

Indigenous Experience in Mexico: Readings in the Nahua Intellectual Tradition

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## Dedication

For my great-grandmother, Myrtle May (Marie) Evans, educated at the Carlisle Industrial School for Indians in Pennsylvania. I am humbled by her experience, and recognize that I am able to tell these stories today because of the resilient women who came before me.

For the Tepoxteco (Chicontepepec, Veracruz) high school graduating class of 2008. After watching a video of a commencement speech offered by the regional coordinator of the *Telebachillerato* at their graduation ceremony, it became clear to me that this project could not be simply a matter of generating knowledge or expanding perspectives for the academy. The coordinator told these forty or so hopeful young Nahuas that even though they were “slower than city people, not as developed, so uncivilized, so removed from current technology” they were now ready to go work in factories at the border or acquire some kind of “trabajito,” or menial labor job in Mexico City. My efforts here are a counter-narrative to these all-too-common discourses of the present day. If what I write in the following chapters is incorrect, naïve, or misguided, I would be delighted if it were one of these stunningly intelligent and thoughtful *macehualmeh* from Tepoxteco that would tell me so.

## Abstract

Sometimes unwittingly academic trends, disciplinary isolation, and narratives of nation-building have contributed to the exclusion of native voices from the literary and cultural history of Mexico. Literary anthologies mention the “great pre-Colombian civilizations,” discussing the Popul Vuh and Aztec codexes, and ethnohistorians over the last thirty-some years have shed new light on indigenous intellectual work in the first centuries of the Colonial Period. But less and less is heard from indigenous people after this. Did they progressively cease to think, speak, and write poetically, abstractly, or philosophically after conquest? My dissertation discusses how Nahuas, heirs to one of the most widely spoken and best-documented indigenous language in Mexico (Nahuatl), have indeed continued to work as intellectuals. However, as needs of specific communities changed, so did the role of the intellectual along with the genres, forums, tools, and discursive codes he/she used. To demonstrate these shifts, I trace four Nahua intellectuals over a period of nearly five hundred years, with each chapter dipping into distinct historical time periods. Beginning with the Early Colonial Period, I analyze the shifting social terrains as seen in the writings and personal experience of Nahua and Jesuit priest, Antonio del Rincón (1566–1601), the first indigenous person in the Americas to write a grammar of his own native language, *Arte mexicana* (1595). Next, I discuss the rhetoric of nation-building during the nineteenth century including the denial and disappearance of indigenous people in the discourses of citizenship through the work of Faustino Galicia Chimalpopoca (d. 1877), Nahua politician, attorney, scholar of colonial Nahuatl texts, and Nahuatl teacher to Emperor Maximilian I. Moving to the early twentieth century, I highlight discourses of Social Darwinism manifested in the nation’s resolve to deal with the “Indian problem” as read in the testimony of Doña Luz Jimenez (1897–1965), specifically her first-hand account of the Mexican Revolution, and her experience with assimilative schooling. Finally, I explore bilingual education in Mexico and the co-optation of indigenous peoples to promote assimilation to dominant culture in the latter half of the twentieth century. To this end I focus on the work of Nahua writer, artist, and teacher, Ildefonso Maya Hernández (1936– ), with an analysis of his play *Ixtlamatinij* as well as discussion of a series of interviews I carried out with the author in 2008 and 2009. In reading these texts, I take into consideration the historical context (including official policies and actual quotidian practice) and what the indigenous intellectuals have had to say about their own experience, either explicitly or implicitly. In a move to reconnect the theorization with the people being theorized, I also read the texts in focus groups with native speakers of Nahuatl, some encountering their own cultural patrimony for the first time.

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## **Introduction:**

### **Indigenous Experience in Mexico: Readings in the Nahua Intellectual Tradition**

“We cannot live other people’s lives, and it is a piece of bad faith to try.  
We can but listen to what, in words, in images, in actions, they say about their lives”  
-Clifford Geertz, “Making Experiences, Authoring Selves,” *Anthropology of Experience* (373)

In recent decades, social and political movements in support of marginalized sectors of society have had a profound influence on academic scholarship and activism. In the case of Latin American Literary and Cultural Studies, the canon has expanded, and research agendas have opened to what Michel Foucault has termed “disqualified knowledge” (82) by focusing on, for example, indigenous peoples, women, and afro-descendants. In line with this shift, the study of Latin American indigenous intellectual and cultural production—long relegated to a seemingly ephemeral past or a passing footnote—has taken its rightful place as a worthy, if not urgent, endeavor. Today few would disagree that just as one takes into consideration the legacy and continued presence of Iberian culture in Latin America, the same should hold true for indigenous culture(s). But what are the sources to be used for this more holistic approach to the field? For example, in the case of Mexico the majority of what we know about indigenous cultures since conquest, beginning in 1519, through the present day is *not* from indigenous people themselves, but instead through what Mary Louise Pratt has termed “imperial eyes.” Through non-indigenous texts we have an idea of what Euro-mestizos have thought about their relationships with (and their own subjectivities in relation to) the indigenous population. But how have native people articulated this experience? Many would say that we can not

readily answer this question, since it is often thought that while possessing a rich oral tradition, indigenous people in Mexico have not had a long-standing relationship with the written word and have therefore left little trace. This is not the case, at least for Nahuas (native speakers of Nahuatl, lingua franca of the Aztec Empire and first language of over 1.5 million Mexican citizens today), who are heirs to the best documented indigenous language in the Americas.<sup>1</sup> This dissertation explores texts in the Nahua intellectual tradition spanning from the Colonial Period through the present, offering alternative perspectives and sources in the study of Mexican and indigenous culture. By delving deeper into the often overlooked written strand of Nahua intellectual production over the centuries, it is an original reframing of Nahua-authored texts as post-conquest intellectual tradition.

A body of scholarship focusing on indigenous intellectual production in post-conquest Mexico has steadily increased since the early 1970s, notably in the hands of historians working with texts from the Colonial Period. It is thanks to groundbreaking studies such as those of James Lockhart, Frances Karttunen, Louise M. Burkhart, Stafford Poole, Barry D. Sell, Susan Schroeder, Stephanie Wood, Rebecca Horn, Camilla Townsend, Matthew Restall, and more, that one can return to this period to address and articulate these works as intellectual tradition. Yet beyond the latter part of the Colonial Period, we hear less and less from indigenous people. Why was that so? Did Nahuas

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of conquest Nahuatl was spoken in the vast territory that encompasses today's central Mexico and on into El Salvador and Nicaragua. As part of the Uto-Aztecan language family, Nahuatl is related to indigenous languages in the United States such as Shoshone, Hopi, and Pima-Papago, and in Mexico the Tarahumara, Tepehuan, Huichol, Cora, and Yaqui languages. Today Nahuatl is the most widely spoken of the approximately 68 Indigenous languages in Mexico. It is difficult to place an exact number on exactly how many individuals speak Nahuatl today, as sources vary greatly (INEGI 2005: 1.3 million; Montemayor and Frischmann, Vol. 2: 2.5 million [xiv]).

progressively cease to think, speak, and write poetically, abstractly, or philosophically after the arrival of the Europeans? Cast as *los vencidos* (the vanquished) on the military plane, did this apply as well in terms of knowledge production?

