationship between the players of pelota mixteca, on one side, and Mexico's authorities and state institutions, on the other. Because of a marked increase in initiatives that try to stimulate the practice of the game and the interest that politicians have increasingly started to take from the early 2000s onwards, pelota mixteca is very much in flux. I have tried to capture and understand this moment of change in the chapters below, but because of the ongoing nature of these processes, it is difficult to say anything definitive on the eventual outcomes of current events. In the conclusions and in the final reflections I have tried to sketch some possible scenarios for the future.

### ***Pelota mixteca and the formation of communities***

The traditional setting for important games of pelota mixteca is a village's *fiesta patronal*. In honor of the patron saint, festivities would include a tournament in which *quintas* from other villages and towns would compete for the prizes. However, as is the case today, the patron saint's festivities were most certainly not the only times that important games were played. Important tournaments were also organized around general holidays. The Guelaguetza tournament, that is

organized each year in the city of Oaxaca and brings together teams from the whole state as well as from Mexico City, is one of the biggest tournaments currently organized. Traditionally, the time around Easter was also an occasion at which large tournaments would be organized. These Easter tournaments in communities in the state of Oaxaca were already visited by *quintas* from Mexico City in the early 1950s, as evidenced by newspaper articles from those days.

Apart from these traditional occasions for fiestas and tournaments, as well as the *compromiso* matches which could be organized at any moment but were also often clustered around important holidays, tournaments were sometimes organized for special reasons. An amusing example was narrated to me in Fresno in 2012 by Don Marino, a migrant from Jaltepec who has lived in the US since the early 1970s and who was one of the first migrants in California to play *pelota mixteca*:

DON MARINO

“Yo me acuerdo, pa’ narrarles una pequeña historia, en Jaltepec estaban dos viejillos que jugaron en su juventud. Yo tendría 18 años. Y esos dos viejillos se hicieron de palabras en el pueblo, “No que cuando yo jugaba [te ganaba]” y el otro dice “Don Arturo, no pero que yo te ganaba a ti”. Dice el otro señor, le decían el Plutarco, dice “No, que Taco, yo te ganaba”. Ya estaban viejitos y estaban reumáticos ya tenían sus años. Y entonces dice Doña Lola, la que es la hermana de Don Arturo. “Pa’ que no se están haciendo de palabras no más, pa’l trece de julio van a jugar ustedes.” ... Entonces Doña Lola mató cuatro chivos, y se hizo el deporte. ... Y se hizo una fiesta en grande. En aquél entonces me acuerdo que estaba[n] ... todos los equipos grandes jugando. Fue un torneo, fue un gran torneo. No fue un juego. No más para quitarse los viejitos para andarse hablando uno a otro. Así fue como se dijeron. Y el equipo que ganó fue el de Don Arturo. Pero ganó el equipo de Don Arturo, no Don Arturo. Porque [Don Arturo y Don Plutarco] echaron no mas así [como reumáticos].”

For Don Marino, this example of a tournament, which was organized only to settle a discussion between two old men, is not just an amusing memory and an anecdote on the history of *pelota mixteca*, but an example of what he thinks is the essence of the game, a starting point to promote the game nowadays and ensure its survival and revitalization. He started the above story by saying:

DON MARINO

“Tenemos que empezar a preservarlo como era el original. El original del deporte era fiestas. Cuando se jugaba pelota, se jugaba por fiestas. ... Eran fiestas, era barbacoa, era con todo y no se vendía nada. Todo era gratis. ... Y se ha ido perdiendo a causa de que no le estamos dando la promoción correcta. ... Porque como se comienza a restaurar las cosas? Recordando la raíz. Esto no comenzó con balazos, no comenzó con pleitos. Comenzó con gozo, con fiestas, con barbacoas. Así fue como comenzó la pelota. Así es como llegó aquí [a Fresno].”

To Don Marino, the essence of playing pelota, of participating in tournaments, be it as a player or as a spectator, is *convivencia*. It is being together in a festive atmosphere, sharing in food and drink and playing together, while playing against each other. This does not mean that every pelota mixteca tournament is always a happy affair in which there is no disagreement between players, teams or spectators. After all, pelota mixteca remains a sport, which brings with it the highly emotionally charged atmosphere of any sports competition, especially when big games are being played and significant amounts of money are bet. However, through being together, following a tournament circuit and the exchange of teams, games create *convivencia*. Food and drink play an important part in the creation of this *convivencia*. Enjoying a large meal together after a tournament is customary at many traditional tournaments and matches. Often only the competing teams are invited to these meals, but sometimes spectators and others are also invited to partake. For example, in 2009 and 2010, Leobardo Pacheco organized a large tournament as an alternative to the traditional Guelaguetza tournament, in which he invited over 30 *quintas* to come and play at the *pasajuego* of his team in Santa Cruz Amilpas. At the end of the tournament, a large *comida* was organized for the teams (more than 150 individuals in total) and all the participants received a prize. These prizes ranged from a ball for the losing teams to cash prizes for the winners of the tournaments. In his description of the tournament and the meal afterwards, Leobardo used the word *convivencia* several times to describe the importance of bringing all the players together in a meal and awarding a prize to all the participants, not only to the winners. Similarly, in a newspaper article reporting on a tournament that took place in Minas Llano Verde, in the municipality of San Jerónimo Sosola, the author writes “al término del torneo se llevó a cabo *una convivencia* entre los jugadores de las diversas quintas participantes”, and when announcing that another tournament will take place in a few weeks time in Tamazulapam, says “habrá una bolsa de 2 mil pesos en efectivo y también se cerrará con *la acostumbrada convivencia*” (Sánchez León 2011b: 1 my emphasis). Still, *convivencia* not only entails parties, food and drink that accompany the games and tournaments, but also a sense of being part of a community, which is created through a shared interest in the game.



*Convivencia* is also what is at the basis of the exchanges between teams from different communities for the *partidos de compromiso* and the *fiestas patronales*. The relations between communities have to be good in order for teams to be exchanged. An example is described by Philip Dennis in his ethnography of an inter-village conflict between the towns of San Andres Amilpas and Santo Tomas Soyaltepec (1973)<sup>17</sup>. The conflict between the two towns arose after the murder of a man from one of the communities. Members of the other community were accused of the murder, but were never sentenced. Before this conflict, *pelota mixteca* teams from both communities would customarily visit the other community on the occasion of their *fiesta patronal* and compete in a game. After the conflict arose, however, teams were not exchanged for many years and the traditional *pelota mixteca* contest did not take place. Clearly, while, on the one hand, *pelota mixteca* creates a community of its own, on the other hand, this community is also disrupted by and subject to the relationships that exist between different communities on a larger scale.

It is not only to Don Marino and the inhabitants of the villages described by Dennis (1973) that *convivencia*, creating community, is one of the most important aspects of playing *pelota mixteca* and coming to see the games. In a newspaper article describing the introduction of classes of *pelota mixteca* at the Colegio de Bachilleres de Oaxaca (COBAO), one of the students, who does not have a family background in *pelota mixteca* and had never played the sport before it was presented to him during his studies, explains his choice to start learning the game: "Nos llamó mucho la atención, yo ya voy en sexto semestre y estoy por empezar la carrera académica. He elegido estudiar una licenciatura en deportes y quiero enseñar el juego de pelota a los niños ... Este juego es de mucha *convivencia* y me parece muy sano" (Sanchez Leon 2011: 1, my emphasis). Similarly, Alfonso Ramírez Ríos, a member of the organizational committee of the tournament that is held in Bajos de Chila (Oaxaca) says of the event that it is "más que un torneo, es una reunión de amigos que vienen desde muy lejos para convivir con nosotros" (Torretera 2012). The Bajos de Chila tournament, which is organized annually in February around the patron saint's day of the community, is one of the three most important tournaments in the *pelota mixteca* calendar and draws players from the whole of Oaxaca, Mexico City, and, occasionally, even from the United States. Still, in the quote above, we see that even a tournament of this magnitude, one of only a handful that actually brings together *quintas* from all of the places in which the game is played, is described by an organizer as 'a meeting of friends', coming together to take part in the *convivencia*. Clearly, the aspect of *convivencia*, the creation of community, of being together with your fellow

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<sup>17</sup> The book was reissued in 1987, in which the names of the towns were changed to San Andres Zautla and Santo Tomas Mazaltepec.

players, your *paisanos*, the friends whom you have not seen for a long time, is one of the principal reasons for players and spectators to go to tournaments and to participate in pelota mixteca.

'Back home' in Mexico, the *convivencia* aspect of pelota mixteca is significant because it creates communities of players and spectators, as well as strengthening the ties between villages and towns that compete against each other. Naturally, *convivencia*, the feeling of being part of a community, is even more important for migrants who have moved away from their home communities, and try to embed themselves into new social structures in a new, often hostile, environment. To many migrants, who are away from home and regularly confront difficult socio-economic circumstances, going to see a game of *pelota mixteca* provides the opportunity to come together with family, friends and *paisanos*. The *pasajuego* functions as a meeting place for people from the same background. In the words of Marcelo Carreño, a Oaxacan migrant who lives near Dallas, Texas, and is one of the first pelota mixteca players in Dallas, "I knew about pelota mixteca, but I am only starting to play it now. We get together after work. We spend time playing and sharing memories of our hometowns. I love it" (Estrada 2009).

As is the case with international migration from Mexico to the United States, in earlier days meeting people of a similar background was, of course, equally important for migrants who moved from villages in Oaxaca to Puebla, Orizaba, Mexico City and other cities outside of the state. The first migrants to play pelota mixteca in the nation's capital arrived in the late 1920s. At that time, no pelota mixteca courts existed in Mexico City and the game was played in the streets in different parts of the city (Inzúa C. 1998: 75). This situation persisted until the 1950s, when the *pasajuego de Balbuena*, the main pelota mixteca court of Mexico City, was constructed. From the moment of its construction to its final expropriation and destruction by the Mexico City authorities in 2009 (see below), the *Balbuena* formed the epicenter of pelota mixteca in the city. Cornelio Pérez, the chairman of the Asociación del juego de pelota de hule, describes the importance for migrants of the *Balbuena*, which was constructed with a permit of the authorities of the Federal District, in the days before the widespread availability of telecommunication:

CORNELIO

"[El pasajuego de Balbuena era] un espacio que, desde sus orígenes, ayudó, pues, a darle un núcleo de convivencia a muchos de los migrantes, en este caso de origen Oaxaqueño. ... Era un espacio donde, en particular las personas de Oaxaca, de donde son originarios mis padres, pues ahí se encontraban. Había dos lugares donde en aquella época se buscaba la gente. [Como no había acceso a un] teléfono, simplemente llegaron y no sabían ni a donde ir.

Los podían buscar en la Villa de Guadalupe, donde todo el mundo se congregaba porque iban ahí a la Virgen de Guadalupe, o venían al pasajuego de Balbuena.”

As such, the Balbuena not only formed a meeting place for migrants who had already established themselves in the city for a long time, but, perhaps more importantly, was also a point of reference for new migrants who had just arrived from communities in Oaxaca and were trying to find their way in their new surroundings. Since maintaining contact with family members and friends who had already come to the city was complicated, because of the lack of access to telephones or other means of communication, it was difficult for newly arrived migrants to find their relatives and acquaintances. Because the Balbuena formed a focal point for the Oaxacan migrant community, new migrants knew that they could find their *paisanos* there. At the Balbuena they could (re)connect with their family members, friends and *paisanos*, and find them in a city of overwhelming size. The Balbuena had an important function in creating and establishing communities of migrants from Oaxaca, as well as from Michoacán, in the case of players of *pelota tarasca*, who also used the courts to play their game. The Balbuena itself was also the result of a communal effort, as it was constructed by an already established community of players, consisting of migrants who had started coming to the city from the 1920s onwards. Cornelio Pérez describes the way in which the *pasajuego de Balbuena* was created in the 1950s:

CORNELIO

“Nosotros llegamos a esas instalaciones ... con un permiso que otorgó el gobierno de la ciudad de aquella época. ... En aquél momento, la misma regencia de la ciudad otorgó un permiso para que se construyan esas canchas. Porque además no las construyó el gobierno, también queremos que quede muy claro. Simplemente otorgó el permiso para usar terrenos que los compañeros de aquella época, mediante trabajo comunitario, limpiaron a través de uso del esfuerzo de todos los jugadores y [lo] acondicionaron con sus propios recursos.”

Through the communal labor of the players of *pelota mixteca* and other migrants from Oaxaca, the *pasajuego de Balbuena*, was constructed, without, as Cornelio stresses, one cent of economic subsidy from the DF government. Over time, the *Balbuena* became a well-known, almost legendary, name within the circles of *pelota mixteca* players as a location where great games took place. It was the focal point of *pelota mixteca*-culture in Mexico City, as well as one of the important points of reference for Mixtec and Zapotec migrants in general. A place where people could *convivir*,

a place that formed and strengthened the migrant community, and a place that was itself a testament to the ability of the migrant community to create spaces for themselves.

The story of the creation of the *pasajuego de Balbuena* has many parallels with the creation of one of the most important *pasajuegos* in the United States, in Fresno, California. This court was constructed through the communal labor of Mixtec migrants, mostly from the Jaltepec-Nochixtlán region. Don Agustín Hernández, *coime* of the Fresno *pasajuego* as well as president of the Asociación de Pelota Mixteca California Central, recounts its history:

DON AGUSTÍN

“[En los años 70] no teníamos el tipo de campo que se necesita para la pelota.

Entonces se iba a los parques. Pero teníamos que ir temprano, porque ya en el día llegaban las familias y ya no podíamos practicar ... Y así cada ocho días, hasta que empezamos a cooperar poco a poco dinero de cinco pesos, diez pesos, como era la posibilidad, y al final rentamos un terreno. Pagábamos 100 pesos cada ocho días. ... Fue unos tres, cuatro años que se jugó ahí. Después nos pidieron el terreno porque ya lo iban a cultivar, y ya nos quedábamos sin campo otra vez. Y seguimos buscando, hasta que rentamos aproximadamente unos cinco, seis veces. Estuvimos rentando desde esa fecha [1977] hasta el '96, que yo tuve la oportunidad de conseguir este lugarcito. Y me motivó conseguir algo, porque ya no teníamos campo donde seguir practicando la pelota. ... Entre todos nos ayudamos para darle su arregladito al campo.”

In the case of the Fresno court, Don Agustín was one of the main actors who facilitated the creation of the court. He was the one who bought the land on which he built his house with a *pasajuego* in his backyard. However, like in the case of the Balbuena, it is only because the players of the game cooperated as a community that they were able to create their own space in which they could play the game. This space is enlivened by cultural items and practices from ‘back home’ and represents a small part of Mexico that is recreated in California. At the Fresno international tournament in 2012, Oaxacan *tortas de quesillo* were sold, as well as tacos and tortillas, and Mexican music was played over the sound system during the whole tournament. The event started off with all the participants, both spectators and players, singing the Mexican national anthem. At the end of the tournament, all of the teams, those from Mexico and from the United States, as well as some spectators, joined in a large meal of tortillas with beans. During an earlier edition of the tournament, one of the participants even provided two pigs and a large *barbacoa* was prepared. Clearly, for migrants outside of Oaxaca, *pelota mixteca* is not only a weekly event that holds the migrant community, or at least a small, well-described part of it, together in a new environment. It also

enables some of them to create new spaces for themselves, both physically and metaphorically, in which they can (continue to) experience and recreate an atmosphere that is similar to, if not the same as, the one in Mexico during *pelota mixteca* games and tournaments. In the following, I will focus on the history of *pelota mixteca* in the United States, explore what impact migration has had on the game and what role, if any, *pelota mixteca* plays in the transnational and transborder communities that have formed over the past four decades.

### ***The transnational/transborder community***

Many indigenous peoples of Mexico have a long history of labor migration, both within Mexico and to the United States of America. These patterns of migration go back to the end of the nineteenth century, when, under the presidency of Porfirio Díaz, the construction of large networks of railroads led to the seasonal migration of many indigenous and non-indigenous peasants (Beezley and MacLachlan 2009). While many Mexican indigenous peoples, such as the Triqui and Maya's, have historically migrated primarily within Mexico, others, such as the Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and P'urépechas, have a much longer history of migration to the United States. This tradition of migration to the United States goes back to the Bracero program (1942-1964), a labor program that was created in order to alleviate the labor shortages in the United States occasioned by World War II. Under the Bracero program, many indigenous migrants from Oaxaca migrated seasonally to work in agricultural labor, often returning to their home communities when their contracts expired. As time progressed, however, many migrants decided to stay in their new homelands (either legally or as 'illegal immigrants'), creating communities of indigenous migrants in the United States, as well as giving rise to groups of second- and third-generation indigenous migrant US citizens. From the 1980s onwards, the number of indigenous migrants started to increase significantly (Fox and Rivera-Salgado 2004: 2; see also Stephen 2007: 66-77). This not only meant an influx to the United States of indigenous peoples like the Maya, who did not traditionally migrate to the US, but also led to a marked growth in the number of indigenous migrants from already present populations, such as Mixtecs and Zapotecs. In part, this increase was due to the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which was passed in 1986 and allowed many 'illegal' migrants who were already in the USA to regularize their status. This provided them with possibilities to accept better-paid jobs and move up the socio-economic ladder, which opened up room in the lower end of the job market for new migrants. In this wave of migration, Mixtecs primarily ended up working in rural farm labor, while Zapotecs found employment in urban services. By the early 1990s, around 50,000 Mixtecs lived in California's Central Valley, and around 55,000 Zapotecs had settled in the Los Angeles area (ibid.: 9-10).

For many Oaxacan migrants, the choice to migrate across the US-Mexican border was only the next step in an established pattern of migration that started in the beginning of the twentieth century after the end of the Mexican Revolution.

“The first travels of Oaxacan villagers in search of employment began back in the 1930s, taking them to Oaxaca City, the sugarcane fields of Veracruz, and later to the growing neighborhoods in Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl on the periphery of Mexico City. Then labor contractors supplying the agribusinesses of the northwestern state of Sinaloa began recruiting, especially in the Mixteca region. These south-to-north flows later extended to the Valley of San Quintín in northern Baja California. By the early 1980s, indigenous migrants reached further north, to California, Oregon, and Washington.” (Fox and Rivera-Salgado 2004: 9).

This migration northward is also reflected in the places where pelota mixteca was played during the past century. In the middle of the twentieth century, important locations where pelota mixteca was played outside of Oaxaca included the city of Puebla in the state of the same name and Orizaba in Veracruz. Over the course of the past decades, however, as migrants decided to move ever further northwards in search of work, pelota mixteca has disappeared in these places, and now only survives in Mexico City.

The establishment of large numbers of indigenous migrants in the United States has created a novel form of community, referred to in the literature as ‘transnational’ or ‘transborder’ communities. These communities are characterized by the fact that they, according to Stephen (2007: 9), “[do] not exist in one geographic place but [are] spread out throughout multiple sites in the United States and Mexico”, and are inhabited by ‘transmigrants’, people who “having migrated from one nation-state to another, live their lives across borders, participating simultaneously in social relations that embed them in more than one nation-state” (Glick Schiller 2003: 105). As such, these ‘transnational communities’ consist of people living in multiple locations, who, in the case of Mexico, often identify with the same hometown. According to Stephen (2007: 6), the lives of these transmigrants are not only transnational, living on different sides of the borders of nation-states, but are rather ‘transborder’, considering that “the borders they cross are ethnic, class, cultural, colonial, and state borders within Mexico as well as the U.S.-Mexico border and in different regions of the United States.”

One border that seems difficult to cross for indigenous migrants, however, is that of ethnicity. Whereas mainstream North American society sees the mass of Mexican immigrants as a homogeneous ethnic/racial group, within the migrant community indigenous immigrants are still

seen by non-indigenous Mexican migrants as *indios*, with all the negative connotations this term entails. As a result, in the United States, these indigenous migrants suffer from ‘double discrimination’. On the one hand, immigrant workers face discrimination from mainstream American society as Mexicans, a foreign group within the United States of America, on the other hand, indigenous migrant workers, like indigenous peoples in general in Mexico, face discrimination from *mestizo* migrant workers who look down on the *indígenas*. Because of this process of discrimination within the group of Mexican migrant workers, indigenous individuals never felt a consequent sense of identification with this group of Mexican migrants. They simply did not feel at home in a community that systematically discriminated against indigenous migrants because of their ethnic background. As a result, a unified class of foreign migrant workers, which included indigenous migrants, never truly formed in the United States (Nagengast and Kearney 1990:87). Indigenous migrants still identified mostly with their communities of origin, forming transnational/transborder communities. Nonetheless, over the course of the past decades, because of this shared sensation of double discrimination, new ethnic identities, for example Mixtec or Zapotec, but also, more broadly, *indígena* have started to form (Fox and Rivera-Salgado 2004; Nagengast and Kearney 1990). These identities did not exist ‘back home’ in Oaxaca, mostly due to historical legacies of inter-village conflict, but emerged when a form of cross-community solidarity took shape under the influence of the new socio-economic conditions in the United States, and gave rise to new organizations that represented the interests of indigenous migrants (Fox and Rivera-Salgado 2004: 12). The question here is what importance pelota mixteca has, or could have, for these newly constructed organizations and identities, and vice-versa, how do these coalitions, organizations and identities influence the game? For example, do players of pelota mixteca themselves actually choose to employ the label of ‘Mixtec’ or ‘indigenous’ when describing themselves and their game, or do they simply refer to themselves as members of a certain village-community? Below, I will examine the history of pelota mixteca in the USA, followed by an exploration of what role pelota mixteca plays in forming and maintaining transnational or transborder communities.

### ***Pelota mixteca in the USA***

Before crossing the border became increasingly complicated during the last decades of the twentieth century, many undocumented migrants in the US were seasonal migrants who planned to return to their hometowns after working in the US for a limited period of time. The first Mixtecs and Zapotecs, potential players of pelota mixteca, who reached the United States through the Bracero program, would go north to work on a specific job after having been recruited by labor contractors,

but would return home when the work was finished. The program only “allowed the importation of Mexican workers for annual harvests with the stipulation that they were to return to Mexico after their work was finished” (Stephen 2007: 72). Because of the temporary character of their stay abroad, these migrants never really brought pelota mixteca with them to the US in an organized form. They did not carry their gloves and, if they were players of the game, they would resume playing back home. These first migrants, then, did not ‘internationalize’ pelota mixteca. But when did pelota mixteca start being played in the United States, where is it played nowadays, and how can we understand its historical trajectory?

Don Agustín, whose father had come to California to work as a Bracero worker, followed his two older brothers to California in 1975. According to him, the game started to be played incipiently in the mid-1960s:

MARTIN

Usted, cuando llegó acá?

AGUSTÍN

En 1975 ... entonces ya se jugaba acá, las otras personas que ya tenían unos diez años más antes que yo [lo jugaron]. Fueron los primeros que empezaron a traer el guante y pelotas. Ya se empezaba a practicar en tres, cuatro, cinco. ... No había bastantes jugadores en esos tiempos. ...

MARTIN

Desde cuando hubo bastantes jugadores para practicar?

DON AGUSTÍN

Después del '75 que llegué yo, ya empezaron a migrar más y más Oaxaqueños que jugaban la pelota mixteca. Y, pues, ya con el tiempo, como en el '77, ya se completaban diez jugadores y ya se jugaba cinco a cinco.

Don Agustín dates the first full-fledged pelota mixteca matches in California to the late 1970s, around the time that he first arrived in the United States. Before then, the game was played just as a pastime, but actual matches could not be organized, not only because there were too few players, but also, more importantly, because there were not enough gloves for all to play. Don Marino, who came to California in 1972, around the same time as Don Agustín, describes the story of how, according to him, the first glove came to California and how they played the game before there were enough gloves for everyone to play.



DON MARINO

[El primero que trajo un guante de pelota mixteca a California fue] Crescencio Trinidad. Y como [lo] sé? Porque nosotros venimos desde siempre. Llegamos a trabajar a Coalinga, y él se trajo un primer guante. Y cuando pasamos la frontera nos agarró la migra. Y empezaron a revisar. Yo no traía nada, él traía una pelota y un guante. No más eso traía. ... Él era un hombre que tenía fe en el deporte, porque para todo hay que tener fe. Y él tenía fe en el deporte. Y cuando se lo llevaron [el guante], le pasaron rayos X, y no se explicaban que material tenía, porque pesaba demasiado. Y que tenía adentro? No le encontraron nada. Entonces lo tuvieron investigando. ... Les tuvo que explicar [como era el juego]. ... Y cuando ellos empezaron a escuchar cómo se narra, dijeron 'Este es semejante al fútbol Americano'. Semejante, nada más que se juega en diferente forma. ... Y cuando dio esta explicación, lo dejaron libre. Lo echaron para Tijuana, le dejaron su guante, no se lo quitaron, pero se lo querían quitar. [Antes,] ahí en Coalinga, nada más se paraba uno, me paraba yo de un lado y Chencho de otro lado. Le botaba yo la bola. Cambiábamos por turnos, y luego otro botaba y así no más. ... Como al año, llegó uno que se llama Guadalupe Hernández y entonces, como se sabía que ya hubo un guante, se trajo otro guante. Los primeros dos guantes que llegaron fueron el de Lupe y el de Chencho, fueron los que pasaron para acá. Y de ahí empezaron a llegar. Fue un tal Regino Bolaños y trajo cuatro guantes. Entonces ya eran seis. ... Y entonces ya jugábamos tres de un lado y tres de otro lado. Esto es bien hermoso como comenzó. Después de ahí, ya empezaron a llegar. Cada persona que venía empezó a traer guantes. ... [Fue] Chencho. Chencho Trinidad, el primero que pasó su guante. Estuvo bien bonito porque lo investigaron como si hubiera pasado mucha contrabanda. Pero no, era nada más un guante y una pelota. ... Como lo compararía? Como Cristóbal Colón, cuando pisó. Primer paso en la tierra. Descubrimiento.

MARTIN

Y entonces antes, aquí no había pelota?

DON MARINO

No había. ... Estábamos como veinte personas, antes no éramos muchos. ... Fue como en el 80. Para no exagerar, pero fue en los ochenta cuando comenzó ... Tendrá como cerca de treinta años el deporte aquí. ... Fresno fue el primer lugar donde se jugó.

While there is a slight difference in the dates that Don Agustín and Don Marino give, it is clear that pelota mixteca was not played as an organized game, that is to say with enough players and gloves for there to be actual matches and tournaments, until the late 1970s or the early 1980s. This timing would agree with Fox and Rivera-Salgado's (2004:9) assertion that it was not until the early 1980s that large groups of Mixtec migrants travelled further north than Baja California and started settling in California in sizeable numbers. The main destinations that indigenous Oaxacan migrants travelled to were the San Joaquin Valley, the Los Angeles metropolitan area and northern San Diego County, places where Oaxacans now have long-established communities (ibid.:9). Not surprisingly, it is in exactly these places that most pelota mixteca players and teams can be found. According to Jesús Hernández, in 2013 there were around 18 teams in California, five in Fresno, five in San Fernando, two in San Diego, two in Santa Barbara and one each in Gilroy, Monterey, San Bernardino, and Oxnard. According to Don Agustín, the number of teams is larger. He says there are seven in San Diego and four in Santa Barbara, apart from the ones in other cities. This estimate only counts the pelota mixteca de hule teams. There are also pelota mixteca de esponja teams in different cities in California, most notably in Los Angeles and Santa Maria. During fieldwork I was told that there were also some *quintas* of players of pelota mixteca de forro in the US. This would not be surprising since there has been, and continues to be, a lot of migration from the Mixteca Baja, the heartland of pelota mixteca de forro, to the US, but I have personally never met any players of this variety of the game in the US, nor have I found any documentation of the game being played. Outside of California, pelota mixteca is played in Dallas, Texas. A newspaper article on pelota mixteca in that city says that the game started there in 2007, when Jesús Ramírez brought some balls and gloves back with him from a trip to Oaxaca (Estrada 2009). Here, again, we see that the start of pelota mixteca in a region, in this case northern Texas, is related to the arrival of more sizeable groups of indigenous migrants, a development that, in the case of Texas, has only taken place in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In 2014 the Arellanes brothers, of the *quinta Los Gemelos*, had received an invitation to come to Texas and compete against the local *quinta*, opening up possibilities for another international tournament. It could be that pelota mixteca is also played in other states to which many Mixtecs and Zapotecs have migrated, for example Oregon, Washington, Illinois, New Jersey or New York, but I have not found any information on this. One possible reason could be that the climate in many of these northern states is more prohibiting and that this complicates the construction of a *pasajuego* and playing the game year-round. What is sure is that there is no contact between the players in California and the players in other states.

Naturally, the history of pelota mixteca in the United States mirrors the development of migration flows to the United States from Oaxaca, for the simple fact that if there are no people,

there is no pelota mixteca. As a result, the game was popularized around the time that a 'critical mass' of migrants arrived in the US and it is played especially in the state with the most Mixtec and Zapotec migrants, California. But what role does the game play in creating and maintaining transborder communities? Why do teams from Oaxaca come to play in the *Torneo Internacional* and what does this mean to the players involved?

The most remarkable outcome of the 'transnationalization' of pelota mixteca is the international tournament that is organized annually in Fresno, California. In this tournament, which was organized for the first time in 1998, a selection of players from Oaxaca competes with a selection of players from California for the title of 'international champion of pelota mixteca'. The tournament has been organized from the outset by Agustín Hernández. He recounts the history of how he and others came to organize it:

#### DON AGUSTÍN

La pelota mixteca se abrió a nivel internacional en [1998]. Y desde entonces, año con año hacemos lo posible para traer la mejor selección de Oaxaca, para que venga competir, pues, nos dé buen espectáculo para todo nuestro público aquí en Fresno. ... La asociación [de Pelota Mixteca California Central] se fundó en el '96, cuando iniciamos solicitando al estado de Oaxaca que queríamos traer una selección de ahí para acá. Y, entonces, el cónsul que estaba en función en ese tiempo aquí en Fresno dijo que sí nos apoyaba pero quería saber algo sobre la historia de la pelota. ... Entonces me dijo, 'Si tú me consigues algo de información, yo la leo. Me das un mes para leerla, y yo te contesto si te apoyo o no te apoyo.' ... Hicimos un viaje especialmente a Oaxaca, hablamos con los amigos ahí. Nos consiguieron una información. [La traíamos al consulado] y de ahí esperamos a que nos contestaran. Al mes, más o menos, nos contestan que estaba muy interesante la historia de la pelota. Les había gustado mucho y que estaban interesados en apoyarnos para que se abriera a nivel internacional. Nos llevó como ocho meses, tramitando papeles ... Hasta que los dos gobiernos lo aceptaron, el de Estados Unidos y el de México.

The organization of the annual tournament is in the hands of the *mesa directiva* of the pelota mixteca association that Don Agustín and others founded in 1996. This *mesa directiva* consists of seven individuals, including Don Agustín. The organization of the tournament starts about six months in advance by selecting the players that will be invited and starting the process of contacting the Mexican consulate in Fresno, which will provide the necessary letters of invitation that enable the players from Mexico to obtain a visa. While, officially, the tournament is organized

by the *mesa directiva*, it is Don Agustín who does much of the work, also because he functions as the *coime* of the *pasajuego*, which was constructed in the backyard of his house.

One of the main reasons to organize the tournament is the pride and motivation it brings to players from both sides of the border. It inspires the players to practice harder and strengthens the (community) relationships that exist between the players (and the players' families and friends) on both sides of the border. Jaime and Pedro comment:

JAIME

Eso me da mucho orgullo a mí, de yo jugarle a una quinta [de Oaxaca] ... porque traen guantes, yo llevo guante, ... el orgullo es lo bueno, me entiendes? De que le juegues!

PEDRO

Sabes qué? Lo que pasa es que aquí no estamos como allá. A veces jueves, los días que quieren van a volar al Tecnológico [en Oaxaca], a sus pueblos. Aquí es difícil que vayamos, que vengamos. A veces no se puede. Y más en cambio, si juegan, juegan enseguida con otros que juegan más. Y aquí no. A veces jugamos entre nosotros a veces no hay.