At first glance, the answer to this question appears to be in the affirmative. In fact, rarely in Mexico today does one hear the words “indigenous” and “intellectual” linked together.<sup>2</sup> Research that frames indigenous people in Latin America as intellectuals, or possessing an intellectual tradition largely underdeveloped.<sup>3</sup> Maya indigenous intellectual Victor Montejo has stated that “[f]rom the time of the conquest, indigenous people have been conditioned to positions of servitude and mental deficiency, and the non-Maya have insisted that the *criollos* or *mestizos* are the only *personas de razón* (people of reason). Indigenous people have always been perceived as incapable of thinking or reasoning like real human beings” (162). As opposed to an accurate depiction of the intellectual activities of indigenous people—which in many cases includes a long-standing relationship to the written word—this disconnect between notions of indigeneity and intellectualism is one of the more sinister manifestations of the logic of coloniality. Walter Mignolo and others have theorized the logic of coloniality as asymmetrical

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<sup>2</sup> Anthropology, particularly focusing on South America, is ahead of other disciplines in conceiving of indigenous people as intellectuals. Kay Warren & Jean Jackson’s *Indigenous Movements, Self-Representation, and the State in Latin America* identifies several Latin American indigenous scholars/activists (3). See also Joanne Rappaport’s *Intercultural Utopias: Public Intellectuals, Cultural Experimentation, and Ethnic Pluralism in Colombia*.

<sup>3</sup> Natividad Gutiérrez’s book *Nationalist Myths and Ethnic Identities: Indigenous Intellectuals and the Mexican State* and Carmen Martínez-Novo’s *Who Defines Indigenous? Identities, Development, Intellectuals, and the State in Northern Mexico* are examples of the few studies that treat the Mexican indigenous intelligentsia. Robert Warrior’s *Tribal Secrets* and *The People and the Word: Reading Native Non-Fiction*, which both treat indigenous intellectual production within the borders of the United States, have served as inspiration and model for this project. Victor Montejo’s *Maya Intellectual Renaissance: Identity, Representation, and Leadership* is another laudable pioneering effort in this vein.

political, economic, civic, and epistemological relationships established in the Colonial Period and extending into the present (*Idea of Latin America* 11).<sup>4</sup> Compressing distinct peoples, many who originally belonged to highly stratified societies with specialized intellectual classes, into one (perceived as inferior) mass of “indios” was a strategy of domination in the interest of imperial hegemony. The discursive and ideological maneuvering required to manage Indian subjects included depriving them, or at least minimizing the perceived value, of “their objectified intellectual legacy” (Quijano 541). Taking this into consideration, my initial research was aimed at discovering if Nahuatl written intellectual production really lay dormant for centuries, only to be revived from its long slumber at the end of the twentieth century as a Nahuatl literary “renaissance.”<sup>5</sup> Or, as is common with minoritized<sup>6</sup> cultures in the context of conquest and colonialism (and its extended logic), was the existence of this tradition simply suppressed, obscured, and/or overlooked? Who were the figures that might populate a narrative of this tradition? What were some of their central concerns? How could a focus on Nahuatl

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<sup>4</sup> Without calling it coloniality, Guillermo Bonfil-Batalla articulated this concept in his 1972 essay “El concepto de indio en América: Una categoría de la situación colonial” in which he critiques the extension of the colonial practices and social structures in “Independent” Mexico. Aníbal Quijano has also written extensively on the idea of coloniality in terms of how racial-social criteria and classifications of the Colonial period intervened to create and extend a logic that deems some “inferior types” (based on their perceived race, culture, understanding of space and knowledge) that are suitable for labor and others that are not.

<sup>5</sup> Regarding the upsurge of indigenous literary production in the last quarter of the twentieth century, see Abbey Poffenberger’s 2006 dissertation *The Renaissance of Mexican Indigenous Literature: Resistance, Reaffirmation, and Revision*.

<sup>6</sup> Francesc Ligorred Perramon’s assertion of Indigenous languages as *minoritized* rather than minority is on the mark: “No debe olvidarse...que cuando hablamos de la lengua maya-yucatek no nos estamos refiriendo a una lengua minoritaria, sino en todo caso a una lengua menos favorecida y minorizada que se encuentra, eso si, ante una lengua expansiva y mayorizada como es el castellano” (3) (It should not be forgotten that when we speak of the Maya-Yucatek language, we are not referring to a *minority* language, but in fact a *disfavored and minoritized* language that finds itself faced with an *expansive[ist] and majoritized* language, Spanish). This, and all subsequent translations, are my own unless otherwise noted.

intellectual work expand our perception and understanding of indigenous experience in Mexico, past and present?

### **Suturing Disciplines: A Multi-Disciplinary Perspective**

An attempt to articulate a continuous post-conquest Nahua written intellectual tradition requires a multi-disciplinary approach, since a focus on finite time periods and genres offers an incomplete view. For example, attention to Colonial Period Nahua annalists such as Fernando Alvarado Tezozómoc, Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, or Chimalpahin indeed offers a rich example of Nahua intellectual work. Nevertheless, this line of intellectual production fades away after the seventeenth century. Twentieth-century anthropological and linguistic studies of Nahua culture frequently highlight orality and a focus on only these fields and time period would suggest that Indians cannot or do not employ the written word. A search for a tradition of literature also gives only a partial view of Nahua intellectual production. Present-day literary anthologies pay homage to the extraordinary pre-Colombian Aztec codexes and poetry, and only occasionally treat the contemporary literatures, leaving a lengthy period of silence.<sup>7</sup> However, by suturing disciplines, time periods, genres, and methods associated with Nahuatl Studies—fields such as History, Anthropology, Linguistics, and Literary/Cultural Studies to name a few—a panoramic view demonstrates the many distinct manners in which Indians have shaped and responded to historical change as active participants in modernity. A multi-

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<sup>7</sup> In his seminal work *Escribir en el aire*, Antonio Cornejo-Polar discusses this phenomenon, stating that Latin American historiography not only nationalized pre-Hispanic writings, but also framed this cultural production on a linear trajectory that was abruptly terminated with the Conquest (13–14).

disciplinary approach also expands theoretical and methodological possibilities in the analyses of the broad range of texts to be discussed. As each chapter is informed by specific disciplinary approaches, I discuss methodological and theoretical issues throughout the dissertation as appropriate.

As the following chapters demonstrate, a multi-disciplinary approach makes clear that Nahuas have used the post-conquest technology of alphabetic reading and writing in their first (and second, and third) language(s) on a continual basis. What *did* change, however, was that as needs of their specific communities evolved, so did the role of the intellectual along with the genres, forums, tools, and discursive codes he/she used.

To demonstrate these shifts, my dissertation traces four Nahua intellectuals over a period of nearly five hundred years, dipping into distinct periods from the early sixteenth century through the present day that markedly affected indigenous intellectual work. Each chapter situates a Nahua intellectual in his/her historical context, and explores specific issues that arise from a reading of their personal experience and their written texts. By casting a wide temporal, demographic, and geographical net (Warrior xx), this study highlights the heterogeneity of Nahua experience, while at the same time identifying some of the broader issues that indigenous people in Mexico have reckoned with over the centuries. In these readings I work with a three-pronged method of analysis, taking into consideration official policies and discourses, quotidian practice, and indigenous experience as read in the Nahua intellectual tradition.<sup>8</sup> In a sense this is a recovery of a narrative that can be re-integrated to the general history of Mexican letters.

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<sup>8</sup> K. Tsianina Lomawaima and Teresa McCarty provide the model for this three-pronged approach in their book *To Remain an Indian: Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Education*.

Equally, this knowledge can and should be repatriated to Nahua communities. Knowledge of this tradition has the potential to contribute to linguistic and cultural revitalization projects. For instance, the texts and analyses in this dissertation can inform a curriculum that includes Nahua intellectual protagonism, which in turn supports the basic human dignity of Nahua people as knowing subjects.<sup>9</sup>

### **Nahuas and the Written Word**

Each of the intellectuals treated in this project has worked extensively with the written word, leaving an accessible corpus of work to be analyzed while alerting us to this often overlooked facet of Nahua intellectual life. That the written line of indigenous intellectual production has for the most part been ignored perhaps stems from the fact that the introduction (some might say imposition) of the Roman alphabet has long been associated with the epistemological violence of colonialism and the marginalization of native ways of knowledge and history. Indeed, as Jean Franco has stated, “[o]ne cannot write in an indigenous language without calling up the whole history of colonialism, give the power relations that dictated the first and many subsequent transcriptions of Native American texts into phonic writing” (25). The privileging of European ways of knowing, specifically through alphabetic means, at the expense of indigenous knowledge practices has been the subject of numerous studies (Mignolo, Quijano, Gruzinski). Mignolo, for example, has been one of the more influential theorists that has dealt with the legacy of

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<sup>9</sup> In *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*, Craig Womack highlights the importance of “find[ing] Native literature’s place in Indian country, rather than Native literature’s place in the canon” (11). I depart from Womack slightly in that it seems that indigenous, in this case Nahua, intellectual production has an important place in both.



colonialism on the epistemological plane by challenging “the hegemony of the *alphabet-oriented notions of text and discourse*,” thus promoting more nuanced studies of (equally worthy) non-dominant cultural knowledge such as oral, pictographic, or embodied practices (Moraña, Dussel, and Jáuregui 3). Mignolo’s approach has been of immense importance in broadening fields of inquiry and reframing cultural histories to include multiple cultures and ways of knowing, and my project is indebted to this example. However, frequently studies in this vein tend toward binaries that segregate practices and materialities to specific ethnic realms (i.e. orality/writing, conquered/conquistador, códice/book, glyphs/alphabet) that perhaps do not accurately consider the spectrum of indigenous experience (Chacón 63). By correcting too sharply away from the emphasis on alphabetic knowledge, or by viewing alphabetic writing only as an imposition of Western ways, we miss out on a rich tradition of how Indians have actually appropriated that tool. Furthermore, a conception of indigenous people as having always existed primarily in the realm of the oral is actually ahistorical. Long before the arrival of the Spaniards, imperial indigenous societies such as the Aztecs and the Maya had linked the written word with power. The Aztecs had highly specialized scribes/painters (*tlacuiloque*), and interpreters of knowledge (*tlamatinimeh*) (Chacón 63). Thus, in order to establish the new order with Indians at the bottom of the social hierarchy, it was necessary to erase the memory of a pre-Hispanic tradition of indigenous writing by isolating the written word to the realm of (supposedly superior) Euro-mestizos, while pushing Indians toward orality (Pellicer 41). Therefore, I am hesitant to view Nahua

orality and writing as oppositional, especially since in Nahua culture these have often been parallel and complementary intellectual activities, both before and after conquest.<sup>10</sup>

Several Mexican indigenous intellectuals have also weighed in on the place of writing in their communities. For example, Natalio Hernández-Hernández (Nahua) has conceived of the written word as a longstanding and integral part of Nahua culture: “No éramos un pueblo ágrafo, ni un pueblo sin historia, como todavía sostienen las ciencias sociales y muchos científicos sociales” (97) (We were not a people without writing, nor a people without history, as the social sciences and many social scientists continue to portray us). Zapotec writer Victor de la Cruz has criticized the academy for perpetuating the erroneous idea that some languages (i.e. indigenous) were meant to be only oral languages, not written: “El transito de la oralidad indígena a la escritura plantea problemas, aunque no en el sentido que pretenden problematizarlo algunos antropólogos, para quienes en el mundo unas lenguas nacieron para ser habladas únicamente y escribirlas sería tanto como pervertirlas” (487) (The transition from indigenous orality to the written word presents problems, but not in the way suggested by some anthropologists, for whom some languages were born to be only spoken, as if to write them would be to pervert them). De la Cruz, a leading proponent of the recovery and articulation of a Zapotec written intellectual tradition, has said that a major problem for Zapotecs today is that they lack knowledge of and exposure to their own literary/written tradition which he sees as necessary “tanto para imitarlos como para criticarlos” (488) (as

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<sup>10</sup> Regarding the complementary nature of orality and literacy in general, see Ruth Finnegan’s *Orality and Literacy* (12–13; 110) wherein she cautions against posing the two as separate or distinct practices.

much to imitate it as to criticize it).<sup>11</sup> Working with young people in his community, de la Cruz not only teaches writing in Zapotec, but also makes an effort to educate the youth regarding the various written genres over the course of 2,500 years of Zapotec writing:

El objetivo de la investigación de los nombres de los géneros literarios de los *binningula'sa'* no era revivir todas estas formas en la literatura zapoteca actual; sino que los jóvenes, quienes empezaban a escribir en *diidxazá*, tuvieran ante sí un panorama de su pasado literario y vieran cómo sus antepasados habían elaborado obras literarias en su lengua; y que aquellos habían tenido sus propios caminos en la creación literaria, obstruidos por el proceso colonizador. (489)

(The goal of research on the names of literary genres the Zapotec writers of the past wasn't to revive them in today's Zapotec literature; it was instead so that the young people who are just beginning to write in Zapotec would have before them the panorama of their literary past and so that they could see how their ancestors had elaborated literary works in their language; to see that they had had their own way of writing, but that this has been obstructed by the colonization process.)

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<sup>11</sup> Jean Franco recently wrote about Victor de la Cruz's poem "Tu laanu, Tu lanu," stating that in this text the poet frames "writing as a second language which kills the native tongue" (25). However taking into consideration de la Cruz's decades-long dedication to the production, recovery, and dissemination of writing in Zapotec, I read this poem differently. My sense is that in the poem "Tu laanu, Tu lanu," when de la Cruz speaks of the second language, he is not referencing writing, but the imposition of the Spanish language: "Who brought that second language / coming to trample down our people / as if we were maggots fallen from trees, / scattered over the ground? / Who are we? What is our name?" ([www.fbisu.net.mx/vdlcruz/english.html](http://www.fbisu.net.mx/vdlcruz/english.html)). Not knowing "who we are" is due to being removed from one's native language. The technology of alphabetic writing has not "killed the native tongue"; it was instead the prohibition of native languages and the imposition of Spanish.

In the same way that suturing disciplines offers a more complete perspective of post-conquest Nahua intellectual production in general, reconnecting the written tradition to this narrative offers a more comprehensive vision of the culture.<sup>12</sup> The written corpus of texts treated in this dissertation—a grammar, political speeches, academic-society addresses, personal testimony, and a play—alerts us to the highly varied ways in which Nahua intellectuals have utilized the technology available to them.

### **Terminology**

So far in these pages I have used the terms indigenous, Indian, native, and native-speaker interchangeably. The question of appropriate terminology to be used in discussing native people of the Americas is much-debated and to date unresolved. Since most would agree that Columbus did not arrive at the Indies, and thus the people he encountered were not “Indians,” it seems problematic to continue to use the term Indian. It is, however, commonly used both within and outside of native communities in Mexico (and beyond) for a variety of reasons. For example, Adam Versényi discusses how Nahua playwright Idefonso Maya-Hernández (see Chapter Four) prefers the term *indio* instead of *indígena*:

one of the reasons he rejects the term *indígena* (indigenous) and proclaims himself to be an *indio* (Indian) is that the latter functions as a constant reminder of the stupidity

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<sup>12</sup> This same kind of work is being carried out at the Taller de Historia Oral Andina (Andean Oral History Workshop) in Bolivia. Directed by indigenous activist Carlos Mamani, the collective conceives of the written word as part of the “genealogy of ancestral knowledge of our communities” and therefore seeks to reintegrate writing alongside the oral tradition (Rappaport 167).

of the colonizing Spaniards who, believing they had reached the West Indies, called the inhabitants of the Americas “Indians.” Maya, in effect, utilizes mistranslation as the foundation upon which to build a firm sense of cultural identity. The colonizer’s epistemic orientation is turned against him, creating new contours of knowledge production. (445)

The ideal, of course, is that each person could be identified in the terms that they themselves use. Native speakers of the Nahuatl language, for example, often call themselves *macehualmeh* (common persons), which distinguishes him/her from the *coyomeh* (generally Euro-mestizos, whites, or outsiders, although social class and education level is often conflated into this definition). However since “Nahua” is understood by indigenous and academic communities, as well as the general public, I will continue with this term.