MARTIN

Porque hay menos jugadores?

PEDRO

Hay menos jugadores. Entonces te imaginas, nos sentimos orgullosos de poderle jugarlos a ellos, que tienen un nivel mucho más alto que nosotros. De poderles competir.

While Pedro's idea of the number of players that there are in Mexico and the amount of time that people in Mexico have to play might be somewhat overly positive – there are not too many players anymore and teams like Los Gemelos from Mexico City have to travel all the way to Oaxaca to play high-level games – it is clear that the players feel proud to represent the place where they live against a team from the place where their roots lie. This sentiment of pride is echoed by players who make the journey the other way around and come from Oaxaca and Mexico City to compete with the teams in California. Salvador Montes, a man from Jaltepec who was a member of the traditional authorities of the town and who joined the 2012 selection from Oaxaca as an accompanying member says:

DON SALVADÓR

Hoy en este día [del torneo internacional], para nosotros es un orgullo... estar en este lugar, ya que venimos de allá del estado de Oaxaca, México, para convivir unos momentos acá con nuestros paisanos que radican en este lindo California.

While Don Salvadór did not participate in the tournament as a player, the renewed contact with *paisanos* and the participation as a spectator in the tournament give him a sense of pride and belonging. The 2012 tournament was won by the selection from Mexico, which was represented by the team Los Gemelos, a group of five brothers from Mexico City. In an interview after the final of the 2012 international tournament, Eduardo Arellanes, one of the main spokespeople for pelota mixteca in Mexico City, says:

PEDRO SILVA

Cuál es el sentimiento después de ganar?

EDUARDO

Mira, el sentimiento, no es nada más el triunfo. [Es] el llegar, el estar aquí, en tierra muy lejana, pero es cercano, porque el espíritu del juego está aquí, nuestra gente está aquí. Gente que no hemos visto desde hace mucho tiempo, así que no venimos a tierra extraña. Porque venimos con nuestra gente y venimos con nuestro deporte. Pero de todos modos sigue siendo un juego. Entonces lo que quieres en un juego es ganar. Y ahora que hemos salido triunfadores en este torneo, pues, la emoción se multiplica es lo mejor que nos podía haber pasado.

PEDRO SILVA

Hay un sentimiento en especial en triunfar en una tierra donde usted no radica?

EDUARDO

El sentimiento de saber que solo tienes una vez, pues ... No es como estar allá en México que sabes que tendrás una revancha. Aquí vienes y es en un día donde se va a decidir todo. Donde un mal día, donde una mala pelota puede hacer que se frustren las ideas que tenemos desde seis meses atrás, cuando nos informaron que vamos a ser los que vamos a representar al estado de Oaxaca. ... Entonces el estar tan lejos, el tener una oportunidad tan rara de estar aquí, el ganar, es muy emocionante.

In Eduardo's and Don Salvador's comments, we see the combination of two of the most important elements of pelota mixteca in a transnational context. In the first place, there is the

*convivencia*, the creation of community, being together with your *paisanos* in a different place. Here, pelota mixteca is a way of maintaining contact within the ‘transnational community’, in this case a transnational community of players of pelota mixteca. Additionally, however, in contrast to many of the other cultural traditions that are being continued or revitalized across the border, pelota mixteca is a competition, a game in which only one of the teams can come out triumphant. Commenting on why the victory of his team is so special, Eduardo says that it is the uniqueness of the event that makes it so valuable. You only get one shot, so you’d better get it right.

While, for the players from Oaxaca, there is only one possible moment a year to go to California, there are, or at least used to be, sometimes multiple opportunities for them to compete against the players from California, as some players from California travel(led) to tournaments in Oaxaca. The tournament which is organized for the *fiesta patronal* of Jaltepec is one of the moments at which players from California compete against players from Oaxaca. This is due to the fact that many players in Fresno are from Magdalena Jaltepec and return home to celebrate the fiesta. The tournament of Bajos de Chila, the second-largest tournament after that of the Guelaguetza, is sometimes visited by players from the United States as well, as was the Guelaguetza tournament in Oaxaca City. Don Agustín recounts the emotion of going back to Oaxaca and playing the traditional game there:

#### DON AGUSTÍN

Nos motivó a todos nosotros que venimos hoy, ver a la selección [Oaxaqueña], verla jugar. ... Entonces, imagínese, yendo una quinta de aquí a Oaxaca. Cuando nosotros íbamos, nos dejaron el campo a nosotros solos. A la quinta que iba de acá, contra la quinta que nos ponían de allá de Oaxaca. El campo estaba llenecito de público. Y ese era el gusto que nos traíamos nosotros, que el público estaba con nosotros. Llenábamos el campo de pelota de gente, por vernos jugar. No éramos, como digo, la misma categoría de juego que ellos, pero es lo que a la gente motivaba, que íbamos a jugar. Ese era el gusto.

Over the past years, as the immigration laws of the United States have gotten tougher and tougher and border patrols round up immigrants trying to cross the border even in the remotest places, the frequency of players travelling back to Mexico to compete in tournaments has decreased because many of the players in Fresno are undocumented. Because of the increased difficulties to cross the border back to the United States, players decide not to go back to compete in their hometown fiestas or larger tournaments in Bajos de Chila or Oaxaca:

DON AGUSTÍN

Tuve la oportunidad de participar algunas ocho, nueve veces en el Torneo Guelaguetza del estado de Oaxaca. Nos hacían invitación oficial, me la mandaban. Y aquí seleccionábamos a los mejores compañeros que podían viajar, que tenían la oportunidad de viajar y regresarse sin ningún problema, ya tenían su residencia. Entonces, con ellos participé para ir allá. ... Toca la situación de que ahorita los mejores jugadores que jugaron hoy, no tienen la posibilidad de ir y regresar. Sí pueden ir, pero no pueden regresar. Entonces, por esto hemos dejado de participar, porque pues el único que puedo ir soy yo y mi hijo, y ya los demás no pueden. Sí hemos ido de todos modos. Allá tenemos más familiares que juegan pelota mixteca en la ciudad de México, entonces ellos dicen 'Si vienes, nos completamos la quinta y vamos a jugar.' Este año [2012] nos pidieron si podíamos llevar una selección [al torneo de la Guelaguetza]. Estamos viendo esto ahorita pero, como digo, no hay ninguna garantía, porque los mejores compañeros no tienen la oportunidad de volver a regresar fácilmente. Eso se nos complica mucho. Pero sí sería bonito que un día tuviéramos esa oportunidad para seguir yendo. Esto motiva más.

The lack of documented status of many of the players is not only problematic for teams that want to compete in international tournaments, it also hinders players within the United States. In San Diego, for example, few people play the game, and even less spectators come to witness the games, because the pasajuego can only be reached by passing the *casilla de San Clemente*, where *la migra* often checks the papers of those who pass. Migrants who do not have the correct documentation cannot afford to risk being caught by the immigration services when going to see or participate in a game. The fact that undocumented migrants in the United States can no longer return easily to their villages of origin, for fear that they will not be able to get back into the country, naturally, has a profound impact on how social relationships with friends and family back home are maintained. Since many people cannot travel back and forth anymore, the tournament in Fresno also functions as a meeting place for people living in the US who cannot go back, and their friends and family from Oaxaca who, for once, can come and visit:

MARTIN

Mucha gente aquí viene de Jaltepec, verdad?

DON AGUSTÍN

Bueno, radican en diferentes partes aquí de California, pero son de Jaltepec. Y como saben que viene [la selección de Oaxaca], y vienen a veces parientes de ellos, vienen aquí. Conviven

con ellos y es un gusto porque, como digo, uno no puede ir para allá, entonces, así aprovechan.

The role of the tournament as a meeting place of Mexican (indigenous) migrants in California, ensures that it can also serve as a means to reach many members of the community at one time. Hence, it is an ideal place to organize with others for a common goal, or to advertise products or services that could interest (indigenous) Mexican migrants in Fresno, a group that might otherwise be hard to reach. For example, at the 2012 Fresno tournament, Don Agustín had installed a large sound system that played Mexican *ranchero* music throughout the tournament. The music was interspersed with Don Agustín taking up the microphone from time to time to direct comments to the audience, inform people of the score of the game, or to simply comment on the game that was being played. During one of these comments, he took the microphone to advertise the next elections of the *señorita Belleza Oaxaqueña*, a beauty pageant organized for girls with a Oaxacan background in the Fresno area. He was asked by one of the women organizing the pageant to announce the competition, since funds needed to be raised so that the competition could take place and added, “Yo los invito a cooperar un pesito para nuestras candidatas. ... Vamos a cooperar todos a apoyar nuestras candidatas.” This way, the pelota mixteca tournament enables others who want to organize different events for Oaxacans to announce them and to start fundraising. Similarly, the organization of the tournament was sponsored by several smaller and larger businesses from the Fresno area. In his opening speech, Don Agustín thanked the different parties who had contributed to the organization of the tournament. Among them were a local Oaxacan restaurant who sold traditional Oaxacan food like tlayudas, mole Oaxaqueña and tortas with quesillo Oaxaqueño, a local enterprise that supplied sodas and bottled water for the participants, different individuals from the community who had helped with practical matters, the local Wells Fargo branch, and Tony and Mike’s Fresno boxing, a local boxing school.

Another sponsor that Don Agustín thanked in his opening speech, was the Mexican consulate in Fresno. He describes the kind of support that they give to the tournament:

DON AGUSTÍN

El apoyo que nos da el consulado de México aquí, es el apoyo de los premios que tenemos para el día de hoy. Y los trámites de papeles de invitación, año con año que se envían de aquí para Oaxaca, solicitando el apoyo de la selección. Ese es el apoyo que ellos nos dan. Económicamente, no nos dan ningún centavo en apoyo.



Even though they do not directly support the organization of the tournament financially – they do however supply the trophies that the teams receive – the involvement of the Mexican consulate in Fresno is important. If they did not supply letters of invitation for the players from Oaxaca, the process of receiving visas would be much more complicated and the players might not even be able to come over to the US. As in the case of the indigenous organizers of events and small local businesses that provide support for the tournament organization, the consulate uses the event to promote their services and as a way of community outreach. Three employees of the consulate visited the 2012 tournament carrying many boxes filled with children’s textbooks and other reading materials in Spanish. They encouraged parents and children to take the material home and learn Spanish, math and other subjects. A line of children who wanted to obtain the materials that the consulate employees had brought formed in front of the consulate stand (Fig. 38). The representatives of the consulate also encouraged the children’s parents and other adults to take part in an educational program that the consulate had sponsored, which provided primary and secondary education to adults. At the completion of the program, participants received an official certificate of the Mexican Secretaría de Educación Pública, that they could use in Mexico as well. The consular representative mentioned an example of an 80-year old man from Oaxaca, who had graduated from the program in 2011, stating that “nunca es tarde para seguirnos educando.” As such, the tournament functions as a meeting place among migrants, between migrants and visitors from Oaxaca, and between migrants and representatives of the Mexican state government. The tournament, thus, also plays a central role in maintaining the community of migrants and alerting members of this community to other events or services that are organized for them.

### ***Material connections/the gloves***

The exchange of players and teams between Mexico and the United States is the most direct personal contact that pelota mixteca brings about. However, it is not only people who travel across the border. The gloves that are used for pelota mixteca de hule, and which are only made and repaired in Xoxocotlán, Oaxaca, also cross. According to Fox and Rivera-Salgado (2004: 19), “as in the case of many other Oaxacan migrant cultural activities – dances, music, food – Mixtec ball has generated a demand for traditional equipment, creating jobs for the artisans back home who make the gloves and balls.” This is only partially true, since there is only one person who knows how to make the gloves at the moment. Hence, there is indeed more work for one person in Oaxaca, but the demand for gloves from the United States does not really create additional jobs in Mexico. Players from the United States normally order new gloves by telephone directly from the glove maker in Oaxaca. After they pay a deposit, the glove is made and it is sent across the border by

regular mail, which in most cases only takes a few days, according to Leobardo Pacheco. Agustín Pacheco, who made gloves from the middle of the twentieth century until the early 2000s, said that gloves were already being ordered from California as early as the 1970s. Leobardo Pacheco has accompanied the Oaxacan selection that travels to the United States on several occasions, since this provides him with extra contacts and opportunities for work. Sometimes gloves need to be repaired and they are sent back to Oaxaca for reparation and, after, go back to the United States. In many senses, gloves cross national borders much more easily than people.

The gloves that players of pelota mixteca de hule wear are constant links to Oaxaca. Unlike the equipment for pelota mixteca de forro or esponja, which can be crafted locally by anyone with a bit of skill, the gloves for hule cannot be created by the players themselves, and buying a glove is a big investment. As a result, players feel very attached to their gloves and play with the same glove for a very long time. Jaime and Pedro say:

MARTIN

De donde sacaste el guante, lo compraste directamente del guantero?

JAIME

Mira, este guante, yo tuve un padrazo y me gustó [este guante] y dijo “no, pues sabes, que yo te lo compro, me dijo”

PEDRO

Fíjate, como este está bien. Porque hay diferentes guantes. ... Si tu metes la mano ...

JAIME

... tu sabes si el guante está bueno o no está bueno.

PEDRO

Si es tuyo o, sabes que no es para mí, mejor buscas otro. Pero cuando ya lo encuentras, no lo sueltas, no lo sueltas.

MARTIN

Ya te quedas con el guante toda la vida?

JAIME

Yo desde el tiempo que yo empecé a jugar este deporte, este es el único guante que yo he tenido. Es el único. Ahora, otra cosa, yo he escuchado de gente que cambia guantes, que dice “oy, que esto no me gusta y que otro” me entiendes. Pero eso, yo pienso que eso no es de jugadores. Un jugador tiene que adaptarse con su guante. ... No me lo cambio por nada, me entiendes. Estos son míos, me entiendes. Así, aunque me des dinero, lo que sea, yo no te lo voy a vender. Porque es mío, yo lo quiero, yo me siento a gusto.

The gloves are a shared concern for all of the migrant players of pelota mixteca de hule. As a result, Leobardo Pacheco, who makes the gloves, is in direct or indirect contact with virtually all of the players of this modality of the game in Mexico and the United States. In contrast, not all of the migrant players of pelota mixteca are in contact with each other in the United States. They form separate communities, based on the variety of the game they play, the regions and villages they come from in Oaxaca, and disagreements that have taken place. For instance, Don Agustín and his brother mention that there are between twenty and thirty *quintas* playing pelota mixteca de hule in California at the moment. They mention places like San Diego, Monterey, and Santa Barbara among others. Apart from these places, Fox and Rivera-Salgado (2004: 19) mention that the game is played in Selma and Watsonville. These cities were not mentioned by Fresno players like Don Agustín. This seems to suggest that there is not one state-wide pelota mixteca community. As is the case in Oaxaca, there is some contact between players of the hule and esponja variants, but these are not in contact with the players of pelota mixteca de forro. Also, disagreements that have arisen locally lead to divisions in established communities and the formation of new ones. In the case of Fresno, there are two different *pasajuegos*, that are used by different groups who formed as part of a disagreement. One player told me in confidence that this was due to the fact that two brothers got into a fight with each other and one team decided to relocate to another *pasajuego*. According to the same player, the players from the other *pasajuego* have started to ask visiting teams to pay for ‘the privilege’ of playing at their *pasajuego*. This is extremely unusual since, normally, teams that come to compete only pay a small fee for the *coime* as a contribution to help to keep the playing field in a good condition, but are not expected to pay for anything else. As a result of this division in the playing community in Fresno, sometimes there are not enough players at both *pasajuegos* to be able to play a regular 5-a-side game.

### ***Pelota mixteca and the creation of a transborder community***

Pelota mixteca clearly has a role to play in establishing and sustaining communities of both indigenous migrants and of non-migrant inhabitants of Oaxacan villages. The *pasajuego* functions as a meeting place that creates and sustains communities of players and spectators, and their respective family and community members. These communities are created on multiple scales. In the first place, at the level of the team, where five players come together and form a *quinta* that represents a family or a group of friends. This ‘small community’ is the most basic level and often forms out of an already existing family relationship. As we will see below, new players often start playing the game because someone in their family, often their father, grandfather or uncle, is an

enthusiastic player of the game. As a result, many of the pelota mixteca teams that are active nowadays consist, at least partly, of members of the same family. For example, the team that has dominated many competitions in the period around 2012 is called 'Los Gemelos' and exists of five brothers, two of which are twins, hence the name of the team.

Looking at a larger scale, the game creates a community of families of the players, spectators and other people that come to watch the games and support the teams. As we have seen in the example described by Dennis (1973) above, teams often not only represent themselves, but also represent their home communities in *partidos de compromiso* against other communities, be it during village fiestas or at other occasions. By representing the community they come from, they unify the people of their village to root for their team. Here pelota mixteca, functions just as any other sport, in bringing together people from different backgrounds, by rallying them behind the team that represents the community. It is at this level that the aspect of *convivencia* plays a large role, as we saw in the description of the Bajos de Chila competition as 'a meeting of friends, rather than a tournament'. Within this community, there is a sense of reciprocity, ranging from wanting to have a rematch against a team that beat your team earlier, to the fact that, when one team travels to another village to play, the team from that village will come back to compete in a second match in the hometown of the others at a later moment. In the case of pelota mixteca, there is an interesting additional aspect, which is that of the bets being placed by bettors. The amount of cash that is bet on games can be very large, up to the hundreds, and occasionally thousands, of pesos. Naturally, this influences the involvement of bettors with the teams. It creates a community, in the sense that bettors see their own interests represented in the fate of the teams, but can also be a cause of conflicts if bettors stand to lose a lot of money and feel that players are not giving it their all. While the creation of these communities, on the one hand, brings people together, there are clearly possibilities for conflicts as well, since two opposing teams, or communities, are in competition.

At the largest scale pelota mixteca also creates a community that consists, simply, of everyone involved and interested in the game in any way. This 'pelota mixteca community' includes many people that are involved in different ways – all the teams that meet each other in different tournaments and games, the family members that accompany teams to the matches, the spectators that attend the competitions, members of organizations like the *Asociación Mexicana de Juegos y Deportes Autóctonos* who try to promote indigenous games, and others. In a way, one could say that there is a sense of shared identity amongst all these individuals, who, apart from their differences in social and economic background and the fact that they live in different villages and countries, all identify themselves in some way with or in relation to pelota mixteca. The long history of the game, and its supposed pre-Columbian origin, is often part of the self-identification of players of pelota

mixteca. When asked about the history of the game, many players will respond that pelota mixteca is a prehispanic game that was played long before the conquest. In Oaxaca, players will often refer to the archaeological site of Monte Albán and say that the game was played there, sometimes adding that it was a royal game, reserved for kings and noblemen. Thus, the players present and see themselves as the heirs of an age-old tradition that was played in famous places such as Monte Albán. As a result, it seems that this larger community is the one with the strongest political potential, since it unites players across social, national, and ethnic borders and makes the pelota mixteca community into a larger social movement, which presents itself as the guardian of an authentic indigenous Mexican tradition. We can consider this community as a type of 'transborder' community, in the sense of Stephen (2007), as it is a community that brings together players from different sides of all kinds of borders – players born in the US, with legal residency and a steady job, players born in Mexico who migrated to the United States and live there without documents and try to get by on minimum (or less) wages, players from Oaxaca, who still live there, either in small village communities or Oaxaca city, and third-generation migrants from Oaxaca, who live in Mexico City. What ties all these people together is the game of pelota mixteca, and the way they identify with the game. So, it is to these questions of identity and identification in relation to pelota mixteca that I will turn in the next chapter. Can we really speak of a shared identity among the players? If so, is this identity created locally, regionally, nationally or transnationally? What is the influence of migration and globalization on the emergence of this identity? To what extent do questions of identity determine whether someone starts playing pelota mixteca and joins the community? If a shared sense of identity is indeed one of the main reasons to start playing, what identity are we talking about? That of a Mixtec, Zapotec or other indigenous person? That of a family, a town, a region? In the next chapter I will examine these questions in more detail and try to understand why young people decide to start playing the game and become part of the community or, conversely, why they decide not to start playing and how these choices were influenced by the nation-building project of the Mexican state.

## Chapter 6. Pelota mixteca, identity and the Mexican state

Many players of pelota mixteca play the game because of a family tradition. It is because of this tradition, something which was in the blood of the players, in their family histories being passed on from generation to generation as something of a family heirloom, that the game has survived for so long and was able to thrive not only in its region of origin, but also in other places to which Oaxacan migrants moved over the course of the twentieth century. For example, Jaime, one of the more promising young players in California, was born in Mexico and migrated to the United States with his family as a teenager. While he comes from a family of players of pelota mixteca, he was not very interested in playing the game when he was younger. Jaime describes how he became interested in the game after he had moved to the United States, how his desire to become part of the pelota mixteca community was awakened and how his fellow players functioned as role models and inspiration:

JAIME

A mí no me gustaba [la pelota], y dije, pues esto no es lo mío. Pero después la gente me empezó como a apoyar, a dar ánimo. ... Es por eso que estoy jugando ahora, me entiendes? Más que nada por la gente. Porque si la gente nunca me hubiera dado alas, no me hubiera dado ánimos, yo pienso que ahorita no estuviera aquí, me entiendes.

MARTIN

Pero cuando fue el momento que tu dijiste “eso sí vale la pena”?

JAIME

Mira, la primera vez yo que me puse un guante, la primeritita vez que yo me puse un guante a jugar. No te miento, pero a lo mejor esta él de testigo, hay mucha gente de testigo. Que yo, fíjate, sin saber cómo se jugaba, yo entraba y le pegaba la pelota y me salían. Y todos “ay no, mira. Ese chamaco, mira. Como le pega”, me entiendes. ... Yo cuando recién empecé jugar este deporte, yo a estos muchachos, lo que es él [Pedro] y es su hermano, yo les consideraba [muy buenos jugadores], dije “Oh my God”.

MARTIN

Quiero ser como ellos?

JAIME

Eso, eso mismo! Yo dije, quiero ser como ellos, me entiendes? ... Yo no te voy a decir, que yo me inspiré solo. Yo me inspiré, porque la gente me inspiró a mí. Porque me dijeron “ey, tú tienes con qué. Tu dale!”, me entiendes. Fue lo que me inspiró a mí.

This sentiment of wanting to inspire other (future) players, and to help the pelota mixteca community grow, is echoed in the words of Ricardo, the captain of the Fresno team who won the *segunda fuerza* competition at the Fresno 2012 international tournament. Ricardo was born in Mexico but migrated to the United States, where he now lives with his wife and three children. During an interview which was filmed for the making of a documentary on *pelota mixteca*, he directs himself to the film’s possible audience:

RICARDO

A todos, si me están escuchando, yo los invito a los que me escuchan los invito que vean el juego, que lo practiquen. Porque es un juego muy bonito. ... No digo, sabes, yo soy el chingón y no más yo. Yo quisiera que salieran mucho más chingones. Para mí, el apoyo para todos que van subiendo para arriba y que sigan. Yo quisiera que se respandiera a nivel mundial nuestro juego, porque se inició en Oaxaca, hasta donde yo sé. Ahí se inició. Se empezó a extender. Se vino para México y ahorita, gracias a Dios, estamos aquí [en los Estados Unidos].

Because of his love of the game, Ricardo has started to teach his children the rules of *pelota mixteca* and has started training them in how to play it. His oldest son is already a *pelota mixteca* enthusiast, who knows the rules of the game by heart and comes to many of the games his father plays. Within the playing community, family relationships, especially father-son and sibling bonds, are very important. Many teams exist that consist of brothers, cousins or fathers, sons and uncles. Most of the players, both in Mexico and in the United States, start learning the game because someone in their family, mostly their father, grandfather or uncle, is a player of *pelota mixteca* and brings them along to matches and tournaments. Young people often start out as *corredores*, running to retrieve the run-away balls that often tend to disappear into the brush that surrounds the pasajuego. Sometimes they are paid a small amount of money – ten to twenty dollars or a hundred pesos – for their help. The money can function as an extra motivation for some children to join their fathers in the games. Family relationships can also be a source of inspiration for naming a team, as in the case of *Los Gemelos*, which exists of several brothers, two of whom are twins. Likewise, Ricardo’s team, that consists of a few of his brothers and other family members, is called *Los Chivos* after Ricardo’s grandfather who was a well-known player in the 1960s and who was nicknamed *El Chivo*.

For Ricardo, pelota mixteca is a family tradition that is passed on from father to son and that travels with the family as a sort of heirloom:

RICARDO

Yo lo traigo, se puede decir, de herencia. Yo empecé desde los 14 años a jugar. Ahorita tengo 33 años, entonces desde los 14 años para acá yo he jugado la pelota. No he descansado ni un año, ni seis meses. Toda la vida he estado jugando. Mi abuelo, él jugó pelota, mi papá jugó pelota, yo juego pelota. Ahorita tengo mis tres hijos. Dos hijos hombre y una mujer y los estoy entrenando porque yo quisiera de mi parte que este juego siguiera adelante.

The description of Don Agustín, one of the central figures of the *pelota mixteca*-world in the United States, of how he learned to play is very similar to Ricardo's story:

DON AGUSTÍN

Nosotros desde niños, mi papá jugaba, mi abuelito jugaba. Entonces esto ya viene como... Ya viene por generaciones, no? Y yo creo que es algo que lo traemos en la sangre, porque cuando yo llegué aquí al estado de California, pues, había muchos deportes que practicar. Pero no me llamaban la atención, sino yo quería seguir practicando la pelota mixteca. ... Yo empecé como a los nueve años a practicarlo. Mi papá jugaba, terminaba de jugar él y sobraban los guantes. Los guantes que ellos ocupaban, pues entonces nosotros ya los niños que veníamos ver el juego de ellos, pues nosotros ya nos poníamos los guantes y ya que el campo estaba libre empezamos a practicarlo. Y de ahí, cada jugada que tenían cada ocho días íbamos a ver y a correr por las pelotas. Y ya después, como digo, terminaba el juego y ya, pues, quedaban los guantes y a practicar otra vez.

DANIEL CASAREZ

Y tu hijo, cuando empezó él?

DON AGUSTÍN

Michael también empezó a andar conmigo desde seis, siete años. No jugaba, pero le encantaba ir a ver los juegos que yo hacía, acá en el Valle de San Fernando o en Santa Barbara, San Diego. Estos eran los lugares, los campos que nosotros visitábamos con los amigos. Y él siempre [dijo] "Vámonos, ahorita me voy contigo". Y desde chico, le ha gustado andar conmigo y pues le gustó mucho la pelota mixteca. Ya como a los 10 años empezó a practicarla. Y hasta la actualidad pues es uno de los jugadores. De ocho hijos, él es uno que está jugando.



Whereas Ricardo sees playing *pelota mixteca* as a family *herencia*, Don Agustín thinks that the game is something that is *en la sangre*, in his blood. He is not the only one to refer to *pelota mixteca* as something more than a traditional sport, but as running through his veins, as a part of his being:

JAIME

Todo este deporte consiste en una cadena, pues. Si al nieto, al sobrino, al hijo, si le gusta, lógico que va venir, me entiendes. ... Yo tenía 15 años y yo iba a la highschool y todo ese rollo. Pero nunca me atraía este deporte. Como que yo decía que “no, está muy caliente”, pero después de ahí dije pues quiero empezar. Pues como que me empezó a atraer y dije, no pues esto es lo mío

PEDRO

Yo pienso que traes algo de antes, de tu familia.

JAIME

La sangre!

PEDRO

La sangre. La familia de él [Jaime] jugó mucho.

JAIME

Eso es lo que te digo, yo iba a la high school y que esto no era mi rollo. Dije “ay, el clima está muy caliente, no quiero jugar”. Pero después como que, te hace como, no un hobby, pero ni un pasatiempo. Un pasatiempo no se te hace, me entiendes. Pero es como, como te diré. Como que algo que te trae, que tú te dices “tengo que estar cada ocho días ahí” me entiendes. ... Es como que la sangre llama.

The three players of *pelota mixteca* quoted here are migrants and say that the game is something they brought with them to their new homeland ‘in their blood’ or as part of their ‘heritage’, as part of a family tradition. They play the game because their ancestors, most concretely their fathers and grandfathers, played the game and they took pride in performing a tradition that their ancestors competed in, probably for many generations. While the players quoted here are all migrants, in Oaxaca, likewise, most new players start playing because someone in their family played the game. As such, players, rather than focusing on their Mixtec or indigenous identity, tend to stress the importance of the identity of their families as their main motivation to start playing the game. However, this stress on family inheritance and this tradition of transferal of the game from

father to son or uncle to nephew seems to be, in some ways, impeding the spread of the game and, possibly, threatening its survival. Since learning to play *pelota mixteca* seems to be, above all, a family affair, the game is kept within a small circle of players and their families.

For example, at the 2012 *Torneo Internacional* a majority of the spectators, as well as one of the *quintas* from Fresno, consisted of natives of the town of Jaltepec, in the Nochixtlán district of the Mixteca region. The tournament brought together many migrants from around Fresno, but these were primarily migrants from Jaltepec, especially the Rancho Buenavista, and their families. Other Mixtec migrants that were not from the same region, or who did not have a family background of playing the game did not attend the tournament and would probably not consider learning how to play the game. This not only goes for migrants who do not come from a family with a background in the game, it is also, especially, true for young people in Mexico. While some beginners do decide to play the game simply because they see others play it in their neighborhood, all of the young players I talked to around Oaxaca started playing because their father, grandfather or uncle was an avid player of the game. The same goes for players in California. While some indicated that they only started playing after having arrived in the USA, even these players came from *pelotero* families.

While people who do not come from a *familia pelotera* will often not start playing the game, even within families that do have a tradition of playing, a lot of the young people no longer start playing the game. As we have seen before, of the eight children of Don Agustín, who is one of the foremost promoters of the game in California, only one plays *pelota mixteca*. Likewise, in the family of Jaime, he and his brother are the only two of his siblings to be playing. Obviously, the fact that young people do not start playing the game is a threat to the survival of the game in California and Mexico alike. According to Jaime and Pedro, who are in their mid-20s and -30s, the game is going to have trouble surviving:

MARTIN

Y tus hermanos, ya no juegan?

JAIME

Aquí tengo uno presente, que juega, más que nada.

PEDRO

Ya se está acabando. Él es el único, tiene sobrinos. Sus tíos jugaron, sus hijos no juegan. Y él es el único sobrino.

MARTIN

Y por qué?

JAIME

Mira yo te voy a decir una cosa, aquí los niños, los jóvenes están en otro país, me entiendes. No tienen la mentalidad como en México. Si todos los morros que estuvieran aquí ... estuvieran en México tuvieran otra mentalidad.

PEDRO

No viste los chicos jugando con los guantes? Tienen poco tiempo que llegaron aquí, y traen otra mentalidad.

JAIME

Por qué? Porque, desgraciadamente, en este país los niños tienen mucha libertad de hacer las cosas.

MARTIN

Y no traen amor a las raíces?

JAIME

Sí! Y eso es malo. Por qué? Porque desgraciadamente las raíces se van perdiendo. ... Y la verdad, que te esperas de mis hijos, imagínate? Si sus hijos de él [Pedro], él que ya es más grande que yo, si sus hijos no juegan, que te esperas de mis hijos míos?

PEDRO

Pero todos los hijos, fíjate, ... son como 10 hermanos, y nadie juega. Nadie, de todos. De todos los hermanos. Como el casi es el único de los sobrinos [que juega].