## **Nahua**

The criterion for being included as a “Nahua” in this intellectual tradition is that he/she has been identified or self-identifies as a Nahua. I have purposefully avoided the rubric of “writes or works in his/her native language,” as the determining factor of whether or not a particular figure should be considered part of this trajectory. For while each intellectual does indeed work in Nahuatl, the source texts I include are also in Spanish, Latin, and a hybrid Nahuatl-Spanish (“Nahuañol”). Linguistic choices should not define or preclude identification as a Nahua intellectual since the language chosen to communicate ideas is

not always based solely on ethnic identity. Language also marks intended audience and historical context. Insisting on language-specific criteria for designation as an indigenous intellectual also ignores the fact that a key marker of indigeneity in Mexico (especially during the nineteenth century) has been to be on the receiving end of enormous pressure from dominant culture to stop speaking one's native language (Chacón 14). It is in fact very "Indian" in Mexico to be bilingual. For nearly five hundred years, being Indian in Mexico, at least in heavily populated areas, has implied reckoning with a dominant Spanish-speaking culture. In this environment, Nahuas regularly appropriated and strategically utilized that culture's technologies, including European languages and the Roman alphabet. Some might suggest that framing Nahua intellectual production to include languages other than Nahuatl is off the mark, or that these aren't *real* indigenous intellectuals because they use the language of the colonizer. But aren't Indians, as Daniel Justice suggests, capable of expressing themselves in languages beyond their native language? (106). Mexican anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil-Batalla takes up this issue of authenticity and acculturation, firmly stating that the appropriation and adaptation of Western cultural elements does not imply that one is "less Indian":

[l]a discusión sobre el monto y proporción de los elementos 'auténticamente indios' (es decir, no occidentales) en las culturas actuales y su uso como criterio para determinar el grado de 'indianidad,' tienen un contenido profundamente colonialista: tienden a negar legitimidad a los grupos étnicos y, por otra parte, responden al estereotipo ideológico según el cual los pueblos no occidentales están fuera de la

historia. Sí, los grupos indios que han estado sujetos a la dominación colonial han hecho suyos, de buen grado o por la fuerza, muchos elementos de origen occidental; pero la aculturación no significa desindianización ni pérdida de identidad en términos étnicos (*Utopía y revolución* 22).

(the discussion regarding the total and proportion of the ‘authentically indian’ [that is, non-Western] elements in today’s indigenous cultures, and its use as a criteria to determine the degree of ‘indianness,’ are of a profoundly colonialist nature: they tend to negate the legitimacy of ethnic groups and, at the same time, respond to ideological stereotyping that places non-Western cultures outside of the historical record. Indeed, indigenous groups that have been subjects of colonial domination have appropriated many elements of Western culture. But acculturation does not mean de-Indianization, nor does it imply loss of identity in terms of ethnicity.)

If anything, a framework that allows for only Nahuas writing in Nahuatl to be considered *real* indigenous intellectuals tells us more about our expectations<sup>13</sup> of Indians than about their actual experiences. My goal has not been to seek out instances of Indians that have held fast to pre-Columbian traditions. I am instead interested in how Nahuas have moved

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<sup>13</sup> In his book *Indians in Unexpected Places*, Phil Deloria discusses how expectations of Indians are formed, and how and why they have been perpetuated to serve dominant culture’s claims of legitimacy. Deloria’s study focuses on “native cultural producers [...] who moved within white expectations, usually challenging and reaffirming those expectations at the same time” (12). By highlighting the actual plurality of supposedly anomalous occurrences of Indians acting outside of non-Indian expectations, he asks us to rethink the idea of Indian participation in modernity. I follow Deloria’s example by going directly to one of the most “unexpected” roles of Indians in the general Mexican narrative, that of intellectual.

in the flow of their historical moment and how this can inform intellectual agendas, both inside and outside indigenous communities.

### **Intellectual, *Ixtlamatiquetl***

It is safe to say that all peoples are thinking, reasoning, bearers of knowledge. But does this mean that all people are intellectuals? In my use of the term, no. Roderic Camp contends, and I agree, that the implied meanings of the term *intellectual* are ““a person with a high level of knowledge” and “those who are vocationally concerned with things of the mind” (33). Camp also maintains that the intellectual must “have access to and advance a cultural fund of knowledge which does not derive solely from their direct personal experience” (33). My understanding of intellectual does diverge slightly from this in that I *do* include “direct personal experience” as an integral part of the knowledge base. This is based on a consideration of how Nahuas themselves conceive of the role of the intellectual. It is pertinent that in asking several native speakers of Nahuatl their definition of an intellectual, *ixtlamatiquetl*, each response included the fact that “to know something is to have lived something.” A breakdown of the compound word *ixtlamatiquetl* is perhaps instructive:

*Ixtli-tla-mati-quetl*:

*Ixtli*: face, surface, eye +

*tla*: non-specific, non-human object prefix (unidentified things) +

*mati*: to know something (Karttunen, *Analytical Dictionary* 121, 250, 138).



*quetl*: agentive suffix

The incorporation of *ixtli* to create the word “intellectual” insists upon personal experience. For Nahuas, an *ixtlamatiquetl* garners knowledge from lived or witnessed experiences and more value is placed on the subjective experience than in Western cultures.

### **Experience**

The concept of “experience” is sometimes rejected as a viable analytical framework due to the subjective nature of personal experience. Yet, there are those who argue that understanding the colonized subject as author of his/her own discourse is an important critical project (Adorno, “Nuevas perspectivas” 20). Therefore, in agreement with the latter position, attention to individual experience is crucial to this project. Robert Warrior’s work with native non-fiction and indigenous intellectual traditions in the United States has served as model for this dissertation, as does his understanding of the place of experience in the analysis of these traditions. In *Tribal Secrets* (1995), Warrior articulates a tradition of written native intellectual work and how it can inform the work of native intellectuals today. He continues to develop the historical and theoretical aspects of this native written tradition in *The People and the Word* (2005), wherein he reminds us of Joan Scott’s insistence that we must not view individual experiences as uncontested, nor outside of their discursive contexts (xxiii). At the same time, he also cautions against overlooking the possibilities that an analysis of experience can offer: “To

shut down a discussion of experience,” Warrior states, “runs the risk of using antiessentialist rhetoric to silence the voices of those who continue to face marginalization, while never interrogating the essentialist underpinnings of the discourse we all otherwise inhabit by default” (xx). One can arrive at a clearer picture by combining the elucidation of experience with interrogation of “the historical processes that, through discourse, position subjects and produce their experiences” (Joan Scott 779). While I do attend to these historical processes and discourses, on both an “official policy” level and that of quotidian practice, I think it is important to read these processes in reverse as well, through individual (and subjective) experience. For without taking into consideration individual experience, we run the risk of missing out on what Clifford Geertz has called “the informal logic of actual life” (17).

I also acknowledge that my own personal experience intervenes; I make no claim of complete objectivity or scientific distance. Again following Warrior, I agree that “(m)eaning is derived from the space between [the writer and the reader], and its production occurs in a context that includes everything that goes into producing the text and also what goes into making the writer and the reader who they are” (xiv–xv). Since a substantial portion of the research for this project included working with native speakers in formal and informal settings—for example, individual and group readings, participant observation in Nahua communities, and interviews with indigenous intellectuals—what appears on these pages is really a description of the meaning I found in between those spaces of “me” (with my own cultural baggage), my interactions with native speaker collaborators, and the texts.

## **Collaborative Methods**

This is a story about how Nahuas have written, not as passive receivers of official policies and dictum, but as critics and intellectuals, engaged in the understanding of their own past and the development of their future. But perhaps of equal importance this project is grounded in the idea that one must connect the “theorization of a population” with the population itself, that is, work collaboratively with native speakers to ensure that not only is this information returned to these communities, but that the opportunities of access to archives, texts, scholarly forums, and training, are afforded Nahuas in order to de-colonize access to, and scholarship on, Nahua cultural production.

Taking into account the example of anthropologists such as Franz Boas and Bronislaw Malinowski who insisted that to understand a community, one must understand its language (Duranti 5), in preparation for this project I began my study of Nahuatl language and culture at the Zacatecas Institute for Research and Teaching in Ethnology (IDIEZ). This project has been profoundly influenced by my own experience working with native and non-native speakers at IDIEZ, and throughout the research and writing of this dissertation I have attempted to take into consideration the main objectives of the Institute:

- the promotion of cultural heterogeneity as the stabilizing and integrating basis for Mexican society

- the construction of a model for higher education which allows indigenous students to become integrated into Mexican society as professionals, reinforce their ethnic identity and customs, and continue participating in the development of their community
- the sensitization and education of the general public in regards to the value and contents of ethnic cultures through direct contact with indigenous teachers
- the generation of knowledge about ethnic cultures past and present, making it available to the scientific community, the general public, and the indigenous communities themselves.<sup>14</sup>

While in residence at IDIEZ and in rural Nahuatl communities in Mexico, I participated in daily life, carried out formal and informal interviews, and organized focus groups with native speaker intellectuals where we read and discussed the texts and life stories that populate the following chapters.<sup>15</sup> It is through these experiences that I became acutely aware of what Bonfil-Batalla has discussed in his much-cited book *México Profundo* (1996): the intense preoccupation with the glorious Indians of the past and the outright disdain for the flesh and blood Indians of today, and all of the ideological maneuvering that entailed. Much to my dismay, but perhaps not surprisingly, it also became clear that for the most part Nahuas are unaware of their own cultural patrimony, particularly this written tradition, and face formidable challenges of access to the same. Anthropologists

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<sup>14</sup> See IDIEZ's website: [www.macehualli.org](http://www.macehualli.org).

<sup>15</sup> Institutional Review Board (IRB) permission granted to work with human subjects under the title "Contemporary Nahuatl Narrative from the Huasteca Region of Mexico" Study # 0612E97987 (valid January 2, 2007–January 2, 2010).

Kay Warren and Victor Montejo, among others, have roundly criticized the fact that “few foreign investigators spend substantial amounts of time working with indigenous researchers and students, enabling them to gain access to the analytical skills routinely taught at national and foreign universities” (3). With this in mind, and heeding Linda Tuhiwai-Smith’s call to “demystify, to decolonize” scholarship (16), as part of this dissertation project I have dedicated efforts to sharing information (the texts themselves), providing practical instruction in gaining access to documents (for example how to enter and navigate archives), and modeling approaches and methods of analysis. This has also meant ensuring access to equipment, paying fair wages to colleagues involved in this project’s focus groups, and creating opportunities for Nahuas to disseminate their work.<sup>16</sup>

At IDIEZ I benefited greatly from working individually and in groups with native speakers, and will occasionally elaborate issues that arose from our meetings. For example, in the chapter on Luz Jiménez (Chapter Three), I discuss comments by focus group participants regarding their own experiences of assimilative education. However, I must be clear that reporting all results from these sessions is not the focal point of this project. The goal was *not* to mine natives for information that I could publish. Instead my aim was to cultivate equitable, respectful, and productive engagement between colleagues. The focus groups were a manner in which to demonstrate a *dialoguing with* and *learning from* a people that have traditionally been talked *at* and written *about* (Rappaport 83). The group meetings provided an opportunity to share knowledge and

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<sup>16</sup> Examples include the organization of the December 2008 Special Session at the Modern Languages Association annual meeting entitled “Indigenous Languages as Modern Languages,” and co-organization of three panels on Nahuatl language, culture, and history at the May 2010 Native American and Indigenous Studies Associate meeting, in which native speakers were actively recruited for participation.

texts that refute the explicit and implicit (yet erroneous) message of indigenous inferiority that has been the leitmotif of the post-conquest centuries. The texts discuss a variety of topics such as how the Nahuatl language ought to be written and taught, educational theory and land confiscation problems, community histories, *costumbre* and ceremony, first-hand accounts of assimilative education, and even the State's attempts to co-opt indigenous people themselves in the scheme of de-Indianization. All of the themes we encountered were issues that are of concern in the present day for the focus group participants. A reincorporation of these kinds of texts to Nahua cultural memory has the potential to not only affect the self-esteem of Nahua community members,<sup>17</sup> but also to inform decisions in regards to these issues today.

These collaborative methods are indebted to the approaches of Paulo Freire (Brazil) and John Dewey (United States). Freire's essay "Creating Alternative Research Methods" has served as guide for how I have attempted to connect my work with the Nahua community. Understanding reality as a "dialectical relationship between objectivity and subjectivity," Freire's methods included community members as researchers (30). I agree with Freire's rationale for this approach:

If I am interested in knowing the people's way of thinking and levels of perception, then the people have to think about their thinking and not be only the object of my thinking. This method of investigation involves study—and criticism of the study—by the people is at the same time a learning process. Through this *process* of

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<sup>17</sup> After a few weeks of focus group work, one of the participants said "so all this time they have been lying to us." When I asked who it was that had been lying, the person responded "the school teachers; they always said we are *burromeh* (donkeys, stupid)."

investigation, examination, criticism, and reinvestigation, the level of critical thinking is raised among all those involved. Thus, in doing research, I am educating and being educated with the people. (30, my italics)

Like Freire, John Dewey's focus is also on the process—as opposed to the end goal—of education, and I extend this paradigm to research collaborations. Deweyan scholar Alison Kadlec explains that “[i]n Dewey's view, education does not *prepare* us for anything, it is rather the *process* by which we develop our capacities as self-directing human beings capable of creative collaboration in a changeful world” (56). Working and speaking (and stumbling very clumsily) in Nahuatl with native speaker colleagues was aimed at simply sharing knowledge, but a welcomed side effect of this *process* was that some of the traditional power structures normally associated with outsider academics and indigenous people were disrupted. Through this process, the groundwork was laid for more dialogue and future collaborative research.

### **Chapter Summaries**

This introduction has served as a general presentation of the area of study, the guiding research questions, theoretical considerations, and specific terms. I also discussed the collaborative nature of my multi-sited research.

In the first chapter, I focus on religious education and native language legislation in the Early Colonial Period, including what I characterize as the containment of Indians. I analyze the work of Antonio del Rincón (1566–1601), a Jesuit priest and grammarian,

descended from the royal house of Texcoco. Rincón, perhaps the only indigenous man ordained by the Jesuits during the Colonial Period, is also the first indigenous person in the Americas to write a grammar and linguistic treatise of his own language, *Arte mexicana* (1595). I carry out a detailed discourse analysis of Rincón's text alongside the two earlier extant Nahuatl grammars (non-native speakers Andrés de Olmos and Alonso de Molina), in an effort to identify linguistic and social transitions of the time. This analysis points to the slippery social terrain and the broad spectrum of indigenous experience during the late sixteenth century. I also discuss issues of what the native speaker can tell us that the non-native speaker could not, or did not, in regards to the language, in this case the phonological aspects of Nahuatl.

In the second chapter I discuss the rhetoric of nation-building during the nineteenth century, including the denial and disappearance of Indigenous people in the discourse of citizenship. To this end I conducted research at the Archivo Histórico of the Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia in Mexico City to analyze the career and writings of Faustino Galicia Chimalpopoca (1802?–1877), Nahua politician, attorney, scholar of Colonial Nahuatl texts, and personal Nahuatl teacher and interpreter to Emperor Maximilian I. I contend that Chimalpopoca's outspoken support of the short-lived French occupation of Mexico (1864–1867) has unjustly relegated him to an unpopular footnote in Mexican historiography and Nahuatl letters. I also highlight how his far-reaching activism in securing and assuring indigenous rights as full citizens demands a revisiting of his profile as an important nineteenth century intellectual.