Whereas, in the United States, Pedro and Jaime attribute the loss of the game among children and young people to a different mentality from that of youngsters back home, in Oaxaca itself it is often said that the reason that the sport is in danger is that young people consider the sport to be something of the past, a game that is not really something that anyone 'modern' would play. The words *caduco* and *aburrido* are often used to describe the opinion that young people have of the game. For example, Don Ignacio Canseco an older player from Ejutla says "A mis hijos no les llama la atención la pelota mixteca, les parece muy aburrida; es que ellos tienen opciones más modernas y por mucho que les quiera inculcar esto a los jóvenes no lo ven atractivo; como es un deporte que no se ha modificado en años, dicen que está caduco" (Ruíz 2005). Naturally, it is not quite true that the sport has not changed in years, one need only think of the development of the gloves in the hule variant or of the invention of the esponja variant over the course of the past decades, but it is clear that pelota mixteca is seen as an ancient sport, something that was played by the ancestors but which is now considered old-fashioned and not as 'modern' as other sports like soccer, basketball or baseball. These global sports often have a larger appeal for young players, who, in a globalized sporting world, can choose between many different alternatives. Sports that lack an

'aura of globalization' have less appeal and are less likely to attract young players (van Bottenburg 1994: 260). Margarita García García, a depute in the state senate of Oaxaca who proposed an initiative to stimulate the playing of pelota mixteca by organizing a *campeonato estatal*, says in an interview "los jugadores de pelota mixteca, viejos en su mayoría, están convencidos de que este juego no morirá, pero a la vez les preocupa que sus hijos y nietos no se interesen en él por considerarlo caduco y aburrido" (Martínez 2011). It should be mentioned that the above sentence that is presented as a quote from an interview with Margarita García, is taken directly from another article that was published years earlier in a piece written by Elisa Ruiz on the website of the CIB (Confédération International de Jeu de Balle). What this says about the 'authenticity' of the interview and the actual engagement of the *diputada* with pelota mixteca and its players, I cannot judge.

It is clear that the main reason that pelota mixteca is in danger of 'extinction', is the fact that many young people do not start playing it anymore. This lack of enthusiasm among young people for the game has widely been attributed to the fact that the game is seen as old-fashioned, boring and anti-modern. As a result, politicians who have wanted to promote the game have tried to make young Oaxacans aware of the importance of the game. However, it could be argued that politicians and the state-created discourse around pelota mixteca that was formed from the Mexican Revolution onwards, are themselves largely responsible for this representation of pelota mixteca as something old-fashioned and ethnically particular, bordering on the historic and folkloric.

In the next section, I will attempt to sketch a diachronic overview of the Mexican state's attitude towards indigenous peoples in general and pelota mixteca in particular. This overview looks at the overall discourse that was created on the value of indigenous culture and the policies that were implemented in relation to indigenous traditions (including sports). I will examine how the Mexican nation-building project, from Independence onwards, has prompted the Mexican state to promote or discourage playing pelota mixteca and how pelota mixteca itself has featured in narratives and discourses on Mexican national identity. Government initiatives have not only significantly influenced the decision of individuals to start playing the game, they have also framed the ways in which players of the game have been able to identify themselves and their game. As a result, these policies and discourse are fundamental to understanding the evolution of pelota mixteca over the course of the past century. At the same time, as I have argued in chapter four, modernity, globalization and migration have opened up new possibilities of self-identification and this development has given players of pelota mixteca an opportunity to define their own agenda. In the last part of this chapter, I focus on this new agenda for promoting pelota mixteca and the ways

in which globalization has enabled the players, and their self-organizations, to take matters into their own hands in order to ensure the game's survival.

### ***Mexican Indigenist Policies since the Spanish invasion***

Roughly speaking, starting from the Spanish Conquest, the history of the (Spanish-) Mexican state's attitude towards indigenous cultures can be divided into four broad periods. Firstly, the Spanish Colonial government (1521 - 1821) treated Mexico's native population as a racialized group, organized in the *República de Indios*, that existed alongside the formal Spanish Colonial system. Indigenous peoples were identified according to ethnic and cultural criteria and were resettled in new communities, which were easier to control and to extract tribute from. While a certain degree of indigenous self-rule was accepted under the *República de Indios*, a system in which local indigenous *cabildos* or *caciques* would govern indigenous communities, indigenous individuals were considered to be intellectually comparable to children who needed the guidance of Spanish Colonial Rule. Indigenous peoples were subject to different legal arrangements and were not regarded as full citizens of the Spanish Empire, but rather as members of a lower caste within the state.

Briefly before Independence, in 1812, the Constitution of Cádiz was passed, which formally abolished the caste system and rendered all Spaniards and 'Indians' equivalent as citizens of the empire (McEnroe 2012:185). While this new constitution granted the indigenous population of Mexico more formal rights as citizens of the Spanish empire, at the same time, it took away their rights to self-rule of the indigenous local *cabildos*. In other words, whereas Mexico's indigenous population was acknowledged as a separate, though inferior, group prior to the Constitution of Cádiz, after this moment, they were simply seen as citizens of the Spanish empire, without any regard to their cultural or ethnic diversity. This policy of, at least officially, dismantling the caste system was continued after Mexican independence from Spain in 1821 and was reaffirmed in the new Mexican Constitution, which came into effect in 1824, building a national identity that simply denied the existence of the indigenous population (Jung 2008: 80; McEnroe 2012: 194). It was assumed that the indigenous population of Mexico would eventually disappear because of cultural assimilation and intermarriage with criollo and mestizo inhabitants of Mexico.

This politics of *mestizaje* as a 'solution to the Indian problem' was, with some modifications and the use of new terminology, carried on after the Mexican Revolution. The indigenist policies of subsequent post-Revolutionary Mexican governments, until the 1970s, were aimed at incorporating the indigenous sectors of society into a Mainstream Mexican culture, which took the Mestizo as its ideal. These policies were largely based on the ideas and writings of the philosopher and Secretary for Education (1921 – 1924) José Vasconcelos, who promoted his visions of a racially and culturally

homogenous Mexico under the name of the *Raza Cósmica*. This Cosmic Race was founded on an amalgam of Mexico's pre-Columbian cultures and Spanish/Western models of governance. The principal means to achieve this goal was through the standardization of national public education, using schools as the primary agent through which to construct a new Revolutionary Mexican identity. However, while Vasconcelos' policies were aimed at improving the socio-economic circumstances of the indigenous peoples of Mexico, his main objective of 'modernizing' Mexico through the education system, at the expense of traditional culture and indigenous languages, meant that the only contribution of Mexico's indigenous population to the Cosmic Race was that of their prehispanic ancestors, denying the value of contemporary indigenous traditions. In the words of José del Val (1999: 355), "visionario y racista, Vasconcelos soñó con un México moderno, racialmente unificado y culturalmente sajón. Su reivindicación del México prehispánico se plasmó en murales justicieros y en el culto por los indios de piedra, en demérito de los indios vivos que en su proteico proyecto estaban condenados a desaparecer." Under this regime, Mexico's indigenous population was no longer identified on the basis of cultural and ethnic criteria, as had been the case in the Colonial era, but, rather, in a class-based state organization, was incorporated into the category of 'peasants' (see Aguirre Beltrán 1992 for a discussion in favor of this position).

A major turning point in the approach of the Mexican state, and its most important indigenist institute the INI (Instituto Nacional Indigenista) came in the 1970s with the presidencies of Luís Echeverría (1970 – 1976) and José López Portillo (1976 – 1982), who abandoned the economic isolationist policies of their predecessors and opened up the country for participation in the global economy (Friedlander 2006: 193-212; Jung 2008: 80). During and after the 1970s significant changes took place in the indigenist policies of the Mexican state in general, and of the INI more specifically. With the abandonment of economical isolationist policies, came the dismantling of the revolutionary project, which included the idea of the *Raza Cósmica* and the racially and culturally unified Mestizo nation. This opened up the possibility of seeing Mexico as a multicultural rather than a culturally homogenous country. Anthropologists and archaeologists had been fundamental in the creation and functioning of the INI, ever since its foundation in 1948, and had had a significant impact on the social policies of the Mexican state, especially in regards to education and indigenous issues. Large part of the changes that came about in the policies of the INI were implemented under pressure from a group of anthropologists who were critical of the assimilationist tendencies of the INI and who voiced their critique in the publication *De eso que llaman antropología Mexicana* (Warman 1970). However, as Friedlander (2006: 184) notes, in the 1970s "as Mexico's leaders prepared the country to open its doors wider to international markets, they relied more heavily on the advice of

economists than they did on the advice of their friends in Anthropology, with whom they had had a very special relationship since the days of the Mexican Revolution.”

Thus, we see that the opening up of the Mexican internal market to the global economy, coupled with Mexico’s wish to play a larger role in the international political arena – evidenced, for example, by López Portillo’s wish to become secretary-general of the United Nations after his presidency (Friedlander 2006) – led to the abandonment of traditional Revolutionary ideas of Mexico as a unified Mestizo nation, creating more space for the recognition of indigenous cultures and multiculturalism. According to Courtney Jung (2008: 148), this turn towards neo-liberal politico-economical models was coupled with a discourse of democracy that “opened space for political mobilization around demands for representation and citizenship that link politics to groups constituted in terms of ethnicity, gender, and race.” These new identity-politics replaced earlier class-based movements and political agendas, refocusing the political debate away from questions of economic redistribution towards the recognition of indigenous cultural rights. As a result, indigenous peoples and movements no longer identified themselves, or were identified as, peasants but gained a new, potentially powerful identity as *indígena*. At the same time, the re-orientation of the INI, under the influence of strong criticism from anthropological circles, made that the Mexican government, through its indigenist institute, focused more on respect for and recognition of indigenous culture, than it did on cultural assimilation. This change of perspective cleared the way for the later ratification by the Mexican government of ILO’s Convention 169 in 1989, and the amendment to Article 4 of the Mexican Constitution in 1992, which asserted Mexico’s commitment to protect indigenous languages, cultures, *usos y costumbres*, resources and specific forms of social organization. As such, (economic) globalization, played a clear and distinctive part in the altering of traditional ethnic relationships in Mexico from the 1970s onwards. Later on in this chapter I will treat this development in more detail, discussing how these international developments might have influenced the attitude of the state towards pelota mixteca. First, however, I will try to develop an overview and understanding of how these different ‘currents of indigenism’ impacted pelota mixteca.

## ***Pelota mixteca and the state, a diachronic overview***

### *The Colonial period*

Because of a lack of sources on indigenous handball games from the Colonial period, it is difficult, and maybe even somewhat nonsensical, to attempt to determine the attitude of the Colonial administration towards pelota mixteca. In chapters 2 and 3, I have argued that the

traditional Spanish game of *pelota a mano* was adopted by indigenous peoples in southern Mexico, most notably Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Tarascans, during the Colonial period. However, since we cannot determine with certainty at what point in time this adoption actually took place, it is virtually impossible to relate this assimilation of the game by indigenous peoples to specific socio-political developments. Nonetheless, on the basis of the information we have on the general attitude of Spanish colonial society towards indigenous culture, we can postulate some ideas.

First of all, from 16<sup>th</sup>-century chroniclers, we know that the traditional hip-ball game of *ollamalitzli* was prohibited by the Spanish Colonial authorities, because of its intimate relation with non-Christian religious practices, as well as its potential role in the creation of conflicts between communities that had competed with each other in the ballgame. In the previous chapter, I have suggested that *pelota mixteca*'s precursor, *pelota a mano*, may have been introduced by Spanish missionaries as a substitute for the hip-ballgame, as part of initiatives to Christianize and 'civilize' the indigenous population. Moreover, these games would have taken place in communities that were part of the *República de Indios*, in which indigenous cultural customs that did not interfere with the regular economic goings-on of the Spanish authorities or were not in direct contradiction to the Christian doctrine were allowed. Following this hypothesis, we could argue that the birth of *pelota mixteca* as an indigenous sport was actually instigated by the Spanish Colonial administration. Of course, it is important to note here that the first known documents that describe *pelota mixteca* as an indigenous practice date to the late nineteenth century. As a result, we cannot speak of the stimulation of indigenous culture by the Spanish Colonial administration – that would be quite ridiculous, considering the large-scale prohibition of indigenous traditions that took place in the Colonial era – but, ironically, we do see that, as in other cases, the Spanish Colonial system laid the basis for a new indigenous tradition.

#### *Pre-Revolutionary Independent Mexico*

According to Jung (2008: 85), the attitude of Mexico's post-Independence, pre-Revolutionary governments toward the indigenous population "was that it would disappear; it would be incorporated into the Mexican national identity through assimilation and miscegenation." As a result, indigenist policies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century concentrated on 'acculturating and educating the Indian', focusing not only on promoting Spanish as the national language, but also teaching hygienic standards and promoting a 'scientific outlook on life'. This movement of modernization was especially strong under the presidency (or dictatorship) of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911). During the *Porfiriato*, Mexico, like many other countries in the world at that time, experienced a period of drastic economic and social changes. Political centralization, and nationalization of culture, with the



aim of creating a new Mexican national identity, were among the most prominent of these new developments. This process of 'modernization' affected all areas of Mexican life, not only politics and economy, but also cultural expressions such as music, clothing, and amusements.

As part of this process of 'modernization', several Western sports were introduced from Europe and the United States by the Mexican elite. While the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century had seen the introduction of more traditional European games like bowls, *pelota vasca*, cricket (Krämer-Mandau 1992:79), and very probably *pelota a mano* the precursor of *pelota mixteca*, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century more modern sports such as football, rugby, baseball, and basketball – but also polo, golf, rowing and cycling (Arbena 1991; Beezley 1988; Magan 2002) – were imported and played by the upper classes of Mexican society, in their desire to resemble their Western counterparts. As a result, a socio-economical divide in leisure and sporting activities was produced, in which the lower classes would participate in more traditional activities, while the elite and urban middle class participated in modern sports (Arbena 1991:351). Of course, the playing of *pelota mixteca* was part of the more traditional activities, which were of no interest to the Western/'Modern'-oriented elite, who preferred to partake in sports that had an aura of modernity and globalization. While this development was a reflection of the government's agenda of modernization, it did not explicitly initiate these changes – it were individuals or small groups that imported the new sports and started the sports clubs. Sports were, at this time, not used as a tool in the process of nationalization of culture, in order to create a new Mexican identity. As a result, no specific policies in relation to *pelota mixteca*, or any other sport, were implemented before the Mexican Revolution. However, the lack of any interest in traditional indigenous culture from the part of the Porfirian administration, because of its focus on modernizing Mexico, makes it improbable that if a policy on sports would have existed, *pelota mixteca* would have featured prominently in any government plans.

#### *Post-Revolutionary Mexican governments (pre-1970s)*

Even though the Mexican Revolution was an explicit reaction to the reign of Porfirio Díaz and the social system that was associated with it, its indigenist policies were largely a continuation of earlier models, phrased in a different discourse. The formation of the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP), which was charged from the 1920s onwards with creating the new Mexican identity and incorporating all sectors of society into this ideal, is one of the most significant outcomes of the revolutionary period. However, while the reach of this institution was definitely novel, its basic principles and aims were nothing new. In the words of Mary Kay Vaughan (1997: 28), "infantilizing campesinos, educators denied them knowledge, culture, and rationality. The SEP assumed that

peasants had no information to contribute to their own transformation. Enlightenment came from abroad and from the cities.”

Sports played a significant role in the ambitions of the SEP. Every rural school was expected to be equipped with a sports field on which physical education classes, including Western sports such as basketball and baseball, were to be taught. Within this framework an array of athletic activities was promoted, that would instill in the students a spirit of team work, loyalty and sacrifice, while at the same time combating the widespread alcoholism that was thought to characterize the countryside (Arbena 1991:353, Vaughan 1997:180). By participating in team sports, such as baseball or basketball, *indígenas* – it was hoped – would learn how to cooperate with each other and others. Additionally, by giving talented individual athletes the possibility to compete, individually or in a team, on a national level, they would be incorporated into the national social structure. Moreover, successful indigenous athletes - excelling in Western, modern sports - could serve as role models for the *indígenas* in the rural communities, to show that *indígenas* could also achieve success in *mestizo* society. Whereas, during the *Porfiriato*, sports did not form part of official government policies, after the Mexican Revolution, sports became an important political tool for the new Revolutionary governments that tried to forge a new national identity for all Mexicans. According to Benjamin (2000: 110), “sports became a metaphor not for the historic 1910 revolution itself but rather for the benefits of *la Revolución* in the present and its promise for the future, as embodied in the forms of healthy, strong, and disciplined young people.”

Considering that this policy of using sports to create a new subject in a new nation focused explicitly on the modernization of the nation, how did this impact indigenous sports and games in general and pelota mixteca in particular? First of all, it has to be remembered that “the ideological thrust of projected physical education programs was to direct social change and enhance state consolidation” (Arbena 1991:354). Hence, it seems doubtful that any initiative to stimulate indigenous games could have been successful, since indigenous culture in general was considered anti-modern and in need of replacement by modern customs and pastimes. Nonetheless, some attempts to promote indigenous games were made. For example, in 1935 the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) launched a national program that was aimed at reviving the indigenous sports and games. These indigenous sports would form the basis for a new form of national physical education (Brewster 2004:224). The program aimed to promote not only indigenous games but also traditional dances of different indigenous groups from all around Mexico by teaching them at rural and urban schools. It is possible that the rulebook of pelota mixteca that was compiled by Oaxaca’s secretary of Sports and Education, Raúl Bolaños Cacho, and published in Oaxaca in 1946 was part of

an initiative that flowed from this program. In the introduction to this *reglamento*, Bolaños Cacho (1946: i) states:

“al florecer la gran Cultura Mixteca Zapoteca, apareció la actividad deportiva conocida con el nombre de ‘pelota mixteca’ actividad autóctona que hasta la actualidad viene siendo practicada por nuestra población indígena [...] Uno de los errores más grandes que hemos cometido, radica en que nos olvidamos de nosotros mismos, en mucho se desconoce el pasado histórico deportivo de México, vivimos familiarizados con deportes extranjeros.”

This introduction reflects the concern of the State to promote indigenous sports, games, and other pastimes, favoring them over imported sports, such as basketball and baseball. Despite attempts such as that by Bolaños Cacho, however, this program never achieved its goal to put indigenous sports center stage in the national physical education programs.

Apart from the active promotion of indigenous physical education in schools, which never really stood a chance of success, another form of promotion of indigenous games was through displays and exhibitions that took place during national holidays, such as the Juegos Nacionales de la Revolución. These games, which were organized on the Día de la Revolución in 1941, consisted of exhibitions of indigenous games, such as bow and arrow shooting contests, a form of wrestling from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and shooting blow darts. Other games that were included were Ulama de Hule and Tambuche, a traditional ballgame from Nayarit. Pelota mixteca is also noted in a document that announces the preparations for this festival. Interestingly, however, it appears that pelota mixteca was never played during this festival, the somewhat peculiar reason being that the players of pelota mixteca were too well-organized. The document reads, “la pelota mixteca está en la actualidad perfectamente organizada en una Federación adherida a la Confederación Deportiva Mexicana, por lo que será presentado en un lugar preferente, ya que no cabe dentro del programa técnico que regirá a estos Juegos Deportivos.”<sup>18</sup>

If we look at the reasons for presenting other indigenous games we see that they are selected on the basis of their qualities as a spectator sport and are generally described as ‘spectacular’. For example, in the introduction we see that those sports that will be displayed are “aquellos deportes autóctonos que por su interés y vistosidad merezcan ser presentados.” Examining the effect that the organizers of the games envisioned for the games more closely, we see

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<sup>18</sup> This and following quotes from a report of the Comisión Recreativo-Artística (25.6.1941), archived at the Archivo General de la Nación in the presidential archive of Manuel Ávila Camacho (MAC 532/29). I am grateful to Prof. Dr. Keith Brewster for supplying me with this reference.

that, for the blow dart competition “la exhibición [sic.] de un grupo de indígenas en este deporte despertará en el público mucho interés y admiración.” For another sport it is mentioned that “al ser presentado en un concurso despertará la atención y el interés del público.” Additionally, the document mentions that the committee intends to present a reconstruction of a “Juego de Pelota con los trajes típicos en usanza en la época pre-cortesiana.” As we will see later on, this presentation of the prehispanic Mesoamerican hip-ballgame was still a standard feature during exhibitions of indigenous sports in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Thus, it seems that the aim of the exhibitions was mostly to present the spectacular splendors of indigenous Mexican sporting culture, rather than to stimulate the public – non-indigenous inhabitants of Mexico-City – to take up one of these sports and start playing them. We see that pelota mixteca, the only one of the sports that is actually well-organized under the umbrella of the Mexican Sports Federation, and which could easily be promoted as a sport that spectators can also play, is exhibited elsewhere, since, in typical obtuse bureaucratic jargon, ‘it does not fit in with the technical program’. Below we will see that until very recently, and some would say even today, this is a recurring characteristic of this type of indigenous sports exhibitions – indigenous activities are presented not as something open for participation, but as a spectacle of the Indígena, the necessary Other on which a significant part of Mexican cultural identity is based, but who is only appreciated by the mainstream as a historical counterpoint to the desired modern Mexico. As a result, the programs of Revolutionary Mexican administrations were aimed mostly at consolidating the state and cultivating a positive image of ‘the historical Indian’. Living traditions were, in the words of Keith Brewster (2004: 215), “faced with one of two possible outcomes: either a process of incorporation leading to folklorism, or continued marginalization.”

### *Post 1970s*

As mentioned, the 1970s marked a turning point in the official indigenist policies of the Mexican state. Under the influence of critical anthropologists and neoliberal socio-economic policies, the INI turned away from the traditional assimilationist policies that had characterized state-indigenous relations since the Mexican Revolution and Vasconcelos’ Raza Cósmica. One of the main anthropological criticisms of the indigenist politics of the post-Revolutionary state was that, in line with the official state indigenism, the only way for the indigenous population to truly contribute to the advancement of Mexican society was by ceasing to be indigenous. In the words of Guillermo Bonfil (1970: 55), “el indio, se piensa, no puede contribuir a esa tarea en tanto se mantenga como indio, esto es, como ‘el otro’, como ajeno; su capacidad de acción y su perspectiva de liberación están en su mexicanización total.” From this critique flowed a new form of indigenism, which, rather than aiming at total cultural assimilation of the indigenous population, actually stimulated local

indigenous development and even self-identification of indigenous Mexicans as such. At the same time, the socio-economic policies that were introduced coeval with this new indigenism opened up spaces for indigenous self-organizations, which were also stimulated by the INI. In the words of Charles Hale (2004: 17), “neoliberal democratization contradicts key precepts of the mestizo ideal. Downsizing the state devolves limited agency to civil society, the font of indigenous organization.”

Of course, these new policies affected pelota mixteca. First of all, it is important to note that the 1970s were also the first period in which pelota mixteca really started to become a transnational sport, played by communities on two sides of the Mexican-US border. Naturally, this was an unintended outcome of the neoliberal policies that opened up Mexican markets and stimulated large-scale migration of Mexicans to northern Mexico and beyond. If we look at state policies that directly affected pelota mixteca we see that these are very much in line with the overall aims of post-1970s indigenism – local development and the cultural empowerment of indigenous peoples. For example, in 1994, the ‘Ley de Estímulo y Fomento al Deporte’ was passed. *Deportes Autóctonos* were named as one of the main priorities on the Mexican national sports agenda. Indigenous sports were considered to play a vital role in the constitution of indigenous communities. As a result, indigenous sports were included as a separate priority within the ‘Programa Nacional de Educación Física y de Deporte 1995-2000’. Pelota mixteca is one of the sports that is mentioned explicitly in this program, and is considered ‘uno de los deportes mas notables’. The program recognizes that many of the indigenous sports and games played in Mexico around 1995 are in danger of extinction because young people prefer to start playing modern sports. To resolve this problem, the program proposes three main points of action to ensure the survival of indigenous sports:

1. Registering indigenous sports and promoting research on indigenous sports,
2. Creating and diffusing materials on indigenous sports, and promoting them in the indigenous communities that practice the sports today, and
3. Establishing a program that would recognize and stimulate local promoters of the sports, and capacitate youngsters that will be able to teach the sport (my synthesis and translation).

The aims of this program differ considerably from earlier state interventions that were aimed at incorporation and acculturation, resulting in the disappearance of indigenous traditions through assimilation. In contrast, the 1995-2000 program explicitly states that the goal of the diffusion of indigenous sports is “desarrollar el sentido de identidad, solidaridad y unidad de los pueblos indios mediante el deporte”<sup>19</sup>. While this program aims to promote and stimulate the

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<sup>19</sup> <http://info4.juridicas.unam.mx/ijure/nrm/1/333/default.htm?s=iste>

practice of indigenous sports it is clear that it intended to do so within indigenous communities themselves and did not envision the promotion of these traditions to a larger audience, forming part of a national culture of physical education. The plan aims to “difundir las actividades físicas, recreativas y deportivas precolombinas, así como sus manifestaciones actuales”, but mentions that the main objective is “fomentar la promoción de estas actividades en las comunidades indígenas que las practiquen.” Of course, promoting indigenous traditions, rather than ending them by assimilating the indigenous population, is a positive step in the direction of preserving these traditions. However, it can be questioned whether the promotion of these sports solely within indigenous communities will actually contribute to their survival. I will elaborate on this point later in this chapter when discussing the initiatives that players of pelota mixteca have taken towards the detraditionalization/deindigenization of their sport.

One of the outcomes of the 1995-2000 program was the introduction in 1999 of a workshop on indigenous sports into the SEP’s ‘Carrera Magisterial’. Later, in 2004, the SEP incorporated this workshop into a new course that was taught at twenty ‘Escuelas Normales de Educación Física’ called ‘La educación en el Medio Rural Indígena’<sup>20</sup>. From these programs, it seems that indigenous sports are only supposed to be promoted by teachers who will be working in ‘el Medio Rural Indígena’, not by teachers who want to introduce indigenous sports into the everyday lives of Mexico’s non-indigenous population. Looking at developments over the past 5 years, we see that, after having been absent from the ‘Programa Nacional de Educación Física y de Deporte 2008-2012’<sup>21</sup>, in 2014 the new ‘Plan Deporte 2014-2018’ mentions indigenous sports as a separate category or priority. However, the mention is only cursory. When discussing the national system of sports competitions, the plan states that “México dispone de un amplio y variado sistema de competencias deportivas para todos los rangos de edad durante el periodo de vida escolar, hasta su integración a selecciones nacionales, *además de atender otros sectores como el deporte social, autóctono e indígena*”<sup>22</sup> (my emphasis). It is clear that indigenous sports, while being mentioned in the national sports policies, are explicitly set apart from mainstream Mexican sports culture.

One of the main reasons that we only find one mention of indigenous sports in the national sports program is probably that the updated Ley General de Cultura Física y Deporte of 2013 delegates the burden of diffusion and promotion of indigenous sports to individual states and *municipios*. While the *Ley* has as one of its aims “difundir el patrimonio cultural deportivo”, it also

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<sup>20</sup> [www.codeme.org.mx/autoctonoytradicional/antecedentes.html](http://www.codeme.org.mx/autoctonoytradicional/antecedentes.html)

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.conade.gob.mx/PNCFD\\_2008/PNCFD.pdf](http://www.conade.gob.mx/PNCFD_2008/PNCFD.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.dof.gob.mx/nota\\_detalle.php?codigo=5342830&fecha=30/04/2014](http://www.dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5342830&fecha=30/04/2014), accessed 11-11-2014

mentions that “los Juegos Tradicionales y Autóctonos y la Charrería serán considerados como parte del patrimonio cultural deportivo del país y de la Federación. Los Estados, el Distrito Federal y los Municipios en el ámbito de sus respectivas competencias deberán preservarlos, apoyarlos, promoverlos, fomentarlos y estimularlos”<sup>23</sup>. Clearly, indigenous sports are considered a local matter, only a concern of the national government when it comes to cultural heritage and patrimony, rather than a category of sports that might be incorporated into the national sports agenda. This ‘setting apart’ of indigenous sports is, in my view, still part of the legacy of indigenism, which, before the 1970s, tried to ‘folklorize’ indigenous sports in its project to assimilate indigenous culture into national identity, and, after the 1970s, tried to stimulate indigenous traditions, while keeping them confined to indigenous communities. Below, I will argue that this stress on the ‘cultural peculiarity’ of indigenous traditions is one of the biggest threats to the survival of *pelota mixteca*. In order to do this, I will first try to outline the narratives and discourse on *pelota mixteca* that were created by Mexican politicians. I aim to do this through an analysis of state policies, legislation and initiatives, as well as newspaper articles on *pelota mixteca*.

## ***Discourse***

I hope to show that Mexican authorities have created an official discourse on *pelota mixteca* that was based on three main assumptions:

1. That *pelota mixteca* is a game that has been played for over 3000 years and is a direct descendant of the ancient Mesoamerican ballgame,
2. That *pelota mixteca* is a tradition particular to certain indigenous peoples, mainly Mixtecs and Zapotecs, and
3. That *pelota mixteca* is an indigenous cultural tradition, rather than a sport, more similar to a type of indigenous cultural activity or ritual, than to a ‘real’ sport, like football or basketball.

I will argue that, as a consequence, until very recently, the actions of the state concerning *pelota mixteca* were primarily aimed towards promoting the game as a cultural event or a tourist attraction, rather than towards promoting *pelota mixteca* as a sport that could be played by all Mexicans. This policy, in my view, hindered the spread of *pelota mixteca* and endangered its existence as a living sport, since it implicitly reinforced the view of the game as *caduco* and old-fashioned, which I have touched upon earlier. Below, I will treat every assumption in more detail.

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<sup>23</sup>[http://www.dof.gob.mx/nota\\_detalle.php?codigo=5301698&fecha=07/06/2013](http://www.dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5301698&fecha=07/06/2013), accessed 11-11-2014

### *Assumption number 1*

The first, and most prominent, assumption on which the Mexican authorities' discourse on pelota mixteca is based is the fact that pelota mixteca is a game that has been played for over 3000 years and is a variation of the ancient Mesoamerican ballgame. The assumption that *pelota mixteca* is a variation of the pre-Columbian ballgame, in short that it is a *juego de pelota de origen prehispánico*, is present in nearly all government and media communication on the game. Some, however, are more explicit on the fact than others. For instance, a proposal of Francisco Sánchez Ramos of the federal *cámara de diputados*, which aimed to promote pelota mixteca, contains four paragraphs explaining the way the pre-Columbian ballgame was played, how many ball courts have been found in archaeological excavations and links *pelota mixteca* to pre-Columbian ball courts in sites like Chichén Itzá, Tula, and Monte Albán, among others.

Nearly all newspaper articles concerning pelota mixteca, refer to the game as 'un deporte ancestral' and relate it to the (archaeological) past of the Mixtec and Zapotec inhabitants of Oaxaca. One article, for instance, states that "Oaxaca cuenta con un tesoro histórico al practicar la pelota mixteca" (García 2013). When reporting on the fact that students at the COBAO have started to learn pelota mixteca as part of their courses, Julio Sánchez León writes: "En un hecho inédito, jóvenes estudiantes de nivel medio superior han comenzado a incursionar en la práctica de la pelota mixteca, ancestral disciplina que buscan mantener con vida" (2011). Another article on the same subject reads: "El COBAO continua impulsando el juego de la pelota mixteca en nuestra entidad y promoviendo entre los jóvenes la práctica de este deporte ancestral, a fin de preservarlo como legado de nuestros antepasados" (COBAO 2011).

Going back further in time, we see that the fact that pelota mixteca is an autochthonous Mexican game was stressed in newspaper coverage of the game as early as the 1950s. An article in *El Imparcial* of Oaxaca, published April, 2 1953, which announces that a team from Mexico City will be coming to Oaxaca to compete against a local team, reads

"Para el Sábado de Gloria se anuncia en esta ciudad, la realización de interesantes encuentros de pelota mixteca en los que competirán un equipo local y otro procedente de la ciudad de México, ambos que cuentan con jugadores muy fuertes. ... Los encuentros se llevarán a cabo en el patio del Toronjal, cercano a la Escuela Presidente Alemán, existiendo gran animación por concurrir a ellos dado que se trata de uno de los poquísimos deportes netamente mexicanos que aún se conservan y tiene sus últimos reductos en Oaxaca, Puebla, México y uno que otro sitio más."