In the third chapter, I highlight the scientific, economic, and anthropological discourses of Social Darwinism manifested in the nation's resolve to deal with the "Indian problem" of the early twentieth century. I analyze the testimony of Doña Luz Jimenez (1897–1965), native speaker of Nahuatl from Milpa Alta, who among other professions was a muse and model for many artists, notably working with Diego Rivera and Jean Charlot. Luz's tales of day-to-day life, myths, her first-hand perspective of the Mexican Revolution, and her own experience with assimilative schooling come to us as a joint project with Mexican anthropologist Fernando Horcasitas, who hired Luz as both a linguistic informant and co-teacher of the Nahuatl language.

In the fourth chapter I explore bilingual education in Mexico and the co-optation of Indigenous peoples to promote assimilation to dominant culture norms in the latter half of the twentieth century. To this end I focus on the work of Nahua writer, artist, and teacher, Ildfonso Maya-Hernández (1936– ). I analyze Maya's play *Ixtlamatinij* (The Learned Ones), a critique of bilingual education and its affects in the indigenous communities, and also discuss a series of personal interviews with the author in 2008 and 2009.

By way of conclusion, in the final chapter I address the key factors that fostered this kind of Nahua indigenous intellectual production and outline areas for future research. These protagonists serve as guideposts and can point to other areas of Nahua intellectual activities, leading to a more coherent narrative of the post-conquest Nahua intellectual tradition.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The reader will note that the Nahuatl texts I reproduce in the following chapters do not follow a single unified orthography. While I discuss this more fully in Chapter Three (Doña Luz Jiménez), suffice it to say that the lack of a standardized orthography is one of the hallmarks of Nahuatl writing (Karttunen, *Analytical Dictionary* xii). These orthographic variations reflect the different approaches, writers, dialects,

A final question remains, and that is “why *these* particular people as representative intellectuals”? In all honesty the decision-making process was based primarily on practicality, having much to do with the fact that each person was already mentioned—although for the most part quite briefly—in the literature of several disciplines. A “blip” on the radar in narratives of the Golden Age of Nahuatl, Antonio del Rincón stood out in his role as a “first”: first Jesuit grammarian of an indigenous language, first native speaker to write a linguistic treatise in the Americas, and first to identify contrastive vowel length of the language in a systematic way (Wright-Carr 40). Faustino Chimalpopoca caught my eye for being repeatedly and quite energetically criticized by twentieth-century historian and *nahuatlato* Ángel María Garibay Kintana, who claimed that Chimalpopoca had made a mess of Colonial Studies. Present-day art historians have been far more attracted to the image of Luz Jiménez than literary critics have been to her words, yet it was linguist Frances Karttunen’s narrative of Luz’s life in her book *Between Worlds* (1994) that piqued my interest. Not to mention that her testimony of the Mexican Revolution is the one of the rare accounts recorded in an indigenous language. Finally, Ildefonso Maya-Hernández was brought to my attention by Donald Frischmann, who promised to introduce me to this modern-day *tlacuilo* and playwright. I was motivated to include Maya’s work in the theater as a pointed response to Diana Taylor who, in *Theatre of Crisis: Drama and Politics in Latin America* (1991), stated that Latin Americans lack the option of “using their native languages in a step toward cultural decolonization [...] most playwrights have no ‘native’ languages to turn to; they would have to learn them

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and audiences of the texts. My own experience with Nahuatl has been primarily with contemporary Huastecan variations (Veracruz, Hidalgo).

and even then they could address only miniscule populations” (34).<sup>19</sup> “There is no question,” Taylor continues, “of returning to a native drama” (35). This is not the case; Maya’s work is but one example that disrupts this pessimistic pronouncement. I did not purposefully choose these protagonists in order to demonstrate such a wide diversity of perspectives, experiences, or affinities. This is, however, precisely what occurred. I only hope that these chapters do justice to the extraordinary, courageous, complex individuals that I have attempted to know better through this project.

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<sup>19</sup> Inés Hernández-Ávila first pointed this out in her essay “The Power of Native Languages and the Performance of Indigenous Autonomy: The Case of Mexico.” I am grateful for her example, and subsequent encouragement to continue this path of research.

## **Chapter One: Antonio del Rincón: Priest and Grammarian (1555–1601)**

This chapter focuses on indigenous experience in Mexico during the Early Colonial Period, as read through the Nahuatl intellectual tradition exemplified by Antonio del Rincón (1555–1601). A Jesuit priest descended from the royal house of Texcoco, and first indigenous person in the Americas to write a grammar/linguistic treatise of his own language, *Arte mexicana* (1595), Rincón has been called “el primer lingüista nativo del Nuevo Mundo” (Guzmán-Betancourt 386) (the first native linguist of the New World). The pages that follow explore the rapidly changing social landscape of New Spain during the first one hundred years of colonization through the figure of Rincón, perhaps the only indigenous person ordained by the Jesuits in the Early Colonial Period (Decorme 251). Rincón’s context and activities as an indigenous intellectual provide a platform from which to discuss official Spanish Crown and Catholic Church policies and practices aimed at rendering the formerly stratified indigenous societies into a singular manageable entity. Taking a macro-perspective, a focus on linguistic and educational legislation, along with Church and Crown policies regarding the formation of an Indian clergy, I highlight the dominant culture strategies to mold the original inhabitants of the so-called New World into obedient subjects and Christians through law. The final section of this chapter moves to a more detailed analysis Rincón’s experience with the Jesuits, along with his grammar. By contextualizing his work with the other two extant sixteenth-century Nahuatl grammars and their authors, I explore the role of the indigenous intellectual in the alphabetization and grammaticalization of the Nahuatl language.

In his discussion on the sub-discipline of legal anthropology, or the study of how legal phenomena affects human cultures, Peter Just points out that at times in our rush to read power, discourse, and culture in the law, we overlook the *real-world experiences* of law (35, my emphasis). By coordinating Rincón's experience with official dicta, one is afforded an example of how Indians shaped and responded to laws in New Spain, and also how they repeatedly transgressed the boundaries erected to locate and maintain the "Other" in an inferior position in the social, political, and economic hierarchy. In fact many indigenous people such as Rincón proved to be extraordinarily capable of negotiating, appropriating, and deploying the genres, discourses, symbolic, and physical spaces of power. The barriers of containment erected by the Crown and Church were actually quite porous, challenged from within the very ranks that sought to dictate the social/racial hierarchy. Even as the social roles of Indians were dictated, indigenous people were still able to transgress the limits of the imposed social boundaries and were able to advance their own agendas. In the case of Rincón, his agenda happened to be Christian evangelization and teaching the Nahuatl language to other priests so that they could better preach to and confess the Indian population.

Indians that were "resistant" during the Early Colonial Period—for example don Pablo Nazareo de Xacoltán who wrote a letter in Latin to King Philip II demanding restitution and privileges reflecting his rank as a noble Indian, or don Carlos Ometochtzin Chichimecatecutli, the first Indian burned at the stake in New Spain (November 30, 1539) for continuing to practice his (idolatrous) religion—have tended to gather much of the critical attention in recent times, while a somewhat conservative figure such as

Rincón has received scant consideration.<sup>20</sup> Yet Rincón and others like him are also crucial to understanding the colonial experience. My aim here, as opposed to judging Rincón in terms of assimilation or resistance to the colonial project, is to examine how this particular intellectual experienced what Phil Deloria has termed the “wreckage and the opportunity generated by colonial encounters” (7). Of course, I do not mean to imply that we can look to Rincón as having *the* sixteenth-century Nahua perspective and experience (i.e. we can’t assume that one Indian speaks for the whole). My description of his trajectory is meant instead to be suggestive of one of the many possible experiences in what Mary Louise Pratt has termed the “contact zone.” Pratt’s often-cited and useful term describes “the space of colonial encounters [...] in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (6). It is precisely in the contact zone where we will locate Rincón in his role as cultural and linguistic mediator between Indians and the Catholic Church.