Apart from the label ‘ancestral sport’ newspaper articles reporting on pelota mixteca invariably relate the sport to the Precolumbian Mesoamerican ballgame, the rituals related to this game and the many ball courts that are found in archaeological sites in Mesoamerica. Sometimes this leads to forms of exotization of the game, as in the case of a journalist who notes that “el juego de la pelota mixteca tiene connotaciones mágicas y religiosas, ya que para los Mixtecos la pelota es el simbolismo del universo, el Sol y la tierra” (Torretera 2012). The first pelota mixteca tournament that was ever held in Huatulco to celebrate the town’s patron saint’s day, in 2011, was even given the name of *torneo de pelota prehispánica* by the organizers, who were members of the municipal authority (Sánchez León 2011c). While I have no direct evidence for this, my impression is that, since Huatulco is an important tourist location on the Oaxacan coast, the name of *pelota prehispánica* was chosen in order to draw more tourists to the tournament and use pelota mixteca, at least partly, as a tourist attraction. This tourist-oriented presentation of a tournament of pelota mixteca as a *torneo de pelota prehispánica* is largely in line with what Daniel Cooper Alarcón describes as the ‘strategic staging of authentic Mexicanness’ on the part of the town’s authorities. When discussing the creation of modern, completely planned tourist locations that are only created for the specific purpose of attracting more tourists, such as Cancún or Huatulco, Cooper Alarcón (1997:194) says

“these completely modern, carefully designed, and sanitized tourist resorts so totally transform the landscape that they effectively erase most of the markers that [outsiders have been trained] to read as authentically Mexican (like those at Disney’s Epcot Center), creating a bizarre situation in which the tourist developers must selectively reconstruct Mexicanness – or, to use MacCannell’s theory, must strategically stage “authentic” Mexicanness. [...] The [Mexican] secretariat [of Tourism] learned the hard way how important such staged authenticity is when its infrastructural make-over of Loreto in Baja California left the town with no identifiable “authentic” Mexicanness whatsoever, and a profound lack of tourist interest.”

While, at first glance, the assumption that *pelota mixteca* is a 3000 year old pre-Columbian game does not seem a factor that could hinder the game in its spread – it even forms a source of pride for many players who see themselves as the heirs of an age-old tradition – the implications of this attitude towards the sport are potentially harmful if one wants to increase the number of players. It represents the game as something pre-modern, something of the past, something *caduco* and as a part of folklore and tradition, rather than as a modern-day sport that is still played by thousands of people. A demonstration of traditional games that was organized by the Federal

District authorities in 2008, only a few days after *pelota mixteca* and *pelota tarasca* were declared Intangible Cultural Heritage of the City of Mexico, serves to illustrate this point. During this demonstration, which was organized on Mexico City's Zócalo as part of the official celebration of the *Día de los Muertos*, one of Mexico's largest and most famous national holidays, games of *pelota mixteca*, *pelota tarasca* and *ulama* were played inside the replica of a prehispanic I-shaped ball court. This replica included the rings that are traditionally found in Aztec and Post-Classic Maya ball courts, as well as Aztec calendar signs and plastic skulls on the walls. At the beginning of the match the players lined up, their captains wearing a shield that was adorned with a painted illustration of an Aztec-style depiction of a skull and a serpent (Fig. 39). Naturally, this ball court replica did not resemble in any way a normal *pasajuego* or even the playing field on which modern-day *ulama* is played, but did do well with tourists who were attracted to the precolonial imagery. According to one participant, the players of *pelota mixteca* were even asked to wear loincloths instead of regular clothing, so that the demonstration would have a more 'authentic' feel. The *peloteros* responded to this request by saying that their families had not worn loin clothes in at least 500 years, if not much more, and refused to dress up especially for the event. They did, however, participate in the demonstration in hopes of promoting their sport to outsiders and recruiting new players.

The presentation of *pelota mixteca* within a replica of a prehispanic ball court is a perfect example of the strategy that the Mexican state pursued for a long time of representing indigenous culture devoid of any modern elements. This way a demonstration functioned solely as a presentation of an alien tradition of a certain indigenous group, which the Mexican state was proud of as historical patrimony but which did not fit into the mestizo cultural ideal. This strategy is similar to what Nestor García Canclini (1989: 164-77) describes for the ethnographic display of the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City, where the highly traditional representations of the life of certain indigenous groups are always 'sanitized', stripped of any indications of the inclusion of these individuals and communities in a modern globalized world, to present 'the Indian in his pure form'. According to Charles Hale (2004), this persistence of the 'Indian Other' was essential in order to create a counterpoint to the mestizo cultural ideal. The indigenous population still formed a large part of the backbone of Mexican national cultural identity, but a temporal distance had to be created. In the case of *pelota mixteca* this was achieved by giving demonstrations of the game within a replica of a prehispanic ball court.

#### *Assumption number 2*

A second assumption underpinning the Mexican authorities' attitude towards *pelota mixteca* is that the game is a tradition particular to certain indigenous peoples, mainly Mixtecs and Zapotecs. The fact

that *pelota mixteca* is a practice particular to certain indigenous peoples seems relatively indisputable and, possibly, also quite harmless. However, saying that *pelota mixteca* is a game solely played by Mixtecs is not a very accurate representation of the population that plays the game. Considering the ethnic background of the players of the game and the way they identify themselves (as indigenous or not) it seems more accurate to speak of a *pelota Oaxaqueña* than of a ballgame played only by Mixtecs. Not only was and is the game also played by people of Zapotec and Chocho ancestry, it is also practiced by many people who have never considered themselves indigenous, let alone Mixtec.

Nevertheless, examining what politicians are quoted as saying in Oaxacan newspapers, we see that they consistently stress the historical background of the game, as well as its cultural particularity to the Mixtec indigenous population of Oaxaca. Margarita García García of the Oaxacan legislature says in an interview that “muchos escritores reclaman que el juego es descendiente directo de otro jugado hace más de tres mil años por los Mesoamericanos. La pelota mixteca se muestra en los relieves del sitio arqueológico de Dainzú. Y zonas arqueológicas de la región mixteca” (Martínez 2011). Daniel Cuevas Chávez, the head of the Oaxacan committee on sports and youth policy, who was elected as the representative of the district of Nochixtlán, an important center for *pelota mixteca*, and who has shown himself to be an enthusiastic promoter of the sport in the years that he has been head of the sport committee, refers to *pelota mixteca* in one interview as “este deporte practicado por la etnia Mixteca desde los tiempos del Rey Cazador Garra de Tigre Ocho Venado” (Hernández 2011). When explaining why he, together with other members of the state senate, proposed to have *pelota mixteca* declared intangible cultural heritage of the state of Oaxaca, he is quoted as saying that

“este decreto busca proteger una actividad deportiva que practicaban los antiguos mixtecos y zapotecos, así como otras culturas de Mesoamérica, donde la victoria simbolizaba el reconocimiento de toda la comunidad. ... los orígenes de este juego, datan de la época prehispánica. Más de mil 200 canchas han sido encontradas en Mesoamérica, lo que demuestra el grado de importancia que este juego tenía para nuestros ancestros.” (Diario Oaxaca 2011)

While well-intentioned, these statements, which are undoubtedly meant to convey the historical importance of *pelota mixteca* and the deep roots of the game in Oaxaca, stressing the fact that it should not be lost for subsequent generations, cast back the game to the past and seem to reinforce the view of the game as something *caduco*, and possibly also *aburrido*.

The ‘indigenoussness’ of *pelota mixteca*, that is to say, the representation of the game as something purely Mixtec or Zapotec and its associations with traditional village life and culture, is one of the important factors that make that young people, both indigenous and non-indigenous,

decide not to start to play the game. Due to 500 years of discrimination against and oppression of indigenous language and culture, the adjective 'indigenous' is seen by many Mexicans as a pejorative. For years, indigenous culture has implied backwardness, lack of civilization and degeneracy to large sectors of mestizo Mexican mainstream society. Unavoidably, this pressure from mainstream mestizo Mexican society has also influenced the appreciation of indigenous peoples of their own language and culture. An example is the term *el dialecto* which is used by speakers of indigenous languages in many parts of Mexico to refer to their own languages. This self-discrimination, brought on by years of discrimination from the part of mainstream society, also affects the choice of indigenous sports and pastimes by indigenous players.

Ironically, this discrimination of traditions of indigenous origin not only affects the popularity of *pelota mixteca*, which is undeniably indigenous, but also that of other sports, such as soccer, baseball, and basketball. For example, in the community of Huautla de Jiménez in the Mazatec region of the state of Oaxaca, basketball has been replaced by *fútbol rápido*, a form of football which is played on a smaller pitch and with fewer players. In his description of life in the community, Benjamin Feinberg notes that basketball, which was probably introduced around the 1920s or 1930s, is seen as a traditional sport in the town, rather than as a cultural introduction from the outside. According to Feinberg,

“basketball is not seen in the Sierra as anything new, or as an instance of acculturation. I asked the official in charge of the tournament in San Antonio, said to be the oldest in the Sierra, when the tournament there began. “Years and years,” he told me. I asked, “Since when, before you were born?” “Yes,” he replied (and he was not a young man by a long shot). “Forever.”” (2003:104)

However, the fact that basketball is seen as a game that is traditional of the Sierra and has been played 'forever' in the community, has, according to Feinberg, led to a decrease in the number of players over the past ten years. Whereas, during the early nineties, every young guy in Huautla had or wanted to have a Chicago Bulls cap (Feinberg 2003:103), in the beginning of the 2000s, the number of players of basketball declined, while the number of players of *fútbol rápido* increased. According to Feinberg (2003:104), the players of *fútbol rápido*, some of which used to play basketball before, claimed “that soccer is more sophisticated, or cool, to the outside world while basketball is too indigenous.” Obviously, if basketball is seen as something 'too indigenous', the fact that *pelota mixteca* is seen by young people in Oaxaca as something *caduco*, because of its long

history in indigenous communities and the government's stress on its cultural particularity, is not surprising.

The representation of pelota mixteca as an ancestral, autochthonous sport, that is particular to certain indigenous peoples shapes the last assumption that forms part of the traditional discourse on pelota mixteca:

### *Assumption number 3*

The last and most fundamental assumption that has shaped Mexican indigenist and sports policies on pelota mixteca over the past century is the treatment of the game as an indigenous cultural tradition, rather than a sport. This assumption is also the one that has had the largest impact on how the game was (re)presented. Pelota mixteca was/is considered to be more similar to a type of indigenous cultural ritual or spectacle, than to a 'real' sport, like football or basketball. Since pelota mixteca is considered to be an ancestral, indigenous game that descends directly from the famous Mesoamerican Ballgame, its value has traditionally been considered to lie in its cultural and historical particularity and its connections to the pre-Columbian past, rather than its virtues as a sport. This representation obviously has repercussions for the type of support that the Mexican authorities brandish to individual players of pelota mixteca players, as well as organizations that try to promote the game. Eduardo Arellanes describes his experience when petitioning cultural and sports committees in Mexico City for financial support to acquire gloves for children so that they could learn how to play: "llevamos [a la comisión] unas de la playeras con los logos, dijeron que lo veían muy beisbolero ... entonces, yo no sé qué es lo que esperan, que juguemos en taparrabo?!"

The Mexican state has treated the game as a traditional spectacle that was to be displayed during cultural festivals that presented indigenous culture, rather than to be incorporated into sports festivals in which it would be presented as a sport. We have seen this for the Juegos Nacionales de la Revolución in the 1940s, but also in the 2008 presentation of indigenous games on the Mexico City Zócalo that was described above. Hence, as I argued before, a temporal and cultural distance was created, that reduced pelota mixteca, and other indigenous games, to spectacles to be marveled at by non-indigenous spectators, turning them into exhibitions that could be used by the tourist industry. A short comparison of two motions, one that failed and one that was successful, that were introduced in the federal and Mexico City district legislature serves to illustrate how this 'cultural tradition vs. sports'-dichotomy plays out in the political arena and which consequences it has for the survival of pelota mixteca.

### *The motion that failed*

Francisco Sánchez Ramos, representative of the PRD party in the federal *cámara de diputados*, introduced a motion which was heard in senate on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2007. The point of agreement of the proposal reads: “The Secretary of Public Education is requested to intensify the practice of autochthonous and traditional sports at the level of primary education. The National Committee of Physical Culture and Sport is requested to increase the support for the Federación Mexicana de Juegos y Deportes Autóctonos y Tradicionales, with the aim of promoting and preserving traditional sports.”<sup>24</sup> This proposal is addressed at the Secretary of Public Education and stresses the importance of teaching *pelota mixteca* and other traditional sports to children in primary school, an excellent way of making sure that the sport is preserved for and by future generations. Teaching *pelota mixteca* at primary schools nationwide would take the sport out of ‘the sphere of the culturally particular’ and make it into a modern sport that is not only presented as part of an historical legacy. Also, this proposal requests an increase of the support for the Federation of Traditional Games, which could aid in the promotion of indigenous sports and sports tournaments. In short, this proposal is explicitly aimed at the needs of the *pelota mixteca* players themselves as well as at the preservation of the sport as a sport, rather than a cultural phenomenon particular of Oaxacan migrants or a tourist attraction. However, this proposal was not successful.

*The successful motion: Declaration as intangible cultural heritage*

The proposal that *was* successful, was one that was signed by Marcelo Ebrard, then president of Mexico’s federal district on July 14, 2008 and entered into force on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October in the same year. The declaration proclaimed *pelota mixteca* and *pelota tarasca* intangible cultural heritage of the city of Mexico. This decision was the outcome of a long process of negotiation and research by the legislature of the federal district, started in 2005 through a request of the Asociación Mexicana de Jugadores de Juegos de Origen Prehispánico (AMJJOP) to declare these games “Patrimonio Cultural de la Ciudad de México”. The “Consejo de Fomento y Desarrollo Cultural de la Ciudad de México” decided to ask the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) for advice on the matter. The INAH advised that, because of their history, the games were worthy of protection and revalorization in order to guaranty the continuity of the tradition. As a result, the

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<sup>24</sup> “Se solicita a la Secretaría de Educación Pública incentive la práctica del deporte autóctono y tradicional en los niveles de educación básica, y al titular de la Comisión Nacional de Cultura Física y Deporte (Conade) incremente el apoyo económico destinado a las tareas de la Federación Mexicana de Juegos y Deportes Autóctonos y Tradicionales, AC, con el fin de difundir y preservar los juegos y deportes autóctonos tradicionales.”

declaration of Cultural Heritage was issued. The declaration consists of five points, two of which are of particular interest here.

Firstly, the third point of the declaration, following the normal trajectory of decisions concerning Cultural Heritage, makes the Secretary of Culture (not the Secretary of Education or the Commission for Physical Education and Sports) responsible for following up on the actions derived from the declaration. The second point of the declaration explicates what the Secretary of Culture is expected to do: “To contribute to the preservation and promotion of the ballgames of prehispanic origin [...], the Secretary of Culture will, in agreement with the organizations of players of prehispanic ballgames and the relevant authorities, create a cultural program of stimulation and spread of said games, also aiming to promote them as a cultural tourist attraction.”<sup>25</sup>

#### *Differences between the failed and the successful initiative*

Comparing the unsuccessful proposal and the one that was accepted, we see that the proposal that failed was explicitly aimed at the necessities of players and aimed to promote the sport among children, in order to increase the number of players. The state entities that were expected to take on the challenge of promoting pelota mixteca were the Secretary of Education and the Commission for Physical Education and Sports. This proposal recognized pelota mixteca as a sport that could be played not only by Oaxacan immigrants, but also by schoolchildren from Mexico City and other non-Oaxacans. The declaration that resulted from the second proposal and which came into force in October 2008, on the other hand, departs from a view of pelota mixteca as a cultural tradition, rather than a sport. In the proposal and declaration, the Secretary of Culture is requested to undertake action to not only stimulate the survival of the sport, but also to aim to promote it as a cultural tourist attraction, something that is not necessarily in the interest of the players or in the survival of pelota mixteca as a living sport, and something that would never happen in the case of basketball or soccer.

Initially the declaration as cultural heritage was requested by the players themselves, united in the AMJJOP. This association had formed in the late 1980s after the first threats of expropriation of the *Pasajuego de Balbuena*, the oldest pelota mixteca court in Mexico-City, which was created through communal labor in the 1950s and which formed one of the main meeting places for Oaxacan migrants in the Mexican capital. Sadly, the *Balbuena* was constructed in an inconvenient

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<sup>25</sup>“Para contribuir a la preservación y promoción de los juegos de pelota prehispánica [...], la Secretaría de Cultura acordará con las organizaciones de jugadores de pelota prehispánica y con las autoridades competentes, un programa cultural de fomento y expansión de dichos juegos, tratando de promoverlos también como atractivo turístico cultural.”

location, since, years after the *pasajuego* itself had been constructed, the nation's *cámara de diputados* was constructed very close to it, as were several buildings of the Secretaría de Seguridad Pública (SSP). As a result, ever since the 1980s, the players of pelota mixteca and pelota tarasca, which is also played on the same courts, have tried to ward off attempts to expropriate their terrains. In response to the first attempts in the 1980s by the Mexican city police to expropriate the terrain, the players formed the *Asociación Mexicana de Jugadores de Juegos de Origen Prehispánico* (AMJJOP). This association has represented the players ever since, in their conflicts with the Mexico City authorities. Towards the end of 2004 the threat of expropriation and destruction became imminent again, when the *Cámara de Diputados* reached an agreement with the authorities of the *Delegación Venustiano Carranza*, to which the Balbuena area belongs, to turn the *pasajuego* into a parking area for the legislative body. In response, the AMJJOP requested the *Secretaría de Cultura*, also a part of the Mexico City authorities, to declare both pelota mixteca and pelota tarasca, and their associated *pasajuegos*, protected intangible cultural heritage of the City of Mexico. The hope of the players was that, if pelota mixteca and pelota tarasca would be proclaimed intangible heritage of the city of Mexico, the traditional space in which it had been played for over fifty years would automatically also be protected. Sadly, this was not the case, and while the Secretary of Culture advised positively on declaring the game intangible cultural heritage, the *pasajuego* was turned over to the SSP in order for them to construct a parking lot on the terrain (Fig. 40, 41). As a result, the players were left with a game that was considered intangible cultural heritage but no space in which to play it. Despite promises by the city authorities to construct new courts with better facilities, no sufficient alternative had been constructed in 2015. Thus, we see that, clearly, for the Mexico City legislature, the cultural and traditional aspects of pelota mixteca was considered to be more important than its value and role as a sport.

### ***Authorities in Oaxaca***

A short analysis of a leaflet published by the Oaxacan state government serves to illustrate that this type of treatment of the game was not only prominent in Mexico City, but was also prevalent in Oaxaca. The pamphlet is entitled 'Sabías que los Mixtecas contaban con un juego parecido al tenis?' and was handed out during the Guelaguetza festival, in addition to being published online (Fig. 42).

*Sabías que los Mixtecas contaban con un juego parecido al tenis?*



The first point that jumps out in terms of representation, are the images that are used. While one of the images depicts a ball used for *forro*, the least-played variant of *pelota mixteca* and also the variant that uses a type of ball that looks ‘least modern’, the other two images are illustrative of the temporal distance that is created and that frames *pelota mixteca* as an historical tradition. One image shows a ring from a pre-Columbian Mesoamerican ball court and the other is a picture of the Classic era (AD 200 - 900) ball court from the archaeological site of Monte Albán. Both these images have no relation to the way in which *pelota mixteca* is played nowadays and it is striking that, instead of choosing a spectacular image that shows *pelota mixteca* players in action, the creators of this pamphlet chose to depict images related to the pre-Columbian Mesoamerican ballgame.

Looking past the images at the text of the pamphlet, the use of the past tense in both the title of the pamphlet and a highlighted quote are significant. Of course, the title, which uses ‘contaban’ instead of ‘cuentan’, reduces the game to its prehispanic roots among ‘the Ancient Mixtecs’, *en passant* also historicizing the Mixtec people as a whole. Additionally, the second page has a highlighted quote, in place of images, which reads “el juego de pelota mixteca era parecido al tenis.” Naturally, the modern-day game of *pelota mixteca* is *still* very much ‘parecido al tenis’ and there is absolutely no need here to use the past tense, unless one aims to present *pelota mixteca* as a historical game, kept at a temporal distance. Looking at the text of the leaflet, we see that *pelota mixteca* is described as “a sport that was played for hundreds of years before the Spanish conquest by Mixtecs and Zapotecs [...] one of the places where the game was played, was at Monte Alban and the winner would receive the heart of a young woman.” This again stresses the history of the game, casting the practice of the game back in the past, and emphasizes the cultural particularity of *pelota mixteca* as something that is only practiced by Mixtecs and Zapotecs. Additionally, the mention of the fact that the winner of the game would receive the heart of a young woman – this is meant literally, not figuratively – connects the game with ‘barbaric’ practices of the pre-Columbian past and stresses the pre-Columbian game’s ritual aspect, rather than the fact that it was also a normal sport. The most symbolic way in which this pamphlet represents the Oaxacan government’s traditional view of *pelota mixteca*, is the fact that it was published by the Secretary of Tourism, rather than by the Secretary of Sport and Physical education. Naturally, this is not only symbolic but also has many repercussions for the treatment of the game by Oaxacan authorities.

While stressing all these historical aspects of the game, its link to archaeology and particular indigenous peoples, and its touristic potential, the pamphlet ends with: “Commentary: It is important that our young people practice this type of sports that [...] form part of our culture, which we cannot permit to disappear.” This commentary is virtually the only part of the pamphlet which

recognizes pelota mixteca as a living practice and one that can be practiced by others than the 'ancient' Mixtecs and Zapotecs. However, it is not entirely evident to whom this commentary is addressed, since the pamphlet is a publication of the Secretary of Tourism, which normally publishes material for domestic and foreign tourists.

Nevertheless, the fact that this pamphlet was published by the Secretary of Tourism is not surprising, since using pelota mixteca as a way to stimulate tourism through exhibitions and demonstrations has been a recurrent feature of state policies on the game over the past decade or two. In the period up to 2010, the Oaxacan city and state government generally promoted pelota mixteca in two ways. One was to (partly) sponsor the annual pelota mixteca tournament that is held during the festivities of the Guelaguetza festival in July/August. In this tournament teams from all over Oaxaca, as well as from Mexico City and, occasionally, California participate in three divisions for the title of pelota mixteca champion of the state of Oaxaca. Since the Guelaguetza festival is Oaxaca's main tourist event throughout the year, the organization of a pelota mixteca tournament during this time, while not expressly aimed at tourists, still has a certain touristic component. Another way of promoting the game, was the plan to build three pelota mixteca courts at so-called *paradores turísticos*. These tourist centers were placed along the newly-formed *Ruta Dominica* that led tourists around the three famous 16<sup>th</sup> century monasteries of Teposcolula, Coixtlahuaca and Yanhuitlán. Ironically, of these three communities, pelota mixteca is only played in Teposcolula, so teams would have had to have been brought in from other places to give exhibitions for tourists. Priority was given to constructing courts for the game at places where tourists would come and see exhibitions, over spending funds on the construction of courts in places where the game was actually still played actively. A recent example of pelota mixteca being used as a tourist attraction by the Oaxacan government can be seen in a motion that *diputada* Margarita García introduced in the state parliament in December 2011. The motion read: "I encourage the Secretary of Tourism and the State Commission of Sports, to work together in the spread and promotion of the game of *pelota mixteca*, and to institute a state championship." Here, again, we see the stress that is placed on the touristic, and by extension economical, value of pelota mixteca, as opposed to encouraging more people to play the game, so that it might actually survive.

### ***The players' reaction; a turning point?***

Above, we have seen how the representation by the Mexican state of *pelota mixteca* as an ancestral tradition particular to certain indigenous peoples from the state of Oaxaca led to several government initiatives that focused on 'the cultural sphere', declaring the game intangible cultural heritage and promoting it as an attraction for tourists. These actions were a logical outcome of the

discourse that was created by the Mexican state on the game. It was thought that these initiatives – including the organization of a “Day of the *pelota mixteca*”, the institution of a cultural program to promote the sport and using the sport as a means to attract tourists – would ensure the survival of the sport.

However, many players of *pelota mixteca* themselves thought differently. Their idea of how to save the game from extinction was predicated on the belief that the only way to keep *pelota mixteca* alive is to have it played, not to confine it to the (open-air) museum. As Cornelio Pérez notes: “estos juegos desgraciadamente se vuelven como piezas de museo, uno va al Museo de Antropología y hay canchas de juego, pero hay una versión distorsionada, hay una visión de museo, de libro” (El Universal 2012). The promotion by the Mexican and Oaxacan governments of *pelota mixteca* as a tourist attraction and the representation of the game as a culturally particular tradition do not contribute to the survival of the game. On the contrary, these initiatives stress the game’s past and represent it as a cultural tradition that is not open for others to participate in. People who have not grown up with *pelota mixteca* will hardly ever start playing *pelota mixteca*, not only because the majority of them will not know of the existence of the game, but, more importantly, because *pelota mixteca* has the image of something that is not to be learned by people who do not play it traditionally. In the words of Eduardo Arellanes, a player from Mexico City who is a member of the *quinta Los Gemelos* and who has been an enthusiastic promoter of the sport: “when we give exhibitions of the game, people don’t know if the game is being promoted so that it will be played, or whether we are being brought in as a circus phenomenon, that people see us as something strange, they don’t see it as something they can also practice”<sup>26</sup>. The stress on the cultural and historic background of the game, which is prominent in virtually all government communication, as well as the presentation of *pelota mixteca* as a cultural tradition, rather than as a sport led Eduardo Arellanes to comment that “Cuando [las autoridades] nos llevan parece que tiene que ser algo del INAH [Instituto Nacional de Antropología e *Historia*], que es algo histórico, que ahí se queda, como algo caduco, viejo.”<sup>27</sup>

As a result, many players, acutely aware of the fact that the game is in need of new impulses if it is going to survive at all, argued for a different route to ensure the survival of *pelota mixteca*. Naturally, they also see the problems that the game faces and understand that the solution to this problem lies in getting more young people to start playing the game. In order to achieve this goal

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<sup>26</sup> “cuando damos exhibiciones la gente no sabe bien si se está fomentando para que se practique, o si nos llevan [...] como un fenómeno de feria, donde la gente parece que allí nos ve como algo extraño, no lo toma como algo propio que pueda practicar”

<sup>27</sup> From radio interview with Eduardo Arellanes, available at <http://www.archive.org/details/undergroundprograma1>

several individual players and teams, as well as the self-organizations and the federation of pelota mixteca players, have started initiatives to help promote the game among youngsters and enlarge the number of young *peloteros*. These initiatives can be divided into two categories, 1. plans to incorporate pelota mixteca into the curricula of primary and secondary schools, and 2. spectator-oriented activities that aim to stimulate more people to take an interest in the game, either as a player or as a spectator. All these initiatives form a stark contrast to previous government interventions; they argue for a *detraditionalization* of the game, so that the game could be taught at schools, played in sports clubs and become more spectator-friendly, as opposed to the government's initiatives which attempted to enshrine pelota mixteca as a cultural tradition in the canon of Mexican national heritage.

The spectator-oriented initiatives focus on making the game more intelligible and easier to follow for outsiders. To make the sport more understandable for those who have never seen the game, some tournaments have chosen to have only one match played at a time. Normally four teams play at the same time, which is quite confusing to the untrained observer. Through these modifications in the way games are being played and tournaments are organized, pelota mixteca, which is actually very spectacular once one has a good grasp of the rules, will become more intelligible to people who have never seen a game and do not understand the rules. One of the teams that has been most active in trying to 'professionalize' the marketing and 'spectator-friendliness' of the sport is the *quinta Los Gemelos* from Mexico City. By using social media and creating merchandise, they attempt to encourage new players to practice pelota mixteca. Like other teams in Oaxaca had done before them, the Arellanes brothers have been creating their own team-jerseys, which they customize especially for every event that they compete in (Fig. 43). They also created a team logo, which they also use for general marketing of pelota mixteca, and have created stickers that showcase this logo, as well as a Facebook page which is called 'pelota mixteca', which uses the logo and aims to promote the game through social networks (Fig. 44). There is also a separate 'pelota mixteca Arellanes'-team Facebook page (which has over 500 likes) on which team members post pictures of the games they attended as well as announcements of where they will be playing next. Some other teams have also created Facebook accounts through which they communicate with their fans and invite spectators to visit upcoming matches. Naturally, using the internet and social media is a novel and bottom-up approach which provides players and teams with their own media outlets to showcase their games and accomplishments and which can be a powerful tool to encourage more young people to get to know more about the game.

When demonstrations of pelota mixteca were organized by the Secretary of Tourism or by the INAH, many players were often hesitant to participate because they feared that they and their

sport would be exoticized. In contrast, many pelota mixteca players actively try to be part of exhibitions that are currently organized by the Comisión Nacional del Deporte (CONADE). Armando Padilla Alonso, one of the founders of the Mexican Federation of Autochthonous and Traditional Games, sketches the struggles that the federation went through in order to have the game accepted as a sport, rather than as a cultural tradition:

[Fue muy difícil] de entrar en el mundo del deporte mexicano, sobre todo en el mundo del deporte occidental. Porque no aceptaban, o no querían aceptar, que estos juegos están ahí, que eran practicados por grupos tradicionales mestizos y por grupos indígenas, sobre todo. Entonces tuvimos que luchar muy fuerte desde un punto de vista de justificación. A través de artículos, a través de intervención en la cámara de diputados y como asociación civil, hasta que finalmente logramos tener cabida en la institución donde se agrupan todas las federaciones deportivas. Y después el logro más importante fue tener el apoyo de una institución que surgió que es la regidora del deporte en México que es la CONADE. Lo más interesante es que logramos tener un presupuesto. Para poder realizar una serie de actividades, y ser incluidos en la primera ley que se armó en México del destino del fomento al deporte, donde ya se habla de los juegos autóctonos y tradicionales.

During exhibitions of the CONADE, players bring their gloves and balls for playing the game and give spectators the opportunity to practice with the ballgame equipment, so that spectators can appreciate the incredible weight of ball and glove and the power and skill involved in playing pelota mixteca. Players hope that outsiders are encouraged to start playing pelota mixteca themselves. At demonstrations, players often bring along gloves that were made especially for children, so that they too can develop an interest in the game from an early age. An example of this form of promotion of pelota mixteca was part of the activities of the Tocati festival in Verona, Italy in 2014. At this festival, which is dedicated to showcasing and promoting traditional games from all around the world, Mexico was the featured nation in 2014. As part of this event, the CONADE, which coordinated the event together with the Federación Mexicana de Juegos y Deportes Autóctonos, invited two pelota mixteca players from Mexico City and two from Oaxaca to come to the festival and give demonstrations of the game. Since the Arellanes team consists of five brothers but only two players from Mexico City could be invited by the organization, the brothers decided to jointly pay for the trip of the remaining three team members. During the exhibitions, which were held in the historic center of Verona, the players presented a demonstration but could not really play the game due to lack of space. Because of the risk that the use of the heavy rubber ball, which can cause serious injuries, presented to large crowds of people and breakable cars and windows, the players only hit the ball back and forth, without actually competing. After the demonstrations, children and adults were invited to try their luck at playing pelota mixteca. This invitation was readily accepted by dozens of children, and some adults (Fig. 45). One of the enthusiastic spectators was a player of the traditional

Italian handball game *pantalera*, a sport which is part of the same family of handball games as pelota mixteca. After having tried to play with glove and ball, and understanding that the rules of the two games were virtually the same, he challenged the Mexican players to an international match: Mexico versus Italy (Fig. 46). This match was played using the equipment and rules of *pantalera* and ended in a 6-6 draw, after some exciting plays and cheers from the crowd. Most importantly, through this exchange, the pelota mixteca players were able to broaden their networks to an international level, bringing them in contact with players of similar games from Europe. In the long term, these kind of exchanges might enable pelota mixteca organizations, as well as individuals, to learn from the strategies that traditional European sports, many of which contend with the same problems as pelota mixteca, have deployed in order to ensure their survival. Additionally, a possible outcome could be that pelota mixteca players will be invited to participate in the 'Handball' World Cups that are organized by the International Handball Confederation every year. While Mexico is represented in this forum by non-indigenous players of variants of the Basque and Valencian hand ballgames, pelota mixteca players have never been invited, because their sport was considered to be a *juego autóctono*. Nonetheless, if the construction of an international network by pelota mixteca players is successful and they are invited to participate, the recognition that comes with being invited to participate in a World Cup could present a strong stimulus for more people to start playing pelota mixteca, because it gives the sport an 'aura of globalization'.

Apart from the spectator-oriented initiatives, other actions focus on the way people learn to play the game and try to incorporate pelota mixteca into children's education. While some players, such as Leobardo Pacheco, try to achieve this goal by trying to open a school for pelota mixteca, others try to work together with outside partners to have pelota mixteca incorporated into mainstream education. A successful initiative in this regard has been the incorporation of pelota mixteca into the curriculum of the Colegio de Bachilleres del Estado de Oaxaca (COBAO), the largest organization providing secondary education in Oaxaca. As a result, pelota mixteca, which was made the official sport of the institution, will be part of physical education classes of hundreds, if not thousands, of students in Oaxaca. Pelota mixteca de esponja was chosen as the variety to be played, since equipping all students of the COBAO with pelota mixteca de hule gloves would hardly be possible and the game would also be much harder to learn. The program, which is called 'Rescate de los Juegos Tradicionales Oaxaqueños' came into existence in a cooperation between the COBAO and the Oaxacan chapter of the Federación de Juegos y Deportes Autóctonos. During the public announcement of the program, in 2011, the director of the COBAO, Germán Espinosa Santibañez, said "estamos formando generaciones de jóvenes comprometidos con su pasado, con el legado de sus ancestros, pero también preparados para enfrentar el futuro con sensibilidad y el compromiso

de aportar a la solución de las diversas problemáticas sociales” (COBAO 2011). This program has, so far, been a success, since it has already resulted in the formation of many pelota mixteca teams at the different locations of the COBAO, and a few teams of COBAO students have even participated in the tournament of Bajos de Chila. Ultimately, the aim of the COBAO is to create a state-wide pelota mixteca league, with help from the state authorities, in which teams from the COBAO, as well as others, compete for the title of best Oaxacan team. Apart from the COBAO initiative, the Committee of Sports of the state of Oaxaca, after consulting with the players’ federation, has announced that it will make funds available to buy equipment for the game. Considering the high cost of the balls and the gloves for pelota mixteca de hule, supplying free, or cheaper, equipment could be an impulse for young people to start playing. Since all of the initiatives described here are very recent, it has hard to judge at this moment what their outcome will be. However, considering the fact that some of the COBAO teams have already competed in pelota mixteca tournaments, only a few years after the inception of the program, some actions can already be considered a success. The future of pelota mixteca looks a lot brighter if we assume that every year new students of the COBAO will start to learn the game and will participate in state-wide leagues, which might eventually even be televised so that the number of pelota mixteca fans will also grow.

### ***Globalization, detraditionalization and the creation of new identities***

So what relation do these developments have to the processes of globalization and identity construction that I have reviewed in chapter four? As we have seen, players of pelota mixteca often say that they started playing the game because it was a part of their ancestral or family heritage, or something that is in their blood. It is clear that this means that pelota mixteca, in some way, is part of their identity, it is part of who they are and who they consider themselves to be. However, they never mention that they play the game ‘because they are Mixtec/Zapotec/indigenous’. For example, Jaime, when he explains why he plays the game and what is important for him in playing, says:

JAIME

Lo que cuenta mucho es el orgullo de que no pierdas. Bueno, para mí. A mi punto de vista, yo pienso que eso es mucho el orgullo, me entiendes.

MARTIN

Pero si dices orgullo de las raíces que quieres decir? Raíces de México? De Oaxaca? De la Mixteca, de tu pueblo?

JAIME

Pues, cuando yo hablo de raíces, yo pienso que ando hablando pues de mis raíces, de mis ancestros, de todo lo que era.

This short conversation is exemplary of all the conversations of this type that I had with players of the game. Rather than speaking of his Mixtec background, Jaime speaks of his ancestors, his roots, his family. However, in the coming twenty years, as new regional and ethnic identities are created under the influence of globalization, this situation might be beginning to change. Until now there were, in my view, three main reasons for players not to identify themselves, or the game they play, as Mixtec.

First, and foremost, decades, if not centuries, of discrimination against indigenous culture and language on the part of the Mexican state and mainstream society have made indigenous individuals reluctant to identify themselves as such. Naturally, this discrimination and politics of assimilation, mainly through education, has also led to an enormous decrease in the number of speakers of these indigenous languages, and the loss of traditional indigenous culture. At the same time, from the point of view of the state, as well as general mestizo society, once indigenous individuals start speaking Spanish, master reading and writing, and join urban economies, they are regarded as mestizos (Martínez Novo 2006: 148), thus restraining even further the possibilities of indigenous individuals to identify themselves as such. This leads us to the second, more fundamental, reason that players of pelota mixteca do not identify their participation in the game as 'an element of Mixtec culture'; they often simply do not (or do not want to) consider themselves indigenous, largely because of the hegemonic definitions of 'what an indigenous person is' (and what the actual value of indigenous culture is), that have formed in Mexico since the Mexican Revolution, combined with the fact that they do not speak an indigenous language.

Thirdly, we can ask whether it is actually possible to identify as Mixtec, in the same way as one identifies as Mexican, Dutch or German. These national identities have formed over the course of several decades, or in some cases even centuries, and have, for a large part, consciously been created by political elites attempting to forge a unified nation. National (cultural) identities did not spontaneously form themselves, nor are they the result of some pre-existing social condition that expressed itself through specific national identities. They are not things that individuals are born with, but are, rather, systems of cultural representation, which create and sustain 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1983). They consist of several main building blocks, including a 'narrative of the nation', an emphasis on continuity and tradition, the invention of tradition, and foundational myths (Hall 1996: 293-4). In the Mixtec case, such narratives were never created. The formation of them was actively discouraged by Mexican political elites who tried to assimilate indigenous peoples



and their cultures into mainstream Mexican society, as part of a politics of indigenism after the Mexican Revolution. There was no discourse, no system of cultural representation, no narrative of the Mixtec nation that gave Mixtecs (people who spoke the Mixtec language, lived in the Mixtec region, and shared a certain cultural and historical background) the possibility to even consider identifying themselves as such. Naturally, this is not to say that there was no Mixtec culture. The Mixtec language existed (with all its dialects and varieties) and inhabitants of the Mixtec region shared a very similar cultural and historical background. It just means that, until very recently, apart from the criterion of speaking the Mixtec language, there was no way to identify oneself as Mixtec since no one bothered or was able to create or invoke that category.

As a result of transnational migration, new possibilities for identifying oneself as Mixtec or indigenous may be created. Some have argued that this form of identification is on the increase. Gaspar Rivera Salgado and Luís Escala Rabadán refer to this phenomenon as “the counterintuitive proposition that long-term transnational migration is increasing, not reducing, self-identification by ethnicity” (2004: 171). Whereas, traditionally, Mixtecs, Zapotecs and other *indígenas* in Mexico would identify themselves on the community or village level, indigenous individuals now start to identify themselves more broadly as Mixtec, or, even more generally, as *indígena* (Leal 2001; Nagengast and Kearney 1990:87; Fox and Rivera-Salgado 2004:46). These identities can form in a new social context, that of transnational migration, which, under the influence of widespread ‘double discrimination’ against indigenous migrants, opens up new spaces for broader ethnic identities. “This experience of discrimination outside of Oaxaca was a major stimulus for indigenous migrants to appropriate the labels – *mixteco*, *zapoteco*, and *indígena* – that formerly had only been used by linguists, anthropologists, and government officials” (Kearney 2003, quoted in Fox and Rivera Salgado 2004). Apart from discrimination, according to Perry et al. (2009: 209), in the process of transnational migration, in which (indigenous) communities are being dispersed over different countries, “ethnicity can become a source of social cohesion.” Interestingly, as we have seen in the examples of Huajuapán and the COBAO, that link *pelota mixteca* to elements of Mixtec or Oaxacan identity, it seems that Mexican authorities are starting to take an interest in also creating, sustaining, and actively promoting these forms of identification. As we have seen, politicians have recently started referring to *pelota mixteca* in the media as ‘the game of Lord 8 Deer’, and related it to rituals and sports that were performed by Ancient Mixtec warriors. Judging from this type of rhetoric, it seems that something of a Mixtec identity narrative, which is based on history and archaeology and in which *pelota mixteca* plays an important role, is being hesitantly created in the political arena. This is of course coupled with, and quite possibly an outcome of, the creation of new identities by diaspora, who influence the politics at home. This new interest of the state in indigenous peoples

and forms of self-identification, then, seem to be an outcome of the onset of international migration and globalization. Not only because transnational communities, a typical phenomenon related to globalization and the increase in international labor migration, have influenced and stimulated the creation of these new identities and encouraged politicians to take an interest, but also because of the 'search for the authentic' that globalization seems to occasion in nation-states across the world. A few examples serve to illustrate this point.

When looking at the way that the concept of 'identity' is used by legislators and policy makers in Mexico, we see that they construct pelota mixteca as an exemplary tradition of 'Mixtec' or 'Oaxacan' identity, or, at times, even more broadly, as constitutive of 'Mexican' identity. For example, when presenting a plan to stimulate pelota mixteca by including the game in the curriculum of the physical education classes at the Colegio de Bachilleres del Estado de Oaxaca (COBAO), the director of the institution is quoted as saying:

El Colegio de Bachilleres del Estado de Oaxaca rescatará uno de los juegos prehispánicos más importantes de la entidad, la pelota mixteca, afirmó el director general del COBAO, Germán Espinosa Santibañez, al anunciar el programa Rescate de los Juegos Tradicionales Oaxaqueños. ...

Espinosa Santibañez reconoció el interés de parte de las autoridades municipales y de los jugadores por mantener vivas las raíces oaxaqueñas a través del deporte, porque así como la pelota mixteca y las danzas forman parte de *nuestra identidad como oaxaqueños*. (COBAO 2011, my emphasis)

In this quote, it is clear that pelota mixteca is seen as a cultural trait that is one of the important cultural building blocks of a supposed 'Oaxacan identity'. This Oaxacan identity is shared by all Oaxacans and will be created, stimulated and enacted, through this program, which will stimulate the COBAO's students to start taking an interest in the game.

On a more local level, the *ayuntamiento* of Huajuapán, a traditional center for pelota mixteca de forro in the Mixteca Baja region, is also trying to stimulate individuals to play the game. Here, too, the aim is to get more people to play pelota mixteca and to save an ancestral tradition, that, according to the *regidor* of the municipality is an important part of 'Mixtec identity':

En la región Mixteca, un aproximado del 60 por ciento no muestran interés por practicar la pelota mixteca, prefiriendo así disciplinas más actuales ... informó Alejandro Ortiz Gabriel, regidor de Educación y Cultura del Ayuntamiento de Huajuapán. "Desde varios años, el juego

de pelota mixteca se ha dejado de practicar, debido a que las nuevas generaciones no tienen el interés de jugarlo como lo hacían sus ancestros, por ello apoyamos al Comité de la pelota mixteca a la inauguración de una liga para practicar este deporte, con el objetivo de que no se pierda pues *es una parte muy importante de nuestra identidad como mixtecos*" (nssoaxaca.com 2013, emphasis added)

Clearly, the concept of identity, and the way that is represented, used, and created in discourse is situational. It depends on the context in which pelota mixteca is used, and on whom the discourse addresses, to which kind of 'identity' it is attributed. In the case of the COBAO, a state-wide institute that aims to reach all the inhabitants of Oaxaca, pelota mixteca is presented as a cultural characteristic of 'Oaxacan identity'. In the case of the municipal authorities of Huajuapán, a traditionally Mixtec community inside the Mixtec region, pelota mixteca is represented as a more local expression of a 'Mixtec identity'. In Mexico City, where pelota mixteca is only played by a few hundred migrants and the sport is not, at this moment, an everyday reality for inhabitants of the city, the authorities wish to represent the game as a part of national 'Mexican identity'. A cultural tradition that connects today's inhabitants of the federal district with the inhabitants of Tenochtitlán. As a result, when describing the importance of a new sports complex created especially for indigenous games, the coordinator of the heritage office of the city is quoted in an article as saying:

"La coordinadora de Patrimonio Histórico, Artístico y Cultural, Guadalupe Lozada León, representante de la Secretaría de Cultura, Elena Cepeda de León [manifestó que] "el reconocimiento del juego de pelota prehispánico no es la excepción para la Ciudad de México, a la que se dota a partir de hoy de *un espacio propicio para encontrarse con sus orígenes, con sus tradiciones y con su propia identidad reflejada en una de sus más vistosas manifestaciones culturales*. [El nuevo espacio para los juegos y deportes autóctonos] será *un espacio dedicado a rescatar nuestra identidad*, revalorando los juegos y deportes autóctonos y tradicionales, que lograron sobrevivir y llegar hasta el día de hoy, con su carga ceremonial que soporta el peso de la historia. (Secretaría de Cultura México DF 2010, emphasis added)

Apparently, all levels of government in Mexico – municipal, state and federal – have discovered pelota mixteca as a sport/tradition that is exemplary of their identity. While the Mexican national identity has of course existed for a long time, the appeal to a Oaxacan or a Mixtec identity are relatively new developments. All these developments flow from processes of globalization that

have enabled pelota mixteca players to organize themselves and create new forms and politics of self-identification. Individuals and organizations of players have grasped this opportunity to change the way that pelota mixteca is represented and stimulated by the state. Of course, the players understand better than anyone else that the sport will only continue if there are enough players. Hence, these initiatives were taken in order to make pelota mixteca more popular and to break out of the discourse of an historical indigenous tradition, focusing more on the promotion of pelota mixteca as a sport. Of course, all these measures will bring new players to the game who would traditionally not have played it. This strategy is even followed by Don Agustín in Fresno, who also realizes that, in order for the game to survive in Fresno, more people who do not have a family history of playing pelota mixteca have to get involved with the game. He not only wants to involve more Mexican or Mixtec migrants, but also Americans:

#### DON AGUSTÍN

Ya hemos tenido unas tres, cuatro juntas con la ciudad de Fresno. Yo les he solicitado un campo para este deporte de pelota. Porque si usted se da cuenta, año con año, nosotros estamos alzando el nombre de la ciudad de Fresno hace a arriba. Pero ellos no se han sentado en la mesa a platicar con nosotros. La verdad, este deporte es un deporte sano como todos. Pero necesitamos un espacio más amplio, porque, si usted se dio cuenta, el día de hoy vino mucho público. Y lo que queremos es que haya más espacio para este público, porque queremos que, si los Americanos interesan venir a verlo, queremos que haya espacio, y que todos participan.

Naturally, like in Mexico, once non-indigenous Mexicans or Americans, who have not traditionally played the game, get involved and start playing, the character of *pelota mixteca* as a traditional Oaxacan sport will change. No longer will it be a family tradition that is continued by some members of the Mixtec immigrant community, it will be, rather, a sport just like any other that can be played by anyone interested (and willing and able to acquire the expensive equipment, in the case of the hule variant). Somewhat ironically, this *detraditionalization* or *deindigenization* of pelota mixteca appears to be the most effective way for the game to survive in a 21<sup>st</sup>-century context. The need to widen the social circle in which pelota mixteca is played and to shift the focus from pelota mixteca as a family tradition to pelota mixteca as a sport is recognized by many players. Many of them consider the federal education system to provide the best chances of realizing their aims. Fidel Salazar Rosales, the president of the players' association in Oaxaca, is quoted in a newspaper as saying "que este deporte se está agotando, ya que sólo se transmite de padres a hijos, y a nietos"

(Gómez 2011). Not coincidentally, he was also, as president of the Oaxacan players' association, one of the leading figures in bringing pelota mixteca to the COBAO and, by doing so, taking the recruitment of new players out of the family sphere. Of course, as a result, the locus of cultural reproduction shifts away from the home and the family (father teaching son to play *pelota mixteca*) to the state (boy and girl learning to play *pelota mixteca* at school), and pelota mixteca might lose its traditional/indigenous character.

What happens when indigenous traditions are accepted into mainstream culture and, as a result, lose their 'indigenous character'? Pelota mixteca, when played by students of the COBAO, is still an autochthonous sport, but is it still indigenous, and is this even a relevant question? To some players of the game, this question is quite irrelevant. Eduardo Arellanes, one of the players who has been a strong and consistent advocate for the professionalization of the sport, for example, says that

Pienso que mitificar el juego no ha ayudado mucho para promoverlo. Pienso que es un error el tomar la bandera del juego ancestral que jugaban los antepasados. Esto llevó a que por mucho tiempo deberíamos dar exhibiciones en taparrabos y en zonas arqueológicas. [El público] nos ven igual como los voladores de Papantla. [...] La gente que veía estas exhibiciones no nos preguntaban ¿cómo se llama el equipo? o ¿dónde y cómo entrenan? ¿dónde me inscribo para practicarlo? No, las preguntas son ¿es cierto que al que ganaba lo sacrificaban? o ¿por qué no vienen vestidos con taparrabos? [...] Pienso que si tenemos esta herencia la mejor opción es compartirla y no que se acabe con nosotros [y que], si para la práctica masiva ha de tener algunos cambios, es preferible así.

From Eduardo Arellanes's comments we can see that, while he might think that the 'ancestral sport' label is significant, he does not object to pelota mixteca being taken out of the traditional sphere, in order to survive. The same goes for Leobardo Pacheco who dreams of starting a pelota mixteca school, which will teach the sport to children. In short, it seems that there is a relatively widespread consensus among *peloteros* themselves that pelota mixteca will need to be played by more young people to be able to survive and that the best way of achieving this goal is by way of formal education and (partial) detraditionalization. As a result we see here an apparent paradox: the state has argued for the continuation of tradition inside the traditional sphere, whereas the players of the tradition themselves argued for detraditionalization of their game. While it is too early in the game to call a victory for the players over the attempts of the state to contain them, they have already achieved significant successes and have been able to promote their own sport

(and tradition) on their own terms, thanks to their ability to organize and lobby. Only time will tell what the eventual outcome will be, but the players are undoubtedly off to a successful start.

## Chapter 7. Conclusions to Part II

The second part of this work started out with the aim to answer several questions: Why do people start playing pelota mixteca? Why are there less players of pelota mixteca nowadays, than there were a few decades ago? What has been the attitude of the state towards pelota mixteca? How, and why, has this attitude changed over the years and how have players of the game responded? And what can we say about the future of pelota mixteca? Over the course of the chapter I have attempted to answer these questions by examining what players themselves told me about their engagement with the game, what discourse has been created by the Mexican state on pelota mixteca, and how pelota mixteca has been presented in newspapers and on the internet. Theoretically, I have framed these answers in a discussion of the concepts of cultural globalization and questions of identity. In these conclusions I will briefly revisit my findings, and try to come to an understanding of how this ‘theoretical’ backdrop can help in grasping the ‘how and why?’ of the answers I have come up with.

Traditionally, new players of pelota mixteca started playing because it was part of a family tradition. Young boys – women never played the game – were taught how to play by their fathers, grandfathers or uncles. Starting from an early age they would accompany their older family members to games, retrieve the run-away balls and look at the plays. After their fathers and uncles had finished playing, they would borrow their equipment and start to practice themselves, eventually growing up to be players of the game themselves and forming their own teams with cousins, brothers or friends. Pelota mixteca was something that was part of a family’s identity, something that some players describe as being ‘in their blood’ or as part of their family’s heritage. Not all children from a family would start to play, and sometimes children who did not have a family history of playing the game would become game-enthusiasts and start participating, but a large majority of the players were active because they had inherited ‘the pelota mixteca-bug’.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century, pelota mixteca was probably one of the few, if not the only, ‘ludic options’ in the villages in which the game was played. Under the influence of economic, political and cultural globalization, this situation changed, as both upper-class individuals and the state introduced new, Western sports that were associated with a ‘modern lifestyle’. New sports, such as basketball and baseball, were introduced by and incorporated into the curriculum of the newly formed national system of education, which aimed to create a new Revolutionary identity. This new education system was part of an ideology that “combined, in various patterns, a nostalgic concern with a real or imagined past with a futuristic or ‘progressive’ rejection of tradition” (Robertson 1992: 150), a worldwide program characteristic of many ‘modernizing’ nations in the late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early

20<sup>th</sup>-century, which was carried out with great zeal by Mexico's Revolutionary administrations. While the Mexican state government made the 'glory of the Aztec warrior' (and that of the Precolumbian past more broadly) into one of the formative principles of the newly created post-Revolutionary Mexican identity, the living traditions of the indigenous peoples of Mexico, such as pelota mixteca, were disregarded since they were non-modern and did not fit well into the new image that Mexico wanted to create for and of itself. Attempts to incorporate the indigenous segment of the nation's population into mainstream mestizo society through cultural programs and education rarely went beyond the level of paternalistic tokenism: "this produced a façade of ethnic tolerance, with the indigenous contribution to the Cosmic Race being relegated to the historic, folkloric and ceremonial. In this 'cosmic race', it was the Indian who was forced to do all the running, in a headlong dash towards assimilation" (Brewster 2005: 221; Brewster and Brewster 2009:740).

Both the introduction of foreign sports, which, unlike pelota mixteca, were actively stimulated through formal education, and the representation of indigenous traditions as at the same time anti-modern and cultural patrimony were largely responsible for the decline in the number of players of pelota mixteca. First of all, the advent of new sporting possibilities drew players who normally would have started playing the game away from it, simply because it created new options that were not available before. Second, a change in perspective took place, in which pelota mixteca became 'the old and traditional option' whereas other sports, in Oaxaca primarily basketball, represented 'the modern alternative'. This shift was endorsed by the Mexican state, which aspired to make Mexico into a modern state. This did not mean, however, that 'pre-modern' traditions, such as pelota mixteca, were prohibited as they had been during 16<sup>th</sup>-century globalization and the arrival of the Spaniards. This apparent tolerance might seem unexpected, but considering the aims of the Mexican Revolutionary government, we should not be surprised, since, as Nestor García Canclini (1993: viii, translated by Lydia Lozano) has noted "capitalist modernization ... does not always destroy traditional cultures as it moves forward; it can also appropriate them, restructure them, reorganize the meaning and function of their objects, beliefs, and practices." Roland Robertson (1992:152) puts it more succinctly when he says that "the museumization of the premodern is a major feature of (post)modernity." Therefore pelota mixteca - and with it the whole of indigenous traditional culture - was still appreciated by the Mexican authorities as a museumized cultural tradition that formed the pre-Columbian basis of a part of national cultural identity, it just was not welcome as a living and active sport. A third factor that played a role in the decline in the number of players, was the fact that pelota mixteca, which was a local, indigenous Mexican sport, lacked an 'aura of globalization'. Whereas the Western sports that were introduced were all played abroad and had their associated World Cups and World Leagues, the highest award that one could win with



pelota mixteca was becoming state champion of Oaxaca, and even this trophy was introduced relatively recently. This problem of a lack of a global aura was exacerbated during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, when mass media started broadcasting and publishing on the World Series and the NBA, as a result of which North-American sports stars, together with Mexican football players, became role-models for young boys wanting to achieve world fame. Many children in Oaxaca no longer dreamt of playing on the same *pasajuegos* as their fathers, they instead dreamt of playing for *El Tri* or the Chicago Bulls.

All these factors together led to a decrease in the number of players of pelota mixteca. Most likely this decrease was slow in the early years after the introduction of modern sports, but after the introduction of mass media in the second half of the twentieth century the process sped up. I have attempted to show that this decline was a direct outcome of Mexican state policies that were influenced by Western conceptions of modernity and late 19<sup>th</sup>-century/early 20<sup>th</sup>-century globalization. In the 1970s, when a new wave of globalization, occasioned by the widening scope of global mass media and the growing influence of neo-liberal policies, engulfed Mexico, Mexico's indigenist policies shifted away from an assimilationist approach that portrayed indigenous culture as backward and anti-modern, to a new approach that stressed local development and the strengthening of local cultural identity. While this did not directly occasion a growth in the number of pelota mixteca players, it did set in motion some important developments that heavily influenced the number of individuals playing pelota mixteca. First of all, the neo-liberal policies that were introduced opened up spaces for indigenous representation. This not only enabled indigenous individuals to self-identify as such, but also created a basis from which to organize into interest groups, such as the different associations and federations that represent players of pelota mixteca/indigenous games which have been fundamental in bringing the question of the disappearance of indigenous games to the political agenda. A second important development in the 1970s was that large-scale transnational migration had begun to skyrocket. As a result, new transnational (or transborder) communities formed that lived on two sides of the US-Mexico border. Members of this community gained a certain degree of independence, however slight, from the Mexican state, as they were able to form their own community organizations, that could create 'new ways of being indigenous' (see Kearney and Nagengast 1989, Stephen 2007, Fox and Rivera-Salgado 2003 for more background). As Cooper Alarcón has noted, "challenges to hegemony often require some degree of privileged agency" (1997: xiii), and, it seems to me, that it was due to the formation of these new transnational self-organizations that indigenous individuals and transborder communities gained a form of privileged agency, as compared to their earlier social situation. Still, the number of *peloteros* declined steadily from the 1970s onwards. It is only since a few years that a

potential turn-around has been in the air and, again, I feel that these developments can be explained through the framework of globalization.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the adoption by the COBAO of pelota mixteca as its official sport, we see, for the first time in a century, that the number of pelota mixteca players is starting to grow. Unique about this adoption of pelota mixteca into the COBAO curriculum, and in other recent actions taken by the Oaxacan state government and the Mexican national government, is that the Mexican state not only 'stimulates indigenous activities', but actually incorporates cultural elements that are considered indigenous into mainstream cultural practice and daily life. Naturally, this is the diametric opposite of the traditional, assimilationist practices of the INI that prevailed for many years. It is also markedly different from those 1970s policies that aimed to encourage the practice of indigenous traditions inside indigenous communities, confining these practices to their traditional cultural spaces and setting them apart from the mainstream. Perhaps in some ways (taking a rather pessimistic approach) we could consider this new phenomenon a sort of 'assimilation revisited', as it appropriates practices of indigenous peoples and 'deindigenizes' them to incorporate them into mainstream culture. However, in the case of pelota mixteca, the players themselves were the main actors who tried to stimulate the detraditionalization and incorporation into mainstream culture of their game. Therefore I would prefer to take a more optimistic view of these developments and stress the transformative potential that 21<sup>st</sup> century globalization might have for the position of the indigenous peoples of Mexico within mainstream society.

Part of this transformative potential flows from the 'return to roots' scenario that was sketched above. Under the influence of (cultural) globalization, there is a strong urge for nation-states to revise the way they construct national identities, as well as the content of these identities. According to Roland Robertson (1992: 182), "we happen to be in a period when the appeal to historical length, and depth, has become a major form of legitimizing a large variety of perspectives (as well as ideologies)." In a way this gives the native cultures of Mexico an advantage, since, simply put, their cultures are the oldest in Mexico. As Jonathan Friedman notes, there is a powerful development "toward the local, the national and the fundamentalist. [...] And there is a common basis to these different forms of identity, insofar as they all [...] seek after authenticity, roots, a concrete identity that is absolutely fixed with respect to the flux of modernity" (1994: 188). Whereas, during the 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-centuries, Mexican national identity was constructed using European models and Western building blocks, it is possible that this return to the local will stimulate the Mexican state to truly incorporate living indigenous culture, not only icons from the pre-Columbian past, into Mexican national identity. Transnational and migrant communities, and their self-organizations might play an important role in this development. It might be helpful here to

consider the case of the Chinese diaspora and overseas communities as a comparison for the influence that indigenous migrants from the United States might exert on Mexican national policies. Jonathan Inda and Renato Rosaldo, while discussing the work of Mayfeir Mei-hui Yang on Chinese migrants, mention that

“for China (or, more specifically, for the Chinese state), the fear of western cultural domination is of minor concern in comparison to the consternation over the subversive influence of overseas Chinese communities. [...] The importance of this Hong Kong and Taiwanese cultural invasion, according to Yang, is that it has exposed Shanghainese subjects to overseas Chinese culture and thus made it possible for them to construct new ways of being Chinese. [...] This is not to suggest, though, that the Chinese state has completely lost its subject-making capacity. This is hardly the case. But it is to suggest that it is no longer the sole arbiter of the identity of its subjects” (Inda and Rosaldo 2002: 23, see also Yang 2002 in I & R).

As I have suggested above, migrants and transnational communities seem to have a form of privileged agency of the kind that is also attributed to overseas Chinese communities by Yang and Inda and Rosaldo. As such, globalization, as a return to the roots, a longing for authenticity, or a search for the source might turn out to be a positive development for Mexico’s indigenous peoples, just as the decidedly global movement for the rights of indigenous peoples has led, among other things, to the creation of ILO’s convention 169 and the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Naturally, these possible positive consequences are only possible scenarios that have yet to prove themselves as concrete improvements. The adoption of pelota mixteca by the state alone can hardly function as proof that, thanks to globalization, there is a discrimination-free future in store for Mexico’s indigenous peoples. We should not, and cannot, close our eyes to all the negative impact that globalization has had on the lives of Mexico’s indigenous population, from the formation of *maquiladoras* on the US-Mexico border to the introduction of NAFTA.

Charles Hale has noted that “throughout Latin America, first round concessions of newly christened “multicultural” states cluster in the area of cultural rights, the further removed from the core concerns of neoliberal capitalism the better” (2004: 18). Of course, pelota mixteca is far from a core concern of neoliberal capitalism. Hale describes how in the last two Guatemalan administrations, the Ministry of Culture and Sports has become a post that has been filled by a Maya indigenous person. The Ministry of Education also showcases its multicultural ethos, supporting programs that promote bilingual education and intercultural dialogue. However, “the preposterous idea that an Indian would become Minister of Finance is another matter altogether” (Hale 2004: 18). Yet, if we see the advances that have been made in Mexico over the past 30 years, including the adoption of the Ley Indígena, admittedly a watered-down version of the San Andrés accords but still a document that grants indigenous peoples preferential access to their lands and the right for self-

government, controlled by the state, I feel that we should not be too pessimistic about the future possibilities. While globalization has definitely brought with it many problems, it might also entail the promise for a better future.

Even though I have stressed the structural importance of the onset of globalization, none of the positive developments that have taken place, or might take place in the future, were or will be possible without the agency of indigenous individuals and groups themselves. It is only because people like Agustín Hernández, Leobardo Pacheco, Fidel Salazar Rosales, the Arellanes brothers and many, many others have dedicated themselves to promoting pelota mixteca that the number of players is finally increasing again. While globalization might have made the COBAO as an institution more receptive to incorporating pelota mixteca in its curriculum, it is the effort that the players' associations put into having the game accepted, that teams of young Oaxacan students are now participating in traditional tournaments. In the end, it is thanks to the ability of pelota mixteca players to organize themselves that *pasajuegos* were built as far away as California and that pelota mixteca has been able to survive decades of discrimination in Oaxaca and in locations far removed from its original homeland.

## Final reflections

*“While social scientists have been busy debating whether or not indigenous ethnicities have moved from the local level to the regional level to the transnational level, indigenous intellectuals [...] have set out in practice their own definitions. Rather than labeling their efforts as either essentialist or constructionist, I suggest that we [...] let them speak for themselves” Lynn Stephen 2007: 307.*

While writing this work, the above quote has functioned as a guideline and inspiration to me. In the past chapters, I have attempted to follow Stephen’s example, not only trying to weave together personal narratives and global processes, but also attempting to let the people who taught me to understand *pelota mixteca* speak for themselves. Still, I was of course the person who chose what to quote and what not to quote from the conversations I had. I hope that those who are represented in my work can feel comfortable with the way they are portrayed and can agree with what I say about their game. In these final reflections, I touch on some general thoughts and ideas that I struggled with while writing, but could not find a home for in any of the chapters. Apart from giving more context to the ideas elaborated upon in the previous chapters, my hope is that some of them can function as a basis for future research.