One of the more intriguing figures of the contact zone is the native intermediary. Often a young man from a “prominent family,” Indians such as Rincón benefited from an education that rendered them “alphabetically, bureaucratically, and legally bicultural, bilingual, and literate” (Yannakakis xii–xiii). Responsible for communication and mediation across ethnic, political, and religious lines, these individuals made possible the exchange of symbolic and material power between cultures (Burkhart, *Holy Wednesday*

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<sup>20</sup> Don Pablo Nazareo’s letters in Latin, with translation to Spanish, can be found in Ignacio Osorio Romero’s *La enseñanza del latín a los indios* (1990). Regarding don Carlos Ometochtzin, see Patricia Lopes Don’s essay “The 1539 Inquisition and Trial of Don Carlos of Texcoco in Early Mexico,” and Charles Gibson’s, “Aztec Aristocracy in Colonial Mexico.”

59). The indigenous cultural mediator as ethnographer or historian has been explored by Rolena Adorno in her discussion of *indio ladinos* (culturally mixed or Hispanicized Indian) such as Guaman Poma, El Inca Garcilaso, Hernando Alvarado Tezozomoc, and Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl to name a few.<sup>21</sup> Adorno presents this group as being charged with the task of being “twice ethnographers,” in that they “not only mapp[ed] their own systems of cultural practice and belief but also—and implicitly—mapp[ed] and respond[ed] to those of their culturally European readers” (“The Indigenous Ethnographer” 383). The same could be said of those working with or within the religious orders on issues of language, such as students at the Colegio de Santacruz de Tlatelolco, or our protagonist Rincón. However, by working between Nahuatl, Latin, and Castilian to create the “conduits of communication across the lines of colonial power” (Errington 4), perhaps the appropriate moniker would be “thrice linguists.” The scholarly reframing of these *indio ladinos* involved in linguistic/cultural analyses as intellectuals in their own right has been recently carried out by Silvermoon in her 2007 dissertation *The Imperial College of Tlatelolco and the Emergence of a New Nahua Intellectual Elite in New Spain (1500–1760)*. This chapter works along these lines reading Rincón as an early contributor to the post-conquest Nahua intellectual tradition.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Containment of Indians**

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<sup>21</sup> The definitions of *indio ladino* are varied, some with positive connotations and others negative. See Adorno 379–381.

<sup>22</sup> See also Rocío Cortés’ essay “The Colegio Imperial de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco and its Aftermath: Nahua Intellectuals and the Spiritual Conquest of Mexico” and Manuel Aguilar Moreno’s essay “The *Indio Ladino* as Cultural Mediator in the Colonial Society” for a listing of Nahua individuals that can and should form part of the Nahua intellectual tradition.

To situate Rincón in his historical moment, this study refers to the Crown and Church theories and decrees found in the copious administrative and legal documentation. Aimed at the containment of Indians in New Spain, this corpus consistently demonstrates the logic of coloniality. Walter Mignolo argues that coloniality is exercised in the following four interwoven “domains of human experience”:

- 1) the economic: appropriation of land, the exploitation of labor, and the control of finance;
- 2) the political: control of authority;
- 3) the civic: control of gender and sexuality; and
- 4) the epistemic and subjective/personal: control of knowledge and subjectivity (*Idea of Latin America* 11)

This chapter will focus primarily on the political and epistemic domains by reading Rincón as a knowing subject who actively participated in the propagation of his chosen religion and the description of his language.

The sixteenth century is marked by a progressive decline of the status of Indians and the reduction of their economic, political, and social power. Pre-conquest central Mexican indigenous society was highly stratified, and initially the Spanish Crown recognized and supported this hierarchy. However by the 1540s, consistent efforts were made to compress and reorganize Indians “toward a singular level and condition,” inferior to *peninsulares* and *criollos* (Gibson, *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule* 153).



Outlining the Spanish imperial project of turning “caciques into indios,” Christin Cleaton reviews the racial/ethnic tensions of this context resulting in the establishment of social boundaries and their concomitant subversions during the first century of colonization. Cleaton rightly reminds us that while high-ranking Indians in Central Mexico were able to maintain a degree of power in the constantly shifting social terrain as cultural intermediaries—as translators, informants, cabildo members, and governors—these powers were modified and progressively restricted.<sup>23</sup> The same can be said of the role of the Indian (initially) destined for the clergy. In reading Rincón, this study focuses on the changes in the perceived place of Indians in New Spain as evident in linguistic and educational decrees from the Crown and Church regarding native populations, as well as the findings of the Mexican Provincial Councils. Of particular interest here is the First Mexican Provincial Council in 1555 and the Third in 1585, detailing the intellectual and spiritual capacities of native peoples and whether or not they could or should attain the priesthood. At the same time, Rincón’s experience will be contrasted to official policy in order to highlight how analyzing only legal/administrative texts without taking into consideration the actual experience of the decrees offers a limited view of the colonial experience.

### **Religious Orders in Early Colonial New Spain**

A story about a Nahua priest responsible for the first Jesuit grammar of an indigenous language can not help but invoke the mendicant orders of New Spain—responsible for

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<sup>23</sup> See also Hugo Nutini and Barry Isaac’s *Social Stratification in Central Mexico, 1500–2000*, 39–43; Emma Pérez-Rocha and Rafael Tena, *La nobleza indígena del centro de México después de la conquista*.

the orthographic representation and categorical descriptions of indigenous languages—and their role in the intertwined relationships of colonization, evangelization, and education. While four orders (Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, and Mercedarians) were authorized by the Crown to preach in the New World, only the first three groups would begin the initial missionary projects of New Spain, the Franciscans in 1523, the Dominicans in 1526, and the Augustinians in 1533. The Jesuits would not arrive until 1572. Each of the orders dominated distinct geographical areas, worked in a wide variety of indigenous languages, and held unique views regarding baptism, confession, marriage, doctrine, education for Indians, and the formation of an indigenous clergy. Others have carried out exhaustive work detailing these issues; therefore I will draw on their findings to contextualize the time period previous to the arrival of the Jesuits and Rincón's experience as one of the first novices of the Company of Jesus.<sup>24</sup> It is pertinent to a discussion of Rincón's experience as indigenous priest and grammarian to briefly discuss two of the more important issues that marked the first fifty years of missionary work in New Spain: the role of language in empire (both the Holy Roman and the Spanish), and the perceived spiritual and intellectual capacities of the Indian.

The earliest arrivals to Central Mexico, the Franciscans, were the first group to work with the Nahuas. The friars were keenly interested in baptizing as many converts as possible (as opposed to subjecting them to lengthy instruction and selective baptism), and

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<sup>24</sup> For example, see Robert Ricard's now classic *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico* that discusses the Franciscan, Dominican, and Augustine orders at length and José María Kobayashi's *La educación como conquista: Empresa franciscana en México* which expertly addresses the relationship between Franciscan evangelization and education of Indians. For the Dominican Order, see Pedro Fernández Rodríguez, *Los dominicos en el contexto de la primera evangelización de México, 1526–1550*. See also Pilar Gonzalbo Aizpura, *Educación y colonización en la Nueva España, 1521–1821*.

were also initially quite optimistic in their intention to educate and train elite indigenous men for the priesthood. The Dominicans had nearly exclusive domain over the areas south of Mexico City, in what are today the states of Morelos and Puebla, the Mixtec and Zapotec regions in Oaxaca, and in Chiapas (Gonzalbo 45; Heath 22). Unlike the Franciscans, the Dominicans found the Indians to be perpetual neophytes, incapable of fully learning Christian doctrine; therefore they were more hesitant to baptize them. Nor did the Dominicans ever intend to establish an Indian clergy, and as such found higher education for Indians to be unnecessary. They were also highly suspect of teaching Latin to Indians as the “unskilled” use of Latin would result in heretical readings of sacred scriptures (Kobayashi 231–4). The Augustinians worked with the populations beyond Mexico City, to the east with the Nahuatl, Otomí, Huastec and Totonac-speaking communities, in Michoacán with the Tarascan and Matlalzinca people, and to the south with speakers of Tlapanec and Ocuilteco (Heath 22). Similar to the Dominicans, the Augustinians were highly concerned with “proper instruction” prior to baptism, and did not perceive the place of the Indian to be as a member of the clergy.