### **On the possible positive effects of globalization**

About a week after finishing a first draft of the previous chapter, in which I suggest that globalization might entail the promise of a better future for Mexico’s indigenous population, 43 students of the *Escuela Normal Rural Raúl Isidro Burgos* of Ayotzinapa, Guerrero went missing. In the weeks following their disappearance, news spread that they had been murdered by members of a local drug cartel, after having been turned over to the cartel by the police, who took their orders directly from the mayor of Ayotzinapa and his wife. As the story unfolded, it became clear that the wife of the mayor was one of the leading figures in the Beltrán-Leyva Cartel and that most of the students who had disappeared came from indigenous communities around the country. I mention this tragedy here to reiterate that I do not think that globalization itself miraculously means an end to the discrimination and racism that has been deeply ingrained in Mexican society ever since the Spanish Colonial *casta* system was introduced. Global drug trafficking, and the associated global war on drugs, is the main cause of Mexico’s many current problems, including widespread violence, femicide, corruption and overall insecurity. However, the global support movement that arose after

'Ayotzinapa' was only made possible through global mass and social media. Twitter campaigns such as #Ayotzinapa and #43 aided in raising awareness worldwide of Mexico's deplorable safety situation and helped make what happened in Ayotzinapa a possible turning point in Mexican politics, both at home and abroad.

In a similar way, the global support that the Zapatista movement garnered in the 1990s, with many Western supporters visiting the *caracoles*, writing about them in mass media and promoting the Zapatista's demands, gave a significant impulse to the struggle in support of indigenous rights in Mexico and in the continent. The bestowal of the Nobel Prize to Rigoberta Menchú, a few years before the Zapatista uprising, also brought the world's attention to the growing movement for the rights of indigenous peoples. ILO Convention 169 and, much later, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples were created in global forums that promoted the rights of a global 'class' or group of indigenous communities. Globalization allowed indigenous individuals and communities to organize themselves along new lines, because "by eroding the constraints of space and time on patterns of social interaction, globalization creates the possibility of new modes of transnational social organization" (Held and McGrew 2000: 7). It is in this sense that we should think of globalization's positive potential: it facilitates new forms of organization and creates opportunities that, when seized by individuals and communities, might benefit Mexico's indigenous population.

### **On discrimination and culture**

Indigenous migrants in the US suffer from discrimination from the side of non-indigenous Mexican migrants. Young Mixtecs and Zapotecs that frequent primary schools and high schools in the United States are often hesitant to speak indigenous languages or to identify themselves as indigenous Mexicans, for fear of being bullied and called *Oaxaquitos* by other Latinos and Chicanos (Stephen 2007: 216). Naturally, the same goes for adult indigenous migrants who face implicit and explicit discrimination at the work place and in other social settings. As a result, indigenous migrants tend to hide their ability to speak indigenous languages and cultural performances and traditions are mostly carried out within closed social circles. Of course, indigenous individuals in Mexico have suffered years of the same kind of discrimination. Recently indigenous migrant organizations have started to encourage and organize indigenous cultural events, in an attempt to showcase the rich cultural diversity of Mexico's indigenous population. Lynn Stephen quotes from an interview with Valentín Sánchez, secretary of the *Organización de Comunidades Indígenas Migrantes Oaxaqueños* (OCIMO), "In OCIMO, we promote indigenous cultural events in order to decrease the discrimination toward indigenous people among Hispanics. We think that one of the reasons why discrimination exists is that many Hispanics don't know about the cultural wealth of the indigenous people of Oaxaca"

(Stephen 2007: 230). While they may not have phrased their actions in the same way as Valentín Sánchez, in the context of discrimination and migration, attempts by people like Agustín Hernández, the AMJJOP, the Federación Mexicana de Juegos y Deportes Autóctonos y Tradicionales, the Arellanes brothers and others all serve the same kind of purpose. They showcase pelota mixteca as an attractive sport, that has its own value as a sport and as a cultural phenomenon, to outsiders.

In the Los Angeles area, pelota mixteca is played on a pasajuego that is located inside Hansen Dam Park, a large recreational area that is frequented during weekends by many Latino and non-Latino Americans. Quite often, people who walk by the pasajuego stop to look at the games and show interest in knowing more about the name of the game, the rules and of which materials the ball and the gloves are made. Most, if not all, of those interested in the game are Latinos, and questions to the players are always addressed in Spanish, "*Como se llama este juego? Como se juega?*" Spectators are invariably impressed by the strength and agility of the players and by the weight of the ball and the glove. Without consciously attempting to do so, the players in the Hansen Dam Park act as ambassadors of the sport and do exactly what Valentín Sánchez envisions: they showcase indigenous Oaxacan culture to non-indigenous Latinos in an appealing way.

### **On the future of pelota mixteca de hule**

Both historically and at the moment, pelota mixteca de hule was the most popular variety of pelota mixteca. Whereas forro and esponja are only played in certain areas of the Mixteca region, hule is played all over the state of Oaxaca. In migrant communities in Mexico City and the United States of America the rubber ball game also has many more players than esponja and forro. Considering current developments in the game, however, we can question if hule will indeed remain the most-played variant of pelota mixteca. Two factors are relevant here. First of all, the gloves for pelota mixteca de hule are works of exceptional craftsmanship and are only made by Leobardo Pacheco senior. Because Leobardo, despite several attempts at training others, currently has no apprentices or successors, raising the question of what will happen when he stops creating and repairing gloves. Obviously, pelota mixteca de hule cannot be played in its current form without the use of this special equipment. Like playing the game, the manufacturing of gloves is a tradition that has been passed on from father to son since the equipment was first invented. However, since Leobardo Pacheco's son, Leobardo Daniel junior, works as a promising young archaeologist, it seems unlikely that he will follow in his father's footsteps. If Leobardo senior is not able to find anyone to replace him, a serious problem will arise for players of pelota mixteca de hule.

Another important factor that plays into this discussion is that students at the COBAO are taught to play pelota mixteca de esponja. Quite probably, most of the new players that will start

playing the sport in the coming decades will come from the COBAO. If the school indeed continues to name pelota mixteca the official sport of the institute and gives obligatory classes of physical education to all its students, the number of players will increase exponentially. All these players will play esponja and it is doubtful if they will consider switching to hule. I am sure that many of my pelota mixteca friends will disagree, and might possibly become angry at me for saying so, but I think it is very probable that fifty years from now, pelota mixteca de esponja will be the main variety of the game and it is possible that hule will only be played as a sort of exhibition sport, as it was before. Of course, I hope that I am wrong and that hule continues to be a widespread sport, but considering the developments sketched above, I fear that the players are in for yet another challenge.

### **On 'ethnoarchaeology'**

When discussing the work of Phillis Wheatley and Olaudah Equiano<sup>28</sup>, two eighteenth century writers born in Africa and brought as slaves to the United States, Paul Gilroy (1997: 323) says "we can, of course, identify elements in Wheatley's work which betray the residual presence of African animistic religion or sun worship. We can locate African words and accurate ethnological detail in Equiano's narrative. However, their works ask to be evaluated on their own terms as complex, compound formations. They should not be *belittled* so that they are valued only as means to observe the durability of African elements" (emphasis added). As I mentioned in the introduction to this work, virtually all academic publications that treat pelota mixteca are part of edited volumes on the pre-Columbian Mesoamerican ballgame. Many of these works devote their attention primarily to archaeological material related to the pre-Columbian game and include the modern-day games as a sort of afterthought. These articles often only describe the way the game is played and do not include a serious study into the historical development of these games. While these modern-day games are doubtlessly included in these publications with the best of intentions, the way that they are presented risks giving off the impression that these games have been frozen in time since 1519, have not developed or changed ever since and have little intrinsic value other than their pre-Columbian origins. The field of 'ethnoarchaeology', which studies contemporary cultures in order to come to a better understanding of the past, and its practitioners, to which I (hesitantly?) count myself as well, should constantly be reminded that they are at risk of doing exactly that which Paul Gilroy warns us against. Studying modern-day indigenous culture only for 'rests of the past', as happens sometimes in ethnoarchaeological works, belittles the resistance, creativity, and endurance

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<sup>28</sup> Phillis Wheatley (1753 – 1784) was a celebrated poet, Olaudah Equiano (1745 – 1797) was a writer and political activist for the abolition of slavery.



that characterize indigenous cultures, not only in Mesoamerica but worldwide, and amounts to a lack of recognition of living people(s) and their culture. These cultures are an amalgam of elements from different sources – as are all cultures – which coexist, rather than conflict. Studying historical processes of culture contact, culture change and questions of power and identity that are invariably attached to these issues is necessary to come to a full understanding of cultural elements and avoid presenting indigenous cultures as ‘a people without history’ (Wolf 1982). A failure to study these processes and a failure to accept the essentially hybrid nature of all cultures, ultimately results in erroneous interpretations of both contemporary and pre-Columbian practices. In the case of pelota mixteca an example of this type of approach is William Swezey’s (1972) work on the game, which draws all manner of unsubstantiated parallels between pelota mixteca and Olmec, Classic Maya and Classic Zapotec ball courts. All the elements that Swezey highlights can be explained by studying the historical background of the game, its European origin and the local inventions and developments that changed the game.

It is important to note here that a marked difference can exist between what are traditionally termed *emic* and *etic* perspectives on cultural elements. As I have attempted to show in the last chapters of this work, most people do not consider their own culture to be hybrid. Pelota mixteca is indeed seen by most players as a pre-Columbian ballgame that was played by Mixtec noblemen in the Classic ball court of Monte Albán. Still, from an *etic* perspective, pelota mixteca is of Spanish origin. What is important to keep in mind is that these two perspectives co-exist and that one is not necessarily ‘more correct’ than the other. Pelota mixteca might be ‘of Spanish origin’, this does not deny the fact that it is also ‘una práctica ancestral’, part of contemporary indigenous culture, and as such is also indigenous. Binary oppositions between the two present a view that is too simplistic to adequately express past, present and future realities. Naturally, players of pelota mixteca themselves understand that their game has changed over the years and many have no problem accepting that the game might be of Spanish origin in terms of form. It remains a game that they learned from their forefathers and which was played and formed by their ancestors. When discussing my ideas about the Spanish origin of the game with some players in Los Angeles, one of them said “well, I guess that makes sense. Since we count just as in tennis, which is a European game, the games probably had the same origin.” When I asked him about the history of the game, Bebé, a retired pelota mixteca player from Mexico City whom I only know by his nickname, told me, “Yeah, I think long ago it was played with the hips.” The outward appearance of the game may have changed, but a significant continuity still exists between pelota mixteca and the pre-Columbian Mesoamerican ballgame. This continuity can only be discerned, understood and explained when

taking into account all of the socio-historical processes that have affected Mexico over the course of the past 500 years.

Still, it seems that to some archaeologists this concept of historical (experiential) continuity in spite of apparent change is still unacceptable or, at the least, hard to grasp. When this thesis was still a work in progress, as a first-year graduate student, I was asked to do a presentation about the project to a peer-group. One of the supervisors of this peer-group discussion, a professor in the archaeology of prehistoric Europe, was of the opinion that it might be scientifically unethical to suggest that, while pelota mixteca is formally a Spanish game, it is, at the same time, in many senses a continuation of the pre-Columbian ballgame. While I do not recall exactly how he phrased his objections, they could be summarized as “the way the game is played is European, so it is clearly not indigenous. Saying that it is is a misconstruing of the facts and a political choice to call something indigenous when it is not.”

I find this line of argumentation problematic for several reasons. First of all, the cultural essentialism that is implicit in this reasoning constrains academics in their analyses of cultural complexes and loses sight of the cultural-historical processes that affect cultures worldwide and at all times. The ‘invention’ of tradition, the assimilation of new cultural elements and the relinquishing of old practices all happen (simultaneously) in all cultures. These processes are often conscious or imposed choices, related to political and social constellations and power structures that influence cultural flows. A second, related, objection is the fact that this type of reasoning closes its eyes to cross-cultural compatibility and similarity. In chapter 3, I quoted Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2009: 86), who asks “are cultural elements different merely because they originate from different cultures?” My answer to this question is decidedly “no”. To be sure, the outward appearance of the Mesoamerican ballgame has changed significantly, and no, I do not think that we can say that pelota mixteca is a game that was played at Monte Albán, but I *do* think that pelota mixteca is, in a significant way, the continuation of the Mesoamerican ballgame. Not just because I think that the game fulfills the same social roles as *ullamalitzli*, but also because it fulfills the same social roles as 16<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish pelota. The secular version of the Mesoamerican ballgame and *pelota a mano* were virtually the same cultural element, they simply originated from different cultures.

A final problem that I have with saying that it is unethical to suggest that pelota mixteca is an indigenous ballgame is that this type of reasoning severely hinders archaeological analysis. If one truly thinks that apparent discontinuity cannot mask continuity, archaeological theory is condemned to seeing all cultures as static and all cultural change as the result of ‘people change’. Of course, it is difficult, and oftentimes maybe even impossible, to understand these types of processes through

archaeological material, but one should at least keep an open mind to the different scenarios that social and cultural theory can provide.

### **Some minor notes on the pre-Columbian ballgame**

Because the 'archaeological section' of this work was dedicated to one simple question (Is pelota mixteca pre-Columbian?), many relevant questions and themes in relation to the pre-Columbian ballgame were left unexplored. For example, a thorough examination of the representation and importance of the ballgame in Mixtec and Aztec codices could shed more light on the socio-political role that the ballgame played in Late Postclassic Oaxaca and Central Mexico. A more detailed study of the murals of Tepantitla and their cultural context within Teotihuacan could further our understanding of why these murals were created in a city in which no formal I-shaped ball court has been found and no other ballgame imagery exists. A more in-depth look at the exact relationship between the sociopolitical and cosmological significance of the ballgame among the Classic Maya could greatly enhance our understanding of the different meanings that the ballgame had and the different ways in which ballcourts could have functioned (see for example Fox 1996; Moriarty and Foias 2007). While these larger questions are beyond the scope of this dissertation, I would like to elaborate on some points that are raised in chapter three.

I feel that the point that I made about Dainzú - that the presence of a ball in iconography does not necessarily imply that a reference to the Mesoamerican ballgame is being made - can be expanded to include other examples. Often, the presence of a ball, regardless of its size or the way it is held or used, is taken to identify a certain figure as a ballplayer or a certain scene as a ballgame scene. For instance, E. Michael Whittington (2001: 252), in his impressive edited volume that served as the catalogue of the *Sport of Life and Death*-exhibition, describes a Jaina statue of the New Orleans Museum of Art as, "stripped of all his trappings of rank, the aristocratic war captive depicted in this figurine has none of the elaborate gear or accessories usually seen on Maya ballplayers. [...] The only indication that he is about to play the ballgame is the small ball he holds in his right hand." However, the ball that this Classic Maya figurine is holding is much smaller than any ball that we see in other depictions of Classic Maya ballgames. It is clear that this 'ballplayer' is not about to play the same game as depicted in Classic Maya iconography, also because it seems unlikely that a ball of this size could be kept under control in the hip ballgame. Nonetheless, the description of the figure identifies him as a war captive that is about to be sacrificed, after having played a game of *ullamalitzli* or *pok-ta-pok*. Another example of this kind are the Xochipala-style figures which are illustrated in the same catalogue and which have also traditionally been identified as ballplayers. These figurines from Formative period (1200 – 900 BCE) Guerrero are identified as ballplayers

because of their attire, which includes a belt around the torso, a helmet and a characteristic type of glove. These implements are thought to have been used in a ballgame, either similar to the hip ballgame or one which used gloved hands to propel the ball. However, the only figure of this corpus to actually hold a ball does not wear any part of this diagnostic attire. In this case, the identification of these figurines as 'ballplayers' is not based on the presence of a ball, but on the assumption that this type of attire may have been used in a game. Rubber balls were not only used in Mesoamerica for the purpose of playing the ballgame, they were also burned during rituals or deposited in ritual offerings (see Filloy Nadal 2001). Hence, the fact that the annual tribute of the province of Tlaxcala to the Aztec empire included 16,000 rubber balls, as the Codex Mendoza shows, is not necessarily an indication of the popularity of the ballgame. It seems more probable to think of this tribute as balls that would be used in a ritual context.

Another complicating factor is the fact that in figurines, as well as in sculpted iconographic programs, it is almost impossible to distinguish of which kind of material balls are made. Stone spheres, for instance could have been used as weapons, and, even if rubber balls were depicted, size matters. Like I said in the case of Dainzú, I am not insisting that these figurines *cannot* represent ballplayers, I am only arguing that 1. the suggestion that they show participants in a (ritual) game needs to be substantiated by more evidence, 2. that the presence of a ball does not automatically imply a reference to the ballgame, and 3. if these figurines indeed represent ballplayers, it cannot be readily assumed that all meanings, practices and rituals associated with the hip ballgame were also part of traditions related to other games.

A similar point to the one made above concerns the use of the story of the Hero Twins from the *Popol Vuh* as a basis of interpretation for ballgame iconography throughout the whole of Mesoamerican history. In the introduction to the catalogue of the *Sport of Life and Death*-exhibition, Whittington (2001: 17-8) writes, "the *Popol Vuh* establishes the absolute preeminence of the ballgame in ancient Maya mythology and life, and provides the framework for much of our interpretation of this activity. [...] For the ancient Maya and other Mesoamerican cultures, this story of creation and the activities of the gods and humanity became inseparable from the ballgame." Clearly, even though the text of the *Popol Vuh* was written much more recently, for the Classic Maya the importance of the ballgame was intimately tied to the story of the Hero Twins (but see Tokovinine 2002).

However, it seems doubtful that this would also hold true for all other cultures in Mesoamerica. For the Aztecs, for instance, the *Popol Vuh* does not seem to be a reliable source for interpretation, since their ideas about the creation of the sun and the moon were completely different from those of the Maya. Similarly, the fact that sacrifice through decapitation is shown in

relation to the ballgame in multiple contexts (e.g. the ball court of Chichén Itzá and the stelae from El Aparicio, among other places) and that the Aztecs, according to Sahagún, performed human sacrifice inside the ball court, does not mean that sacrifice was an integral part of all or many, ballgame matches. 16<sup>th</sup>-century chroniclers who witnessed *ullamalitzli* being played stress that the game was forbidden because players ‘worship *el demonio*’ and that priests perform offerings in relation to the ballgame. If they would have witnessed human sacrifices in relation to the ballgame they would have no doubt mentioned these. It might well be that these human sacrifices were related more to the architectural context of the ball court, than to the actual playing of the ballgame. Sahagún, for example, mentions that several captives were sacrificed inside the *teotlachco* and *tezcatlachco* on the celebration of the festival of *panquetzalitzli* and on days dedicated to *omacatl* (Matos Moctezuma 2001: 89). He does not mention that these captives participated in a game or that a ballgame is part of this ritual. Nonetheless, the hip ballgame is always presented by tourist guides in Mexico as ‘the sport in which the winners/losers were sacrificed’. Scholars, likewise, often focus on the sacrificial aspect of the game (i.e. *The Sport of Life and Death*). However, considering even the extremely minimal discussion of this topic here, it seems that a critical reassessment of the relationship between sacrifice and the ballgame might be in order.

### **On 16<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century globalization and the future of pelota mixteca**

As I have tried to show in the second chapter of this work, a form of globalization, in this case sixteenth century European expansionism, was responsible for the creation of pelota mixteca itself. The prohibition in the Colonial era of the pre-Columbian ballgame and the subsequent introduction of traditional European handball games laid the basis for what is today pelota mixteca. Some parallels can be drawn between sixteenth century and twentieth century globalization, when considering how both affected local indigenous sports cultures and how the indigenous population reacted to the introduction of new foreign cultural elements in general. The introduction of Spanish pelota was forced upon Mexico’s indigenous population, because of the prohibition of the original games. However, as was the case with other cultural elements that were forcibly introduced by the Spaniards, the indigenous population managed to incorporate pelota playing into their own culture and truly make pelota mixteca into an indigenous, ancestral sport. Likewise, the early twentieth-century introduction of basketball by the Mexican government through the curriculum of rural schools aimed to fight the perceived “degeneracy of local fiestas” and to ‘modernize’ the habits of Mexico’s population (Brewster 2005, 2009). These attempts at modernization through the introduction of Western sports were inspired by globally established models, which emanated from the West, about what a modern state looked like and how its inhabitants behaved. However, rather

than changing local indigenous culture, basketball was incorporated fully into traditional indigenous village life and became an integral part of the local fiestas, just like had happened with the introduction of the Spanish ballgame. As I showed through an anecdote in the last chapter, in some communities in Oaxaca basketball has become such a standard part of traditional culture that it is now seen as old-fashioned and too traditional for modern young people to play.

These parallels between sixteenth and twentieth/twenty first-century globalization also extend to the realm of international migration and the way that migrants have carried these traditions with them. In an overview of the history of the Basque handball games in the Americas, Carmelo Urza (1995: 1) describes how, from the sixteenth century onwards, Basque immigrants introduced pelota playing in their new homelands, “wherever they went, they took their customs and traditions with them, as well as their religion and beloved pelota. There, they tended to confront the unpredictability of a strange land by banding together to conduct business and to share the language, foods and festivals of their native land. Basque pelota was one of these cultural icons which served both as a form of recreation and as a cultural sacrament.” In this quote, we could easily replace the word Basque with the word Mixtec, in order to describe the way in which pelota mixteca players have taken the game with them to places to which they have migrated, ranging from Puebla and Mexico City to Fresno and Dallas.

As I have shown in chapter 5, the *pasajuego de la Balbuena* was one of the main focal points of Mixtec migrant culture in Mexico’s capital city. It was here that migrants from Oaxaca came together to ‘share the language, foods and festivals of their native land’ and to meet old and new friends. In California *pasajuegos*, and especially the international tournaments, serve the same function. Basketball, the most popular sport in many parts of Oaxaca, also has a similar role to play for an even larger part of the migrant community. To many indigenous migrants, “basketball is the one familiar thing in the strange land. When Felipe López arrived from his village of San Lucas Quiavini in 1978, he made straight for the courts of Venice Beach, where young men from San Lucas played. There, his Spanish being poor, he could speak Zapoteco in comfort. There, over time, he heard about work, saw old friends, and met new ones” (Quiñones 2001: 121).

Clearly, the social and cultural processes that I have tried to describe and understand in this work are not particular to pelota mixteca or to indigenous Mexican migrants alone. They are characteristic responses to cultural and economic globalization of communities and nations worldwide. Again, Basque pelota offers an illustrative parallel, as a lengthy quote from a study of pelota vasca in a migrant context shows:

“The ebb and flow of Basque Pelota in its classical forms in the Americas is inexorably linked to Basque immigration. A wave of immigration was inevitably followed by a boom in the construction of frontons and of pelota related activity. As the immigrant generation dies off, pelota dies off with them or is adopted and modified by the local population [...] The forces of acculturation have pushed second and third generation Basque- Americans into American-based sports such as baseball, soccer, football, basketball and tennis, [because] each generation is motivated to compete in the sport of the culture dominant at the time and place of one's youth and of one's friends. For the immigrant from the small village it was pelota, but the athletically-talented Basque-American high schoolers will more likely be driven to compete for the pitcher's position than against a dwindling pool of aging pelota players. [...] Any possible revitalization of classical Basque pelota in the Americas will almost certainly not happen spontaneously. Rather, if it is to occur, it will be through the efforts of organizations such as the euskal etxeak, the numerous pelota federations and the Basque government. Communication between these institutions is greater than ever and they have made a serious effort to promote the game, particularly among the young. [...] Many Basque-Americans continue to learn their ancient language for largely symbolic reasons. It constitutes and reflects an integral part of their identity. They are motivated by an urgency to grasp the archetypal symbols of their ancestors [...] only through their conservation and actualization it is possible to share a common thread with other Basques today and to maintain a link with one's ancestors. Pelota is also a product of culture and so it may be that pelota will be embraced by those who value and are dedicated to the maintenance of tradition, as has already taken place with dance and other cultural icons. Pelota underscores the uniqueness of our ancestors, and ourselves.” (Urza 1995: 12-14)

So, if these processes are indeed similar around the globe, what can we learn from this specific case study of pelota mixteca? I feel that what makes pelota mixteca unique is the way in which it has historically been promoted by the state as a cultural tradition and the players' reactions to this type of promotion. Basque pelota has always been seen as the traditional 'national' sport of the Basque population. As Urza describes, there has been intensive cooperation between Basque cultural migrant organizations, pelota federations and the Basque government to promote the game among youngsters. In contrast, the Mexican state showcased pelota mixteca as a cultural tradition. This difference in treatment undoubtedly stems to a large extent from the fact that Basques have had their own forms of political representation, whereas Mixtecs and other indigenous peoples were part of the nation-building project of the Mexican Revolutionary government, but were not

represented adequately in the political arena. As repeatedly stressed in the later chapters of this work, this led to a situation in which pre-Columbian indigenous cultures were revered and incorporated into the national image of post-revolutionary Mexico, but contemporary indigenous traditions were expected to disappear as indigenous communities were culturally assimilated into a modern mestizo Mexico.

While, officially, the Mexican government undertook initiatives to promote the practice of indigenous games, these never achieved a genuine popularization of indigenous games. Only when players started taking matters into their own hands, both individually and through organizations such as the Federación Mexicana de Juegos y Deportes Autóctonos y Tradicionales and the Asociación Mexicana de Jugadores de Juegos de Origen Prehispánico, did pelota mixteca truly start to be seen as a sport, rather than a cultural tradition, and did it begin to be incorporated into mainstream Mexican culture through the education system. While the players of pelota mixteca all appreciate the cultural value of the sport and its importance as an ancestral tradition, many of them argue for its modernization and professionalization, thereby taking pelota mixteca out of the traditional sphere of indigenous communities' village festivals. They also open up the sport to non-traditional players of the sport. This forms a marked contrast to the way that Basque pelota is promoted. As Urza mentions in the Basque case, "it may be that pelota will be embraced by those who value and are dedicated to the maintenance of tradition, as has already taken place with dance and other cultural icons." Here, preservation of the game is explicitly aimed at those who would traditionally play pelota vasca and the sport is treated as a cultural icon. It is exactly this tension between traditionalism and professionalization that the players of pelota mixteca, the organizations that they have formed themselves and the government institutions that concern themselves with Mexico's indigenous sports will have to attempt to assuage. The example below serves to illustrate this point.

In 2014 students of the Colegio de Bachilleratos de Oaxaca participated for the first time in the famous pelota mixteca tournament of Bajos de Chila. Several quintas represented the school in the largest tournament that exists. This event marked the first time that quintas, consisting of individuals who had not grown up with pelota mixteca and had learned the game at school rather than from family members, participated in an official tournament. The tournament started off with a speech by one of the organizers. According to one of the participants in the tournament, the speech concentrated on the importance of the games' historical and ancestral legacy, lasted for "thirty hours" and left the students with a profound lack of motivation to compete in the tournament. In the promotion to youngsters who did not grow up with the game, the ancestral and historical aspects of the game seemed to be of minor importance. Of course, in the future pelota mixteca will



still be an indigenous game and will still have its value as national cultural heritage, but it will also have to become a 'regular' sport in order to survive. If the focus lies too much on the label of the ancestral sport, it seems that the number of players will never increase significantly. On the other hand, if the game is promoted as 'just another sport' and the history of the game is forgotten, it will lose exactly that aspect which makes it unique. Eduardo Arellanes describes the challenges and possibilities ahead:

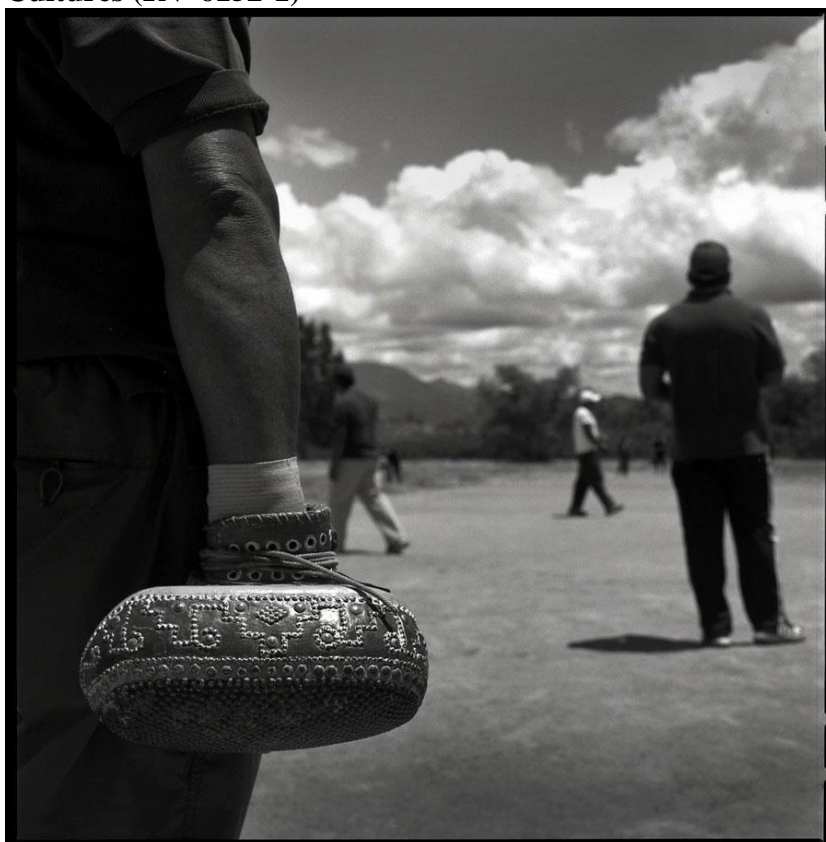
Un deporte no puede perder sus raíces, los va tener. Pero que tenga un desarrollo, una visión de crecimiento. La puede jugar alguien de Michoacán, alguien de Chihuahua, pero el origen sigue siendo lo mismo. [...] Es que no tiene que perder el valor que tiene, las raíces que tiene, pero sí debemos pensar qué es lo que queremos para el futuro con esto. Porque en el futuro la práctica definitivamente, así como vamos, va a perderse. [...] Cómo lo metimos ya no tanto como un acto cultural de una cultura, sino como un deporte que se puede proyectar? [...] Que va perder algo, por supuesto. Exactamente que, no lo sé. Pero va a ganar algo también.

As van Bottenburg (1994: 266) shows in his study of the varying popularity of modern sports worldwide, the most successful (i.e. most played) sports around the world are exactly those that were incorporated into the physical education curricula of national school systems, so it seems that the players of pelota mixteca are headed in the right direction. In the end, only time will tell how pelota mixteca develops and if it indeed becomes a sport that is played throughout Mexico.

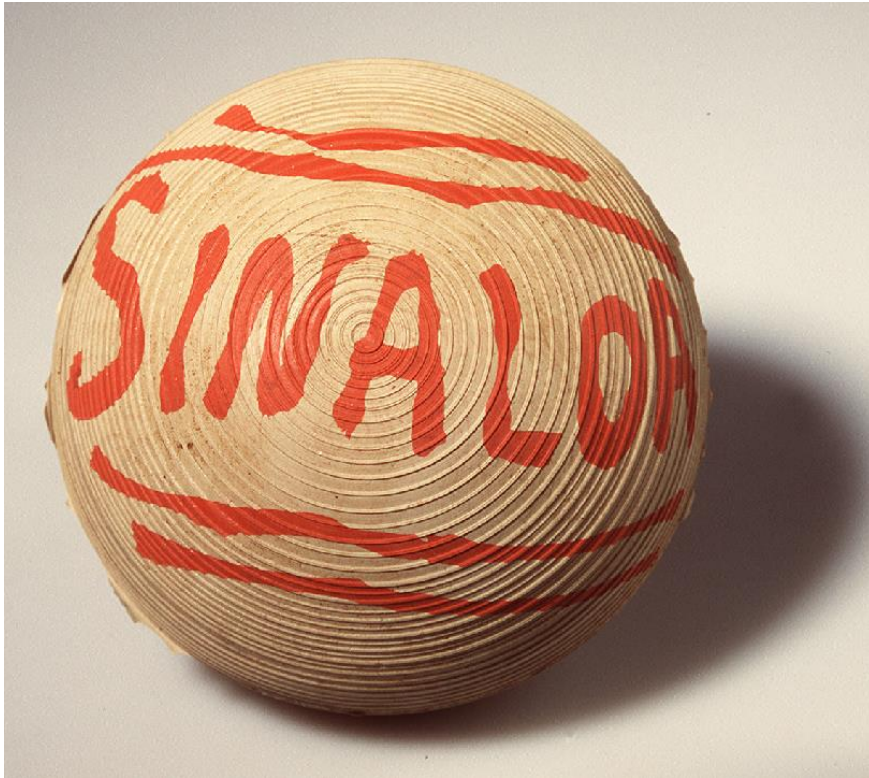
## Figures



**Fig. 1 – Glove for pelota mixteca de hule, Collection of National Museum of World Cultures (RV-6152-1)**



**Fig. 2 – Glove for pelota mixteca de hule as it is worn. Photograph copyright of Leopoldo Peña, used with permission**



**Fig. 3 – Ball used for pelota mixteca de hule, Collection of National Museum of World Cultures (RV-5635-1). The ball bears the name Sinaloa, because it was made for ‘Fiesta Cultural de Sinaloa’.**



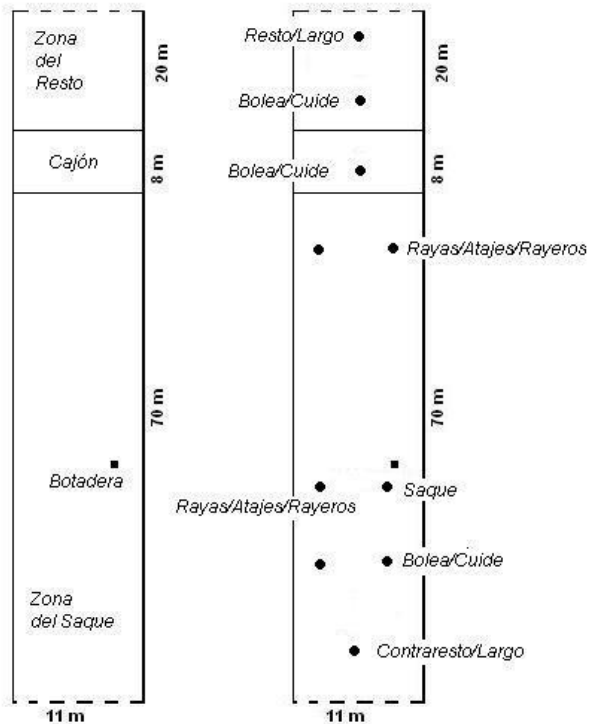
**Fig. 4 – A player of pelota mixteca de forro. Photograph by Samuel Padilla ([http://www.culturaspopulareseindigenas.gob.mx/cp/images/stories/juegos/mixteca\\_forro.jpg](http://www.culturaspopulareseindigenas.gob.mx/cp/images/stories/juegos/mixteca_forro.jpg))**



**Fig. 5 – A player of pelota mixteca de esponja. Photograph by Samuel Padilla ([http://www.culturaspopulareseindigenas.gob.mx/cp/images/stories/juegos/pelota\\_mixteca2.jpg](http://www.culturaspopulareseindigenas.gob.mx/cp/images/stories/juegos/pelota_mixteca2.jpg))**



**Fig. 6 – The *pasajuego del Tecnológico* in the city of Oaxaca. Photograph by the author**



**Fig. 7 – Outline of a pelota mixteca court or *pasajuego*, and the positions of the players**



**Fig. 8 – A *chacero*, referee, at a pelota mixteca match in Oaxaca. Photograph by the author**



**Fig. 9 – A game of pelota mixteca at the *pasajuego* in Hansen Dam Recreation Center and Park. In the background, people are taking a stroll on the dam, probably oblivious of the game that is being played. Photograph copyright of Leopoldo Peña, used with permission**



**Fig. 10 – A banner made for the Torneo Internacional de Pelota Mixteca in 2012.**



**Fig. 11 – A poster announcing a pelota mixteca tournament in Nochtixtlán in 2011**



**Fig. 12 – Daniel Pacheco (third from left) in a line-up before a game of pelota mixteca in Ejutla in 1939. Photograph from Montiel (1987)**



**Fig. 13 - Leobardo Pacheco showing the first rudimentary glove made by his grandfather**



**Fig. 14 – A pelota mixteca de hule glove from 1915, made by Daniel Pacheco**





**Fig. 15 - Leobardo Pacheco showing an overview of the evolution of gloves since 1910**



**Fig. 16 - Some examples of decorations on a Pelota Mixteca de Hule glove. The glove on the right shows the characteristic 'greca prehispanicas' in white and blue.**



**Fig. 17 – Hule balls made in Mexico City with non-traditional designs (see <https://www.facebook.com/david.victoriacastellanos/photos> for more examples)**



**Fig. 18 – Ball with a decoration of Mickey Mouse. Photograph copyright of Leopoldo Peña, used with permission**



Fig. 19 – A custom-designed glove, with an artistic depiction of the ‘flechador del Sol’

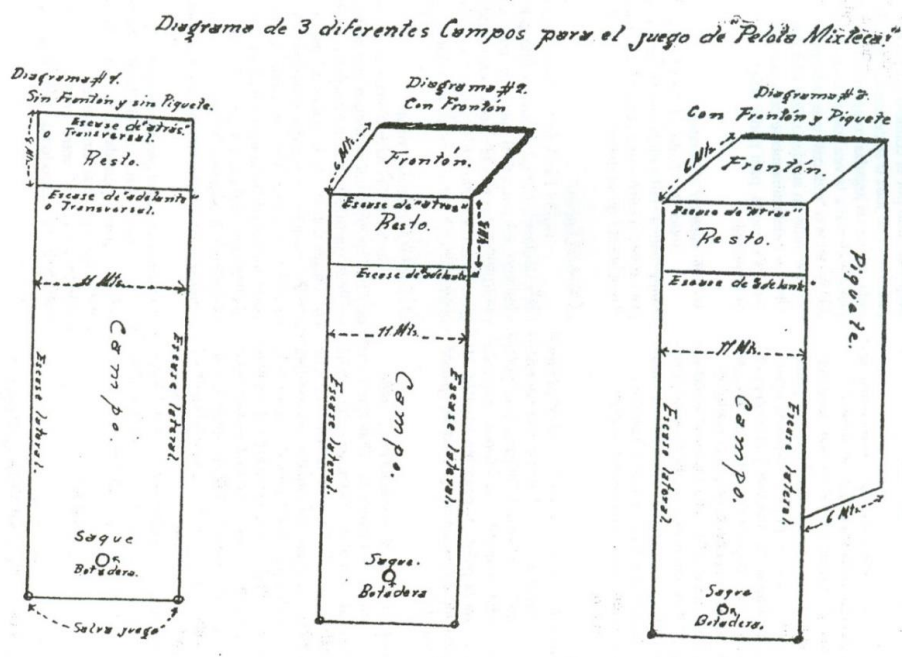


Fig. 20 – Image from Bolaños Cacho (1947) showing three different types of courts. The courts with walls are no longer in use and have disappeared.

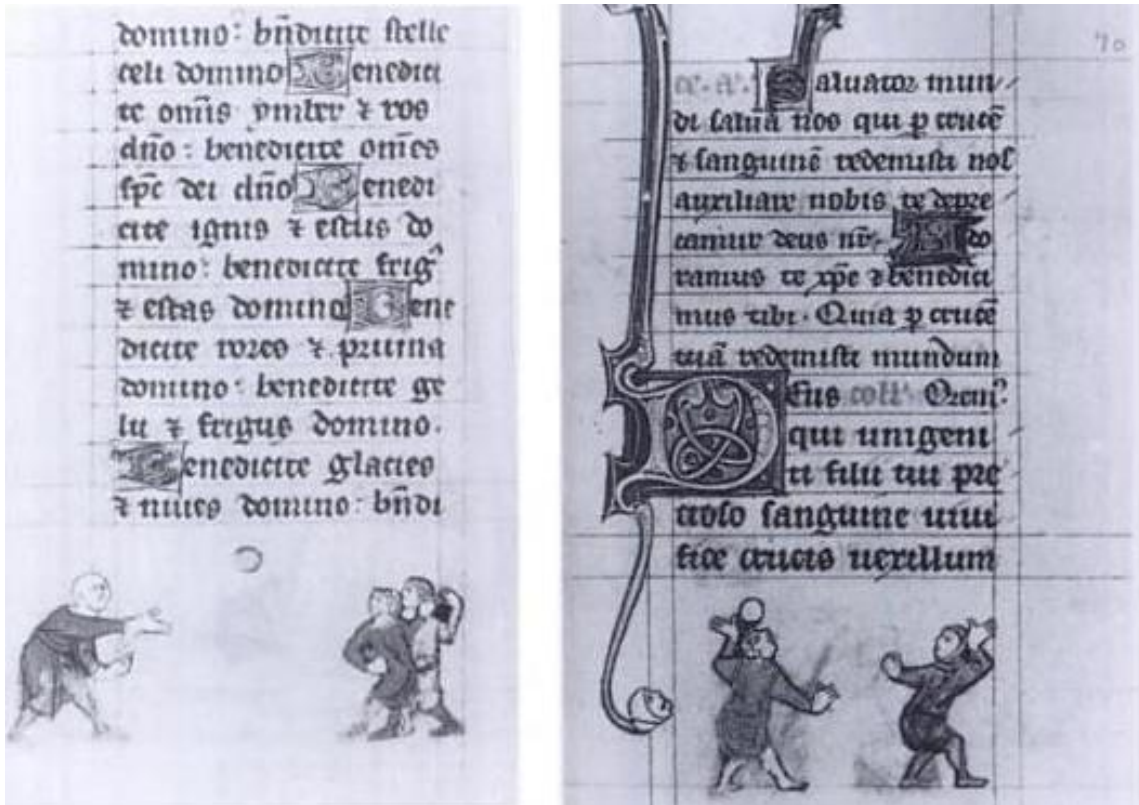


Fig. 21 - Depiction from a Franco-Flemish book of hours from around 1300 showing the *jeu de paume*. From Gillmeister (1997: fig. 10).

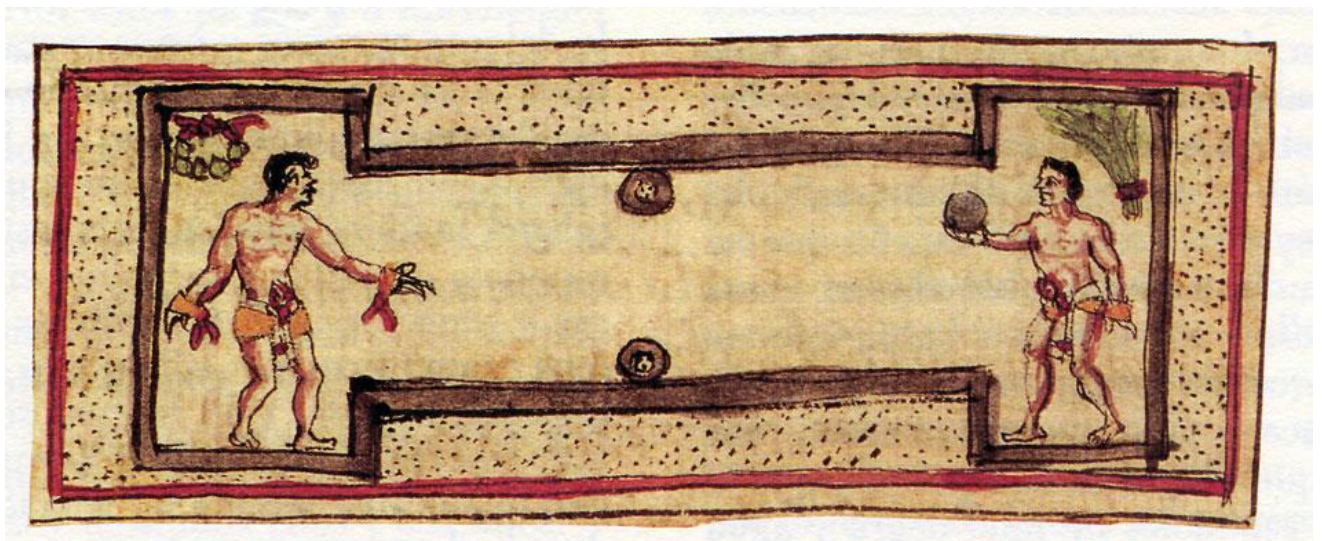


Fig. 22 – Diego Durán's illustration of the Mesoamerican ballgame. From [http://www.mexicolore.co.uk/images-6/621\\_11\\_2.jpg](http://www.mexicolore.co.uk/images-6/621_11_2.jpg)



**Fig. 23 –The use of a ball court in the depiction of a toponym, Codex Nuttall/Tonindeye 80r.**



**Fig. 24 - Lord 8 Deer and Lord 4 Jaguar meeting in a ball court, Codex Nuttall/Tonindeye 80r.**



**Fig. 25 - An overview of the Complex A of Dainzú. In front, under the roof, are the slabs, in the back Cerro Dainzú. Photo by the author.**



**Fig. 26 – A typical Dainzú “ball player”. Taken from Bernal and Seuffert (1979: fig. 30)**



**Fig. 27 – A Dainzú figure falling backwards. Taken from Bernal and Seuffert (1979: fig. 3)**



**Fig. 28 – A Dainzú figure kneeling, another standard posture among the figures. Taken from Bernal and Seuffert (1979:fig. 12)**



**Fig. 29 - Stone 1 of Complex A. Taken from Bernal and Seuffert (1979: fig. 2)**



**Fig. 30 - Stone 5 (or 'wall of sacrifice') from Cerro Dainzú. Taken from Bernal and Seuffert (1979:fig. 45).**

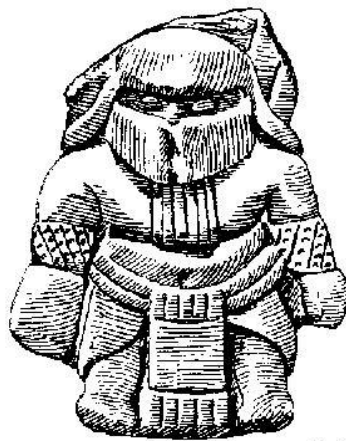




Fig. 31 - Monument 27 of El Baúl. Taken from [http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/sumer\\_anunnaki/godsnewmillemmium/images/el\\_bau\\_l.jpg](http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/sumer_anunnaki/godsnewmillemmium/images/el_bau_l.jpg)



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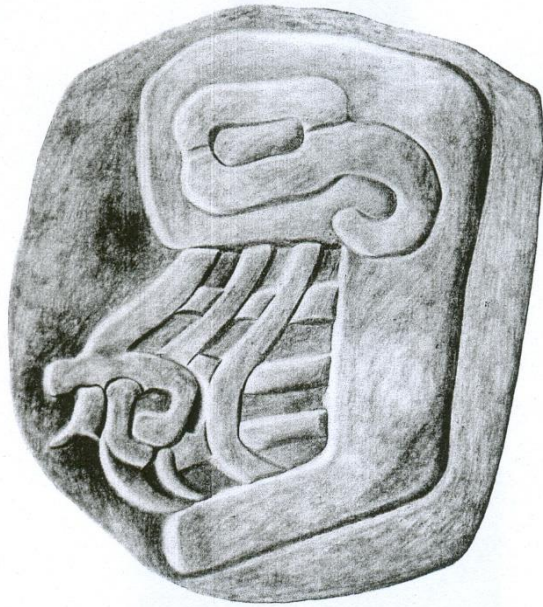
Fig. 32 – Some examples of ceramic figurines from Lubaantún. From Joyce (1933: fig. 19,20)



**Fig. 33 – Classic Maya Vase.** Taken from the Kerr MayaVase database, [http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya\\_hires.php?vase=500](http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya_hires.php?vase=500)



**Fig. 34 – Early Classic Maya Vase**



**Fig. 35 – The only depiction of a helmet similar to those from Dainzú found at Monte Alban. Taken from Bernal and Seuffert (1979:fig. 51).**



**Fig. 36 - A figure with a 'jaguar-helmet' kneeling or falling forward. Taken from Bernal and Seuffert (1979:fig. 27).**



**Fig. 37 - D-86 from Complex B, Dainzú. Taken from Bernal and Oliveros (1988: foto 6)**



**Fig. 38 – Employees of the Mexican consulate in Fresno visit the International Tournament in 2012. A line forms when they hand out educational material.**



**Fig. 39 – A pelota mixteca demonstration organized on Mexico City's Zócalo**



**Fig. 40 – The pasaje de Balbuena in 2008**



**Fig. 41 – The former site of the pasaje de Balbuena, during construction work in 2011**

**¿ SABIAS QUE ?  
LOS MIXTECAS CONTABAN  
CON UN JUEGO PARECIDO  
AL TENIS.**



**¿ SABIAS QUE ?  
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CON UN JUEGO PARECIDO  
AL TENIS.**



**A**NTES DE QUE LLEGARAN LOS ESPAÑOLES A OAXACA YA LOS MIXTECAS CONTABAN CON UN JUEGO PARECIDO AL TENIS.

El juego de Pelota Mixteca es un deporte oaxaqueño que por cientos de años tanto los mixtecas como los zapotecas ya practicaban antes de la conquista de América por los españoles.

Entre otros lugares en los que se practicó este juego podemos citar a Monte Alban, en donde los jugadores encestaban la pelota en una claraboya y los ganadores recibían como premio el corazón de una doncella. A la llegada de los españoles, este singular juego fue prohibido, obligando con esto a que los zapotecas y mixtecas lo jugaran clandestinamente. Para jugar pelota mixteca se utiliza un guante hecho de piel y clavos que pesa entre 8 y 10 libras, con el que se golpea la pelota; fabricada de plástico duro (de hule, de forro y de esponja), con un peso de entre dos y tres libras. Con el tiempo tanto la pelota como el guante han cambiado; antiguamente eran de menor tamaño de las que se utilizan ahora. Cabe mencionar que, el único lugar en donde se elaboran los guantes para este juego es Oaxaca y ya quedan pocos fabricantes.

El Saquero (pitcher) se coloca a 35 metros de donde se ubica el resto de golpeadores (bateadores), quien le pega a la pelota de esquina a esquina.

Existe también un árbitro que supervisa y con un carrizo de unos tres metros de largo marca los puntos, dibujándolos en la tierra suelta, que indican el terreno de uno y de otro equipo. El pasaje, patio de juego, es el nombre que recibe la cancha; lugar donde se realizan las competencias que pueden ser de uno a uno, de dos a dos, de tres a tres. Este pasaje (cancha) debe estar protegido con malla para evitar que la pelota salga del terreno de juego y pegue a alguna persona.

Una tercia se compone de cinco jugadores (cuando se trata de conjuntos deportivos o de distintos pueblos), y existe la primera tercia, mejores jugadores, y segunda tercia.

Para ganar en un encuentro, un equipo tiene que ganar 12 puntos. Es indefinido el tiempo de duración de cada juego, como sucede en el béisbol. En algunas ocasiones la duración del juego puede ser hasta de cinco horas, sin el permiso de cambiar de jugadores a menos que alguno se encuentre severamente agotado.



El juego de pelota mixteca es una tradición que aún se mantiene viva entre los oaxaqueños que viven tanto en el estado como fuera de él. Se practica por ejemplo en México, D.F., Puebla, Orizaba, Cuernavaca y Fresno en el estado de California en el vecino país del norte.

Comentario: Es importante que nuestros jóvenes practiquen este tipo de deportes que además de mantenerlos sanos física y mentalmente, forman parte importante de nuestra cultura, la cual no debemos de permitir que desaparezca.

**EL JUEGO DE  
PELOTA  
MIXTECO ERA  
PARECIDO AL  
TENIS.**

Secretaría de Turismo del Gobierno del Estado de Oaxaca  
Av. Juárez No.703 Col Centro C.P. 68000  
Tel. 01951-9021200  
[www.oaxaca.travel](http://www.oaxaca.travel)  
[info@oaxaca.travel](mailto:info@oaxaca.travel)

**Fig. 42 – The pamphlet *Sabías que los Mixtecas contaban con un juego parecido al tenis?***



**Fig. 43 – A shirt created by the Arellanes quinta**



**Fig. 44 – The logo created for the Arellanes quinta, that is now more widely used in the promotion of pelota mixteca.**



**Fig. 45 – The line that formed in Verona when spectators were invited to try their hand at pelota mixteca**



**Fig. 46 – The line-up before the international match Italy – Mexico, that was played following the rules of *pantalera***





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# Samenvatting

## Van Ollamalitzli naar Pelota Mixteca en Verder - De rol van globalisering in de historische ontwikkeling van een inheems Mexicaans balspel

Pelota mixteca is een balspel dat ontstaan is in de Mexicaanse deelstaat Oaxaca. Heden ten dage wordt, vanwege de grootschalige arbeidsmigratie die zowel binnen Mexico als van Mexico naar de VS heeft plaatsgehad, dit balspel niet alleen meer in Oaxaca gespeeld, maar ook in Mexico-Stad en verschillende delen van de Verenigde Staten, met name de deelstaten California en Texas. Binnen de archeologische gemeenschap is er lang discussie geweest over de origine van het spel. Sommige onderzoekers zien het spel als een lokale variant van het welbekende prekoloniale Mesoamerikaanse heupbalspel, anderen rekenen pelota mixteca tot een familie Europese balspelen die ontstaan is in de vroege Middeleeuwen in noordwest Europa.

Deze dissertatie tracht een aantal vragen te beantwoorden die betrekking hebben op de origine van het spel, de historische ontwikkeling en de invloed die verschillende vormen van globalisering hebben gehad op de ontwikkeling van het spel. Het eerste deel beschrijft de manier waarop het spel gespeeld wordt, gevolgd door een vergelijking tussen pelota mixteca en handbalspelen van Europese origine. Vervolgens wordt in meer detail gekeken naar de balspelen die in Mesoamerika gespeeld werden voor de Spaanse verovering en kolonisatie. Dit deel van het onderzoek heeft als primair doel vast te stellen of er een met pelota mixteca vergelijkbaar handbalspel gespeeld werd in prekoloniaal Mesoamerika. Het tweede deel van het document richt zich op de historische ontwikkeling van pelota mixteca na de Spaanse invasie, de invloed die de zogenaamde *indigenista* politiek van de Mexicaanse overheid op de ontwikkeling van het spel heeft gehad en de manier waarop deze politiek, en dus ook het spel, op zijn beurt beïnvloedt is door twintigste- en eenentwintigste-eeuwse globaliseringsprocessen. Om deze ontwikkelingen te kunnen duiden wordt gebruikt gemaakt van ideeën ontwikkeld in discussies omtrent globalisering en cultuur/culturele identiteit.

Pelota mixteca is een handbalspel dat gespeeld wordt op een veld van ca. 100 bij 11 meter. De puntentelling volgt hetzelfde stramien als die van tennis, 15-30-40-*juego*. Het spel kent drie varianten: pelota mixteca de hule, pelota mixteca de forro en pelota mixteca de esponja, dat ook wel pelota mixteca del valle wordt genoemd. De varianten onderscheiden zich van elkaar door de uitrusting die gebruikt wordt en door het materiaal waarvan de bal is gemaakt. In *hule* wordt een rubberbal gebruikt en wordt de bal met een van leer en spijkers gemaakte handschoen geslagen. Voor *forro* wordt een bal van leer en textiel gebruikt en wordt de hand slechts met katoenen banden

omwonden, ter bescherming. Bij *esponja* wordt de bal, een industrieel vervaardigd type tennisbal, geslagen met een houten plank die aan de hand wordt vastgemaakt met behulp van leren banden. De ballen voor *hule* en *forro* worden niet industrieel vervaardigd maar gemaakt door gespecialiseerde ambachtslieden. In het geval van *forro* zijn er meerdere specialisten die dit type ballen kunnen vervaardigen, de meerderheid hiervan woont in de Mixteca regio in de staat Oaxaca.

Er zijn slechts enkele mensen die de ballen voor *hule* kunnen fabriceren. Voor de handschoenen geldt dat er zelfs maar één familie is die de kennis heeft om deze te maken. Zowel de handschoenen als de ballen voor *hule* zijn een uitvinding van de familie Pacheco. De grondlegger van deze traditie was Daniel Pacheco, een slager uit Ejutla de Crespo in de zuidelijke Sierra van de staat Oaxaca. Daniel Pacheco was een enthousiast speler van *pelota a mano fría*, de voorloper van *pelota mixteca*. Toen hij in 1911 een snee in zijn hand opliep net voor een belangrijke wedstrijd, besloot hij een stuk leer van zijn zadel af te snijden en hiervan een 'handbeschermer' te maken. Deze bescherming zorgde ervoor dat hij de bal harder en verder kon slaan en hij begon te experimenteren met grotere en meer complexe handschoenen. Aangezien ook Pacheco's tegenstanders merkten dat hij een voordeel had, begon hij ook handschoenen voor andere spelers te maken. Door de jaren heen bleven deze handschoenen groeien in complexiteit – van één laag leer, naar meer dan 30 lagen leer, verstrekt met ijzeren spijkers – en gewicht – van 150 gram tot 5,2 kilogram. Omdat met deze zwaardere handschoenen de bal harder kon worden geslagen nam ook de bal in omvang en grootte toe. De rubberbal die aan het begin van de twintigste eeuw voor *pelota a mano fría* werd gebruikt woog ca. 100 gram, tegenwoordig weegt een bal 920 gram. De handschoenen voor *hule* worden nog steeds volgens familietraditie gemaakt, eerst door Agustín Pacheco, de zoon van Daniel, en tegenwoordig door Leobardo Pacheco, Daniel's kleinzoon. Het ontstaan van de handschoenen had een onbedoeld neveneffect: de kosten van de uitrusting gingen significant omhoog. Voor een handschoen werd in 2011 rond de 350 dollar betaald, een groot bedrag in een land waar het gemiddelde maandinkomen rond de 500 Amerikaanse dollar ligt. Omdat sommige spelers weigerden, of niet in staat waren, dit soort bedragen te betalen, ontstond in het midden van de 20<sup>e</sup> eeuw *pelota mixteca de esponja*. Ballen voor deze variant konden simpelweg in de winkel worden gekocht en de houten borden die worden gebruikt om de bal te slaan zijn relatief eenvoudig thuis te maken.

Over het algemeen wordt *pelota mixteca* in Mexico gezien als een 'deporte precolombino', een precolumbiaanse sport. *Pelota mixteca* wordt beschouwd als een variant op het bekende prekoloniale Mesoamerikaanse heupbalspel en spelers noemen regelmatig archeologische sites als Monte Albán als één van de plaatsen waar het spel gespeeld werd. Ook binnen de archeologische

literatuur wordt pelota mixteca traditioneel als een sport van prekoloniale oorsprong beschreven. Een vergelijking met handbalspelen die in de Middeleeuwen in Europa zijn ontstaan toont echter aan dat pelota mixteca, op het gebied van regels en speelwijze, van Europese origine is. Drie basisargumenten ondersteunen deze stelling: de overeenkomsten in puntentelling tussen pelota mixteca en de Europese spelen, het feit dat deze spelen al in Europa werden gespeeld vóór 1492 en het ontbreken van afbeeldingen van of verwijzingen naar pelota mixteca in prekoloniale en vroegkoloniale bronnen.

Ten eerste, de overeenkomst in puntentelling. De puntentelling van pelota mixteca, 15-30-40-*juego* (spel/*game*) zal elke tennisliefhebber bekend voorkomen. Er is echter één toevoeging aan deze puntentelling die niet overeenkomt met het huidige tennis: de zogenaamde *raya*-regel. Deze regel bestaat eruit dat een team ook een punt kan scoren door een *raya* ('lijn/streep') te winnen. Deze *raya* is een lijn die over het speelveld wordt getrokken, op de plaats waar de bal voor een tweede keer binnen de lijnen stuitert of op de plaats waar de bal de 'uitlijn' kruist, nadat hij één keer de grond heeft geraakt. Op het moment dat er twee *rayas* zijn gemaakt, of op het moment dat één van de teams 40 punten heeft en er één *raya* is, wisselen de teams van kant. Het team dat de opslag verzorgde wordt het 'ontvangende' team en vice versa. Hoewel deze regel in het huidige tennis niet meer voorkomt, wordt hij nog wel gebruikt in sporten die uit dezelfde Europese familie van balspelen stammen, zoals pilota valenciana in Spanje, kaatsen in Nederland en pantalera in Italië.

Deze familie van sporten ontstond in de vroege Middeleeuwen in kloosters in noordwest Europa en verspreidde zich van daaruit door het hele continent. Deze vorm van handbal werd, in vele verschillende varianten, de populairste sport bij zowel de adel als 'de gewone man'. Ondanks de verscheidenheid in varianten die er binnen deze familie bestaat, zijn er drie basisovereenkomsten die voor al deze sporten en spelen gelden: 1. Vier winnende slagen winnen één spel (15-30-40-*spel*) en een wedstrijd bestaat uit meerdere losse spelen (meestal drie of vijf), 2. Het spel wordt gespeeld door twee teams, waarvan één het team is dat 'opslaat'/de *service* verricht en het andere de opslag retourneert. 3. De *raya*-regel, die in andere varianten van het spel *chaza*, *ratlla*, *chase* of *kaats* wordt genoemd. Al deze kenmerken zijn van toepassing op pelota mixteca en er kan geen twijfel over bestaan dat pelota mixteca deel uitmaakt van deze spelfamilie. Aangezien varianten van dit spel al in Europa werden gespeeld voor de Spaanse invasie van Mexico, is het duidelijk dat de manier waarop pelota mixteca wordt gespeeld van Europese oorsprong is.

Binnen de archeologische literatuur is geopperd dat er in Mexico een met pelota mixteca vergelijkbaar spel werd gespeeld in de prekoloniale tijd en dat dit spel slechts qua speelwijze



beïnvloedt is door de Europese handbalspelen. Een meer gedetailleerde studie van de variatie in balspelen die in Mesoamerika bestond voor de Conquista wijst echter uit dat er geen overtuigend bewijs is voor het bestaan van een dergelijk prekoloniaal handbalspel. Woordenboeken van inheemse talen die in de vroeg-koloniale periode zijn geschreven door Spaanse monniken maken wel melding van een balspel dat met de hand wordt gespeeld, maar hierbij volgt meestal de toevoeging 'de los nuestros', 'van de onzen'. In deze lemmata wordt dus de inheemse vertaling van het Spaanse balspel gegeven. Ook in de Spaanse kronieken uit dezelfde periode ontbreken verwijzingen naar een handbalspel. In inheemse codices, geschreven in de periode rond de Spaanse verovering, wordt alleen het heupbalspel afgebeeld, afbeeldingen van een handbalspel ontbreken.

Het archeologisch bestand toont geen overtuigend bewijs voor het bestaan van een prekoloniaal handbalspel. Hoewel voor sommige archeologische sites wel gezegd is dat er afbeeldingen van een dergelijk spel zijn aangetroffen, zijn voor alle alternatieve interpretaties mogelijk. De meest voorkomende voorbeelden in de literatuur zijn het Tepantitla complex op de site Teotihuacan en het iconografische corpus van de site Dainzú in Oaxaca. In het geval van Tepantitla zijn inderdaad meerdere verschillende balspelen afgebeeld, geen van deze is echter een spel dat met de hand wordt gespeeld. Het corpus van Dainzú wordt al sinds de eerste opgravingen op deze site door Ignacio Bernal geïdentificeerd als een serie afbeeldingen van een balspel. Verschillende onderzoekers hebben geopperd dat het hier om een prekoloniale versie van pelota mixteca gaat, voornamelijk vanwege het feit dat de afgebeelde figuren een klein rond voorwerp in de hand houden. Om meerdere redenen is het echter onwaarschijnlijk dat in Dainzú een handbalspel wordt afgebeeld dat enige relatie heeft tot pelota mixteca. Ten eerste is er geen duidelijke indicatie dat in het corpus überhaupt een spel of sport wordt afgebeeld. Daarnaast is, zelfs als dit wel het geval zou zijn, Dainzú de enige archeologische site in heel Mesoamerika waar dit vermeende spel is afgebeeld. Hierdoor is het onwaarschijnlijk dat er een directe historische relatie bestaat tussen dit lokale fenomeen van kort voor het begin van de jaartelling en het hedendaagse handbalspel uit Oaxaca.

Hoewel de speelwijze van pelota mixteca van Europese origine is, is het spel heden ten dage ontegenzeggelijk een 'inheems spel'. Pelota mixteca ontstond waarschijnlijk in de Koloniale tijd, als tegenreactie op het Spaanse verbod op het spelen van het heupbalspel. Dat betekent dat het spel al honderden jaren gespeeld wordt door inheemse en niet-inheemse spelers in Oaxaca. Het is dan ook duidelijk dat het ontstaan van pelota mixteca een uitkomst is van een 15<sup>e</sup>/16<sup>e</sup>-eeuwse vorm van globalisering. Ook latere golven van globalisering, in de 19<sup>e</sup>- en 20<sup>e</sup> eeuw, brachten nieuwe spelen en sporten met zich mee. De golf van globalisering die volgde op de industriële revolutie leidde aan het eind van de 19<sup>e</sup>-eeuw tot de introductie van Europese elitesporten, zoals paardenraces, wielrennen

en roeien. Ook voetbal werd rond deze tijd voor het eerst gespeeld in Mexico. Later, aan het begin van de 20<sup>e</sup>-eeuw, werden ook Amerikaanse sporten zoals basketbal en honkbal geïntroduceerd. De komst van deze nieuwe sporten leidde automatisch tot een neergang in de hoeveelheid spelers van *pelota mixteca*, omdat er nieuwe mogelijkheden op het gebied van sport en spel ontstonden. Het bedrijven van sporten van Westerse origine werd actief gestimuleerd door de overheid, voornamelijk via het schoolsysteem. Hierdoor kwamen kinderen in heel Mexico in aanraking met voetbal, basketbal en honkbal. Inheemse sporten, aan de andere kant, werden niet op school gespeeld. Integendeel, deze sporten werden geassocieerd met inheemse cultuur en traditie en werden daarom grotendeels ontmoedigd en alleen tentoongesteld tijdens folkloristische festivals.

Dit initiatief tot promotie van Westerse sporten en ontmoediging van inheemse spelen en sporten kwam voort uit de *indigenismo* politiek van de Mexicaanse overheid. Deze politiek had, na de Mexicaanse revolutie, tot doel om een nieuwe Mexicaanse nationale identiteit te creëren, die bestond uit een *mestizo* samenleving met een Angelsaksische cultuur. Uit een combinatie van Mexico's prekoloniale historie en de adoptie van Westerse culturele elementen zou een nieuw volk ontstaan dat het beste van beide werelden combineerde. De Mexicaanse filosoof José Vasconcelos, één van de leidende denkers achter deze beweging, noemde dit nieuwe volk de *Raza Cós mica*, het kosmische ras. Om echter tot dit kosmische ras te komen moest Mexico 'gemoderniseerd' worden en zou de inheemse bevolking eerst zijn 'verouderde' cultuur en tradities, inclusief de inheemse talen, achter zich moeten laten en opgaan in de nieuwe natie. Deze ontwikkeling moest gerealiseerd worden door middel van het nationale onderwijssysteem, waar het spreken van inheemse talen verboden werd en kinderen Westerse sporten (en andere culturele elementen) werden aangeleerd.

Aangezien één van de pijlers van de *Raza Cós mica* de prekoloniale geschiedenis van Mexico was, werd het uitoefenen van inheemse tradities niet geheel verboden, zoals wel het geval was geweest in de eerdere Koloniale periode. Wél werden deze tradities ingeperkt en werden ze vooral ingezet tijdens folkloristische festivals die op nationale feestdagen werden georganiseerd. Het doel van dit soort demonstraties was het versterken van de nationale trots die Mexicanen voelden over de tradities die zij uit 'hun' prekoloniale verleden hadden geërfd. Hoewel deze demonstraties mogelijk trots en verwondering teweeg brachten bij het publiek, was deze presentatievorm er niet op gericht om meer mensen deze sporten te laten spelen. Gezien de discriminatie die inherent is aan de idee van de *Raza Cós mica*, waarbij de inheemse bevolking verwacht wordt op termijn te verdwijnen, werd niet verwacht van het *mestizo* publiek dat zij ook daadwerkelijk geïnteresseerd zou zijn in het leren beoefenen van deze sporten.

Het is duidelijk dat pelota mixteca, getuige de naam die in de jaren '20/'30 van de 20<sup>e</sup> eeuw ontstond, al in de 19<sup>e</sup> eeuw gezien werd als een inheems spel. Deze visie op pelota mixteca als inheems spel heeft een sterke invloed gehad op de hoeveelheid mensen die het spel spelen en, dientengevolge, op de 'overlevingskansen' van het spel. De representatie van pelota mixteca door de Mexicaanse staat stoelde vanaf de Mexicaanse Revolutie op drie basisprincipes. Ten eerste werd het spel gezien als een inheems spel, dat al 3000 jaar werd gespeeld. Ten tweede werd pelota mixteca gezien als een traditie die alleen door de inheemse bevolking, met name de Mixteken en de Zapoteken, werd uitgevoerd. Ten derde zag deze blik op pelota mixteca het spel als een inheemse traditie, niet als een sport of een spel. Dat wil zeggen, het spel werd gezien als meer verwant aan een inheems ritueel dan aan een Westerse sport. Deze representatie had een sterke invloed op het aantal mensen dat pelota mixteca speelde. Niet alleen zullen niet-inheemse Mexicanen het spel niet snel leren spelen, vanwege de discriminatie die er bestond en bestaat jegens inheemse bewoners en inheemse cultuur, ook inheemse jongeren die het spel mogelijk wel zouden willen leren, zijn eerder geneigd om een 'moderne', geglobaliseerde sport te spelen. Hun rolmodellen zijn niet langer hun vaders of grootvaders die pelota mixteca speelden, maar wereldberoemde voetballers en basketballers.

In de jaren 1970 veranderde de *indigenista* politiek van de Mexicaanse overheid. Twee gebeurtenissen lagen ten grondslag aan deze verandering. Ten eerste, werd er, vanuit antropologische hoek, stevige kritiek geleverd op de manier waarop de Mexicaanse staat, sinds de revolutie aan het begin van de 20<sup>e</sup> eeuw, was omgegaan met de inheemse bevolking en de inheemse cultuur. Deze kritiek richtte zich vooral op de idee dat, volgens de logica van de *Raza Cós mica*, inheemse individuen slechts als echte moderne Mexicanen konden worden gezien als zij hun inheemse wortels verloor. Slechts door zichzelf volledig te 'mexicaniseren' – dat wil zeggen, geen inheemse talen meer te spreken en de 'moderne' Westerse Mexicaanse cultuur te verkiezen boven de eigen inheemse cultuur – kon een inheems persoon een volwaardige burger van Mexico worden. De nieuwe vorm van *indigenismo* die deze critici voorstonden was er één waarin de inheemse bevolking de ruimte kreeg om zijn eigen cultuur te behouden en zichzelf te kunnen identificeren als inheems én als Mexicaans. Tegelijkertijd met deze veranderingen kwam in Mexico een neoliberaal regime aan de macht dat brak met de traditionele isolationistische socio-economische politiek en Mexico openstelde voor buitenlandse investeerders. Deze openstelling betekende niet alleen dat nieuwe buitenlandse bedrijven in Mexico investeerden, maar ook dat steeds meer Mexicanen naar de Verenigde Staten migreerden, op zoek naar werk. Deze migratiebewegingen waren al sinds het begin van de 20<sup>e</sup> eeuw aan de gang, in eerste instantie binnen Mexico en vervolgens als seizoenmigraties van Mexico naar de Verenigde Staten. Onder deze

migranten waren natuurlijk ook spelers van pelota mixteca, wat ertoe leidde dat pelota mixteca vanaf de jaren 1970 ook op regelmatige basis gespeeld werd in de Verenigde Staten, met name in California.

Deze 'neoliberale democratisering', waarbij de staat minder nationaal-culturele politiek bedreef, en de gelijk opgaande groei in migrantengemeenschappen in de Verenigde Staten creëerden samen meer ruimte voor het ontstaan zelforganisaties van Mexicaanse (inheemse) burgers. In het geval van Oaxaca en California waren deze zelforganisaties vaak zogenaamde 'home town associations', transnationale organisaties die inwoners van één bepaalde gemeenschap vertegenwoordigden, of dezen nu in Oaxaca, Mexico Stad, Baja California of de Verenigde Staten woonden. Naarmate de tijd vorderde vormden deze zelforganisaties zichzelf vaak om naar organisaties die een bredere doelgroep dan slechts één gemeenschap vertegenwoordigden.

Hoewel de nieuwe *indigenista* politiek leidde tot een sterkere stimulans voor inheemse cultuur binnen inheemse gemeenschappen, betekende dit niet automatisch dat sporten als pelota mixteca ook gepromoot werden bij de niet-inheemse inwoners van Mexico. Wel leidde de sterkere (transnationale) organisatie van inheemse gemeenschappen ertoe dat er bewegingen ontstonden die zich richtten op het behoud van het inheemse culturele sporterfgoed in het algemeen en pelota mixteca in het bijzonder. Zo ontstonden in de jaren '80 van de twintigste eeuw de Asociación Mexicana de Jugadores de Juegos de Origen Prehispánico, die opkwam voor de rechten van pelota mixtecaspelers in Mexico-Stad, en de Federación Mexicana de Juegos y Deportes Autóctonos, die zich inzette voor het behoud en de groei van inheemse sporten in het algemeen. In de jaren '90 werd ook de Asociación de Pelota Mixteca California Central, die zich richt op het organiseren van internationale toernooien tussen teams uit de VS en teams uit Mexico, opgericht door Mixteekse migranten in Fresno, California. Het doel van al deze organisaties is het redden van pelota mixteca, dat wil zeggen: de afname in het aantal spelers stoppen en meer mensen stimuleren om het spel te leren. Eén van de basisstrategieën die door bijna alle zelforganisaties wordt aangehouden is een 'detraditionalisatie' of 'deïndigenisatie' van het spel. Hierbij worden de traditionele manieren van representatie van de Mexicaanse overheid, gestoeld op het idee van pelota mixteca als een culturele inheemse traditie die beperkt is tot het inheemse domein, overboord gegooid en wordt pelota mixteca gestimuleerd als een spel dat door iedereen gespeeld kan worden. Door deze detraditionalisatie wordt de overdracht van het spel, de manier waarop mensen leren spelen, verplaatst van de traditionele gezinssfeer naar het onderwijs en wordt pelota mixteca gepresenteerd als een sport, in plaats van als een 'traditie'. Eén van de eerste grote successen die bereikt is, is de introductie van pelota mixteca in het curriculum van het Colegio de Bachilleres del Estado de Oaxaca

(COBAO), één van de grootste onderwijsinstellingen van Oaxaca, in 2011. Hierdoor komen honderden jongeren die traditioneel pelota mixteca niet eens gekend zouden hebben in aanraking met het spel. Enkele teams die opgeleid zijn bij de COBAO hebben zelfs al meegedaan aan het toernooi van Bajos de Chila, het grootste pelota mixteca toernooi.

Het is duidelijk dat globalisering een grote rol heeft gespeeld in het ontstaan van pelota mixteca en de lokale ontwikkeling van het spel. Niet alleen zorgde 16<sup>e</sup>-eeuwse globalisering ervoor dat het spel ontstond, 19<sup>e</sup>- en begin 20<sup>e</sup>-eeuwse globalisering veroorzaakten een verregaande marginalisatie van het spel, onder de invloed van de Mexicaanse nationale identiteitspolitiek, die gestoeld was op Europese en Noord-Amerikaanse idealen van de moderne natie. Neoliberale globalisering in de tweede helft van de 20<sup>e</sup> eeuw leidde, ondanks de vele negatieve gevolgen die het had, ook tot een vorm van *empowerment* van de inheemse bevolking en zorgde ervoor dat individuele spelers en organisaties van spelers in staat waren om het spel te naar eigen inzicht te promoten. Hoewel het dan ook de structurele factoren waren die de condities schiepen waarin individuen konden handelen, is het alleen dankzij de inzet en passie – de *agency* – van de spelers zelf dat pelota mixteca tegenwoordig nog bestaat en de sport zelfs een aarzelende groei doormaakt.

## Summary

Pelota mixteca is a ballgame that originated in the Mexican state of Oaxaca. Nowadays, due to the large-scale labor migration that has taken place within Mexico and from Mexico to the United States of America, the game is not just played in the state of Oaxaca, but also in Mexico-City and in several parts of the United States, most prominently the states of California and Texas. In academic circles the origins of the game are a subject of debate. While some archaeologists see the game as a local variation on the well-known precolonial Mesoamerican hipball game, others consider pelota mixteca to be a member of a family of European handball games that originated in northwestern Europe in the Early Middle Ages.

In this dissertation I attempt to answer several questions surrounding the origins of the game, its historical development and the influence that several waves and forms of globalization have had on the development of the game. Part 1 describes the way in which the game is played, followed by a comparison between pelota mixteca and handball games of European origin. This comparison is followed by an examination of the ballgames that were played in Mesoamerica before the Spanish invasion and colonization. This part of the research aims to determine whether a ballgame similar to pelota mixteca was played in precolonial Mesoamerica. The second part of the document focuses on the historical development of pelota mixteca after the Spanish invasion, the influence that the so-called indigenista politics of the Mexican state had on the development of the game and on how, in turn, these politics, and by extension the game itself, were influenced by twentieth and twenty-first century processes of globalization. In order to better understand and explain these historical processes, the social-historical development of pelota mixteca is framed within a discussion of current ideas on globalization and culture/cultural identity.

Pelota mixteca is a handball game that is played on a court that measures around 100 meters by 11 meters. The score is counted following the same rules as tennis, 15-30-40-juego. Three modalities of the game exist; pelota mixteca de hule, pelota mixteca de forro and pelota mixteca de esponja, which is also referred to as pelota mixteca del valle. The modalities are differentiated by the equipment and the type of ball that are used. The ball that is used in hule is made of rubber (hule in Spanish) and the glove that is used to propel the ball is made of leather and iron nails. Forro uses a ball that is made of leather and textile. In this modality of the game, the hand is protected by a simple glove that is wound with cotton bands. An industrially-made ball is used for esponja, which is hit with a square wooden board that is tied to the hand using leather straps. The balls for hule and

forro are made manually by specialized artisans. In the case of forro, several specialists are able to create these balls, most of whom live in the Mixteca region in the state of Oaxaca.

While only a few people are able to create balls for hule, there is only one family that possesses the knowledge to create the elaborate gloves that are used in this modality of the game. Both the gloves and the balls are inventions of the Pacheco family. The founder of this tradition was Daniel Pacheco, a butcher who lived in the town of Ejutla de Crespo in the southern Sierra region of Oaxaca. Daniel Pacheco was an avid player of *pelota a mano fría*, the name given to *pelota mixteca* before the invention of the gloves. In 1911, only days before an important match, Pacheco cut his hand while working. He decided to cut a piece off his saddle and create a partial protection for his hand. When he noted that this hand-protection enabled him to hit the ball with more power, Daniel Pacheco started experimenting with bigger and more complex gloves. Since Pacheco's team mates and opponents also noted that he had an advantage in the game, he also started to create gloves for other players. As time went by, the gloves grew ever more complex, from one layer of leather in 1911 to more than thirty layers of leather, reinforced with iron nails, nowadays. Naturally, the weight of the glove also increased, from 150 grams to 5.2 kilograms today. Because of the increased weight of the gloves, which enabled the players to hit the ball with more power, the size and weight of the ball also increased. The rubber ball that was used for *pelota a mano fría* at the beginning of the twentieth century weighed about 100 grams. Today, the standard weight for a ball is 920 grams. The gloves for hule are still made according to the Pacheco family tradition. Agustín Pacheco, Daniel's son, took over his workshop initially. Today, after the retirement of Agustín, the workshop is led by Leobardo, Daniel Pacheco's grandson.

The creation of the gloves had an unintended side effect, because the cost for the equipment with which to play *pelota mixteca* rose significantly. In 2011, a glove for hule cost around \$350, a large sum of money in a country where the average monthly income is around \$500. Because some players refused, or simple were not able, to pay this much money for the equipment, *pelota mixteca de esponja* was created in the mid-20th century. Balls for this modality could be bought in stores for a relatively low price and the wooden boards that are used to propel the ball could simply be made at home.

Generally, *pelota mixteca* is seen in Mexico as a 'deporte precolombino', a pre-Columbian sport. The game is considered to be a variation on the well-known precolonial Mesoamerican ballgame and the players of the game themselves often mention archaeological sites, such as Monte Albán, as one of the places where the game originated. Most archaeologists have also traditionally considered *pelota*

mixteca to be a game of precolonial origin. However, a comparison of pelota mixteca with handball games that originated in Europe in the Middle Ages shows that, in terms of its rules, pelota mixteca is of European origin. Three main arguments support this hypothesis – the similarities between the score count of pelota mixteca and that of European handball games, the fact that these games were played in Europe before 1492, and the lack of any depictions of or references to pelota mixteca in pre- and early colonial sources.

Anyone who is familiar with the rules of tennis will instantly recognize the 15-30-40-game score count of pelota mixteca. However, one important additional rule exists in pelota mixteca that is no longer present in modern-day tennis, the so-called raya-rule. The raya is a line that is drawn across the playing field. A raya is drawn when the ball bounces twice inside the playing field or when it crosses the sideline, after having bounced once inside the playing field. When two rayas have been drawn, or when one of the teams is at 40 and a raya is drawn, the teams change sides. The team that had performed the service becomes the 'receiving' team and vice versa. Even though this rule has disappeared from modern-day tennis, it is still used in many contemporary sports that are part of the same family of handball games as tennis. These sports include Spanish pilota valenciana, Dutch kaatsen and pantalera from Italy.

This family of handball games originated in the early Middle Ages in convents in northwestern Europe and, from there, spread throughout the entire continent. Gradually, this form of handball became the most popular sport in pre-modern Europe, among both elite and commoners. Despite the variation that exists between different game forms that belong to this family, all these games share three basic characteristics. 1. Four winning strikes win one game (i.e. 15-30-40-game) and a match consists of multiple games (mostly three or five). 2. The game is played by two teams, of which one is the team that performs the service and the other is the receiving team. 3. The raya rule, which is also called chaza, ratlla, chase or kaats in different modalities of the game. All these characteristics apply to pelota mixteca and it is clear that pelota mixteca is a member of this European family of handball games. Considering the fact that these games were already played in Europe hundreds of years before the Spanish Conquest, it is clear that the formal aspects (i.e. score count, court size, number of players, etc.) of pelota mixteca are of European origin.

It has been suggested by archaeologists that, despite the European influences that pelota mixteca has clearly undergone, a type of handball game existed in precolonial Mesoamerica that could be seen as a precolonial precursor for pelota mixteca. Nonetheless, a detailed study of the variation in ballgames that existed in Mesoamerica before the Conquista shows that there is no clear evidence



for the existence of a precolonial Mesoamerican handball game. Early Colonial dictionaries of indigenous languages compiled by Spanish friars only give the indigenous name that was given to the Spanish ballgame. That is to say, these dictionaries do provide entries for a handball game, but this game is described as 'de los nuestros', our handball game. Spanish chronicles from the same period lack any descriptions of handball games. Likewise, there are no depictions of handball games in any of the indigenous codices that were produced around the time of the Spanish invasion. The only ballgame that is depicted in these codices is the well-known pre-Columbian Mesoamerican ballgame that was played with the hip.

There is no clear evidence in the archaeological record for the existence of a precolonial handball game. While it has been argued that depictions of handball games are shown in the iconography of a handful of sites in Mesoamerica, alternative interpretations for all these examples are possible. The most-often cited examples of a supposed precolonial handball game come from the Tepantitla compound at Teotihuacan and from the Late Preclassic site of Dainzú in the Oaxacan central valleys. While it is true that many handball games are depicted in the murals of Tepantitla, a handball game is not one of them. The corpus of Dainzú has been associated with a handball game ever since the first excavations of the site by Ignacio Bernal in the 1960s. Several authors have suggested that a precolonial version of pelota mixteca is depicted at Dainzú, mostly because of the fact that the individuals in the reliefs hold small round objects in their hands. However, it is unlikely that the Dainzú corpus depicts a type of handball game that is related to pelota mixteca. First of all, there is no clear indication that the corpus depicts a type of game or sport at all. In addition, even if a game or sport would be depicted, Dainzú is the only archaeological site in the whole of Mesoamerica at which this supposed game is depicted. Considering the uniqueness of this 'game' and the large temporal distance between Dainzú and modern-day pelota mixteca, it is highly unlikely that an historical relationship exists between the Late Preclassic (200 BCE) Dainzú game and modern-day pelota mixteca.

Since pelota mixteca most probably originated as a counter reaction to the Spanish prohibition of the hipball game in the early Colonial era, the game has been played for hundreds of years by indigenous and non-indigenous players in Oaxaca. Therefore, despite the fact that the way the game is played is undoubtedly of European origin, pelota mixteca is clearly an indigenous game today. Clearly, the creation of pelota mixteca was one of the outcomes of a 16th-century form of globalization. The Spanish invasion brought different European cultural elements to Mesoamerica, one of which was the handball game. In the 19th and 20th century, new waves of globalization brought new sports and games to Mexico. The 19th century saw the introduction of European elite

sports, such as polo, cycling and rowing. Football (soccer) was also introduced to Mexico during this period. Later, in the early years of the 20th century, North American sports such as basketball and baseball were introduced. The introduction of these new sports automatically led to a decline in the number of people that played pelota mixteca, if only because new 'ludic options' were created. The practice of Western sports was actively stimulated by the Mexican authorities. The newly-created nationwide educational system brought children throughout Mexico in contact with sports such as basketball, baseball and football. In contrast, indigenous sports were not taught or played at schools. On the contrary, these indigenous pastimes were associated with indigenous traditions and culture and their practice was discouraged by teachers and missionaries alike. They were, however, displayed during folkloric festivals that showcased indigenous culture for the mestizo population of Mexico.

The promotion of Western sports, to the detriment of indigenous sports and games, was a logical outcome of the indigenismo policies that the Mexican authorities pursued. This politics of indigenismo, which formed after the Mexican revolution at the beginning of the 20th century, aimed to create a new national identity for Mexico, one that envisioned Mexico as a nation that was racially mestizo and culturally Anglo-Saxon. From the combination of Mexico's precolonial history and the adoption of Western cultural elements and standards, a new people would form that combined the best of both worlds. The Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos, one of the leading thinkers behind this movement, called this new nation the Raza C6smica, the Cosmic Race. However, in order for this cosmic race to come about, Mexico needed to be 'modernized' and in order to become true Mexican citizens the indigenous population of the country needed to relinquish their 'antiquated' culture and traditions, including their native languages. The national education system was the main vehicle to achieve this modernization. As a result, speaking indigenous languages was prohibited in schools and children were taught Western customs, including sports.

Because Mexico's precolonial heritage was one of the cornerstones of the Raza C6smica, the practice of indigenous traditions was not outright prohibited, as had been the case during the Colonial period. Nonetheless, these traditions were severely restricted and were only used by the Mexican authorities as demonstration sports during folkloric festivals that were held during national holidays. The goal of these demonstrations was to strengthen the sense of national pride that Mexicans felt in the precolonial traditions that they had inherited as a nation. While these demonstrations may have indeed strengthened feelings of national pride in the public, these events were not aimed at increasing the number of players of the sport. Since, according to the logic of the Raza C6smica, the indigenous populace of the country and their culture were bound to disappear

into the culturally Western-oriented whole of the new Mexican nation, the mestizo public was not expected to be interested in learning how to play these indigenous sports.

The name *pelota mixteca*, which was created in the 1920s or 30s, clearly indicates that the game was already seen as an indigenous tradition at the end of the 19th century. The representation of and discourse on *pelota mixteca* that the Mexican authorities created from the beginning of the 20th century was founded on three basic assumptions, which departed from this idea of *pelota mixteca* as an indigenous tradition. These assumptions were, 1. That *pelota mixteca* is a game that has been played for over 3000 years and is a direct descendant of the ancient Mesoamerican ballgame, 2. That *pelota mixteca* is a tradition particular to certain indigenous peoples, mainly Mixtecs and Zapotecs, and 3. That *pelota mixteca* is an indigenous cultural tradition, rather than a sport, more similar to a type of indigenous cultural activity or ritual, than to a 'real' sport, like football or basketball. This idea of *pelota mixteca* as an indigenous tradition has exerted a heavy influence on the potential number of players of the game and, by extension, on the chances of survival of *pelota mixteca* in a globalized world. Not only would non-indigenous Mexicans be hesitant to start playing the game, because of the widespread discrimination that existed and continues to exist towards indigenous cultures, indigenous young people would also be more inclined to start playing Western globalized sports, since indigenous pastimes were presented within discourse as antiquated and outdated. The role models of indigenous young people were no longer their fathers or grandfathers who played *pelota mixteca*, but rather global sports icons that played football or basketball.

In the 1970s, the indigenista politics of the Mexican government changed. Two developments laid the basis for these changes. First of all, anthropologists voiced a strong critique on the way that the Mexican state had treated the indigenous population and their culture since the Mexican revolution. Fundamental to this critique was the notion that, according to the logics of the *Raza Cós mica*, indigenous individuals could only become true modern Mexican citizens if they chose to relinquish their own culture and adopt the Western-oriented culture of modern Mexico. Only through total 'mexicanization' – that is to say, by no longer speaking an indigenous language and by leaving behind their 'outdated' indigenous cultural practices – could an indigenous person truly become a full citizen of modern Mexico. Critics of this idea proposed a new form of indigenismo that recognized Mexico as a multicultural society, in which the indigenous population was entitled to practicing their own culture and identifying themselves as both indigenous and Mexican. During the same period, Mexico adopted neoliberal socio-economic policies which constituted a break with the isolationist economic politics that had been prevalent in the country since the Mexican revolution. These policies opened up the country to foreign investors. As a result, not only did more foreign businesses

establish themselves in Mexico, more Mexicans also started migrating to the United States in search for work. In the case of the United States, more migrants than before chose to stay in their new homelands. This was in contrast to earlier patterns of migration, in which migrants performed seasonal work and would return to their home communities after their contract had ended. Naturally, players of pelota mixteca were also among those who established themselves abroad and, as a consequence, pelota mixteca has been played on a regular basis in the United States since the 1970s.

This form of 'neoliberal democratization', in which the state devolved limited agency to civil society, combined with the growth in (indigenous) migrant communities in the United States, created spaces for the emergence of self-organizations of (indigenous) Mexicans. With regards to Oaxaca and California, many of these self-organizations were transnational home town associations, that brought together members of one originating community who lived in Oaxaca, Mexico City, Baja California or the United States. These home town associations, in turn, often developed into larger organizations that represented broader groups of migrants.

While the new indigenista politics created more space for indigenous people to self-identify as indigenous and to practice their own culture, this did not lead to a larger promotion of indigenous cultural practices to non-indigenous Mexicans. These newly created spaces, however, did lead to the formation of (transnational) self-organizations that aimed to preserve and stimulate the practice of indigenous sports in general and pelota mixteca in particular. The Asociación Mexicana de Jugadores de Juegos de Origen Prehispánico was formed in the 1980s in Mexico City and represented the players of pelota mixteca and pelota tarasca in that city. More broadly, the Federación Mexicana de Juegos y Deportes Autótonos, that was formed in 1988, is committed to the preservation and growth of indigenous Mexican sports and games in general. In the 1990s, the Asociación de Pelota Mixteca California Central, an organization that represents pelota mixteca players in California and that has organized international tournaments in Fresno for many years, was established. The goal of all these organization is to save pelota mixteca from extinction, i.e. to halt the decline in the number of players and to stimulate more indigenous and non-indigenous people to start playing the game. The most important strategy that is followed by all these groups is the 'detraditionalization' or 'deindigenization' of the game. Instead of showcasing pelota mixteca as an indigenous tradition, a form of representation that was in line with the traditional Mexican discourse on pelota mixteca, these organizations and individuals aim to promote pelota mixteca as a true sport, as something that can be played by any non-indigenous or indigenous person. By pursuing this strategy of detraditionalization, the locus of cultural reproduction shifts away from the home and the family

(father teaching son to play pelota mixteca) to the state (boy and girl learning to play pelota mixteca at school). One of the most significant successes that has been achieved is the introduction of pelota mixteca into the curriculum of the Colegio de Bachilleres del Estado de Oaxaca (COBAO), the largest institution for secondary education in the state of Oaxaca. At the COBOA, hundreds of young people who traditionally would not even have heard of pelota mixteca are taught how to play the game. Some teams that were trained at the COBAO have already participated in the Bajos de Chila tournament, one of the largest pelota mixteca tournaments around.

Clearly, globalization played a major role in the creation of pelota mixteca and the historical development of the game. Not only was the creation of the game an outcome of a form of 16th-century globalization, the introduction of Western sports during several waves of 19th- and 20th-century globalization led to the marginalization of the game, under the influence of the Western-oriented identity politics of the Mexican authorities. Despite the myriad negative consequences that neoliberal globalization in the second half of the 20th century had for the indigenous population of Mexico, it also opened up spaces for the self-organization and empowerment of indigenous individuals and groups. As a consequence, advocates for the game who were concerned with the game's survival were able to promote pelota mixteca on their own terms, focusing on the sport-aspects, rather than on the traditional aspects. In the end, while global developments provided the structural backdrops that enabled these individuals and groups to act, it is only because of their incessant passion for the game and their agency that pelota mixteca is still a living and growing sport, today.

# Curriculum Vitae Candidate

Martin E. Berger (1985) was born and raised in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. While visiting the Yucatan peninsula with his parents at age eight, he fell in love with Mesoamerican archaeology. After finishing secondary education and spending a few months in the Ecuadorian rain forest as a volunteer on a conservation project, he enrolled at the Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University to study Ancient American archaeology. During his studies he followed courses on Mesoamerican and Andean archaeology and took classes in Quechua, Nahuatl, Ch'orti', Sahìn Sàu (Chalcatongo Mixtec) and Classic Maya writing. He also participated in several archaeological excavations in the Netherlands and in the *Proyecto Arqueológico Huari-Ancash* at Marcajirca, Peru. The research for his MPhil dissertation included two months of ethnographic fieldwork in Oaxaca and Mexico-City. He received his BA in 2007 and MPhil (*cum laude*) in 2009.

Since 2010 he has been active as Assistant Curator for the Middle- and South-American collection of the National Museum of Ethnology (part of the National Museum of World Cultures since 2014). His work at the museum included the creation of the new permanent exhibition on Middle- and South-America (2011-2021, with Dr. L.N.K. Van Broekhoven), as well as a temporary exhibition on 'the 2012 phenomenon', entitled '21-12-2012: the end of the world?!'. In addition, he co-edited (with Erik Boot and Laura Van Broekhoven) *Maya 2012: Mysterie, Geloof en Wetenschap*, a popular-scientific publication which functions as a catalogue of the museum's archaeological Maya collection, and contributed entries for the Middle- and South-American pieces in the National Museum's *Masterpieces of Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde*.

At the museum he initiated an ongoing research project on Mesoamerican turquoise mosaic-decorated skulls. This project was supported by a European Committee FP7 CHARISMA grant (in cooperation with the *Centre de Recherche et Restauration des Musées de France*, Paris) and by Harvard University's Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection through a Summer Fellowship in 2014. Since 2011 he has functioned as the Secretary of the Ethical Committee of the *Stichting Volkenkundige Collecties Nederland* (Dutch Foundation of Ethnographic Collections). In this capacity he organized several (national and international) workshops and symposia on ethical questions regarding ethnographic collections and collecting practices. He presented parts of his research at several international conferences, and his work has been published in journals such as *Mexicon*, *Itinerarios* and *Streetnotes*.