The Jesuits, relatively late arrivals to the scene, commenced their work in New Spain in 1572 after receiving authorization from King Philip II. Well known for their missions in the unwelcoming northern reaches of the Spanish empire and in present-day Puebla (where Rincón would later be influential as the first rector of San Gerónimo), they were also quite active in Mexico City, responsible for establishing the famous centers of learning such as El Colegio Máximo (Colegio de San Pablo y Pedro), the Seminario de San Ildefonso, the Casa Profesa, the Colegio de San Gregorio, and the Colegio de San

Andrés. The Jesuit's tardy appearance was to their benefit in that they could see what had worked—and what had failed—in the experience of the other three orders. For the most part, conversion and ministering to Indians in New Spain was understood as best carried out in the native languages, not through Castilian. Therefore, like the other religious orders, the Jesuits preached in the indigenous language. The obligatory study of indigenous languages for all of members, regardless of rank, was in fact the hallmark of the Jesuit's linguistic policy (Guzmán-Betancourt 389). However, just as the conquistadors had been jealous with their translators, the other religious orders were not apt to “share” adept translators with the Jesuits. Add to this that at precisely the same time that the Jesuits arrived, Philip II had declared Nahuatl the language for all Indians of New Spain.<sup>25</sup> In order to be successful, the Jesuits needed to work closely with educated native speakers of the dominant indigenous language, such as Rincón. To be clear, this does not mean that there was no intent or attempt to teach Castilian to the Indian population. As the following section will detail, on the theoretical plane the Castilian language was indeed part and parcel of the Crown's plan for organizing the colony. However the logistics, practicality, and sometimes competing priorities of the Crown and the Church, made for broad differences between theory and practice, as demonstrated in the following section.

### **Language and Education for Indians**

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<sup>25</sup> The 1570 decree declaring Nahuatl the lingua franca can be found in *Cédulas reales*, vol. 47, Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City.

The linguistic and educational policies and practices of the Crown and Church during the Early Colonial Period speak to the shifting terrains of social power in New Spain. This period is marked by attempts to control racial/ethnic/social identities that were met with constant subversion, highlighting the fissures in the social landscape that allowed for indigenous participation in shaping and responding to changes. Pertinent to a more focused discussion of Rincón's experience as grammarian/linguist and priest, the following brief detour outlining sixteenth-century linguistic and educational policies provides a framework for understanding the role of language in Colonial Mexico.

Even before Hernán Cortés' arrival in Tenochtitlán, the 1512 Laws of Burgos had already established "the who and the how" of the education of Indians in the New World. Commencing the conquest of Aztec territory in 1519, the Spanish Crown initially established the *encomienda* system that rewarded the conquistadors for their efforts by supplying them with Indian labor and tribute. Spanish encomenderos "owning" more than fifty Indians were responsible for their evangelization and education. The proposed method to achieve this was that one Indian would memorize Latin prayers, learn the Castilian language, and receive instruction of the new religion in his native tongue. He would then go on to teach the rest of the Indians (Heath 8). From very early on it became apparent that not only was this impractical, the directive was largely ignored by the encomenderos who were much more concerned with organizing and controlling labor than teaching Castilian and evangelizing. In fact, recognizing the difficulties of this situation, as early as 1524 Cortés wrote to King Charles V requesting that the clergy (not the ecomenderos) take over the responsibilities of indigenous conversion and instruction

(Heath 13).<sup>26</sup> By 1535, King Charles V officially turned this enormous task over to the Church, and informed New Spain's Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza that all religious representatives must learn an Indigenous language and that the Indians were to learn Spanish (Heath 14).<sup>27</sup> Heath tells us that "[e]ncomenderos and Crown administrators were ordered to provide schools for the sons of Indian caciques, or local chieftains. In these schools, under the tutelage of friars, the young men would learn 'Christianity, good customs, civility, and the Castilian tongue'" (Heath 14).<sup>28</sup>

Evangelization and education were organically linked to the imposition of new cultural norms, but it is important to remember that the Church's main goal was to evangelize, not Hispanicize (Heath 15). While the Crown's wish was that priests would eventually teach the Indians the Castilian language, the mendicants concentrated their efforts on learning and preaching in the indigenous language and teaching Latin, the language of the Church.

The Franciscans complied with the Crown's desire for teaching "Christianity, good customs, and civility" according to European norms by opening schools for indigenous elites, but Castilian had little importance or presence in the curriculum. The classic example is the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco, where the Franciscans were known to have often bypassed the Castilian language all together, and instead taught the *pipiltin* Latin, through Nahuatl (Gonzalbo 57). If it was the Spanish Crown's intention to extend

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<sup>26</sup> See Hernán Cortés's October 15, 1524, letter to Charles V in *Cartas y relaciones de Hernán Cortés al emperador Carlos V*.

<sup>27</sup> This 1535 decree would again be repeated in 1540 by Charles V (and again by Philip III in 1619 and 1618). See *Recopilacion de leyes*, I, 211–12. Lib. I, tit. XXIII, ley 11.

<sup>28</sup> See *Recopilacion de leyes*, I, 211–12. Lib. I, tit. XXIII, ley 11. Originally published in 1535, reissued again by Charles V in 1540, Philip III in 1619 and 1618.

the Castilian language to Crown subjects, the actual practice of the religious orders was to evangelize and educate in the indigenous language and occasionally Latin.<sup>29</sup>

By 1542, the *encomenderos* had become perhaps too powerful, therefore the New Laws declared that the Indians were no longer their property, but were to be transferred as “free vassals” to the Crown. With these laws Charles V effectively reduced the power of the far-away *encomendero* class in the colonies, and compressed indigenous hierarchies into one lump of “subjects,” diminishing that group’s claims to power as well. Soon thereafter, in 1550 Charles V again decreed that Castilian should be the language of the Christian educational program organized by the friars. This time his stated rationale was that the mysteries of the Catholic faith were unattainable in the indigenous languages. Interestingly, he does not insist on Latin for Christian instruction. In his opinion, Castilian would not only suffice, but would be the ideal language of Christianity. He also declared that this education should be extended to all Crown subject, not just the native elite (Heath 19–20).<sup>30</sup> In this singular decree it appears that the monarch attempted to clarify the pecking order, establishing Castilian (and by extension the Spanish Crown) above Latin (the Vatican) and indigenous languages (natives). However, this bold assertion had little effect on the ground in New Spain, where the friars continued to enjoy more immediate results by working in the indigenous languages.

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<sup>29</sup> Some suggest that behind the idea of evangelization in indigenous languages was to ensure that the majority of Indians remained linguistically isolated, further ensuring that they would be separated from the bad influence of the Spaniards. Or perhaps it was shrewd job protection on the part of the friars; if the Indians could not speak Spanish, the religious men would always be necessary to bridge both worlds (Ricard 52).

<sup>30</sup> See *Recopilacion de leyes* II, 193. Lib. VI, tit I, ley 18 issued June 7, July 17, 1550.

It seems that Charles V had also begun to sense that the Franciscans were becoming too powerful, and by extension the natives associated with them. In that same year he sent word to the Dominican and Augustinian Provincials, requesting that they agree with his plan of establishing Castilian as the language of religion. It is not surprising that Charles V would attempt to ally with the Dominican and Augustinian orders in light of the fact that these groups traditionally viewed Indians as neophytes and had no designs of establishing an Indian clergy, as did the Franciscans. The monarch would need to do everything in his power to manage and control from so far away, and this included ensuring that Indians did not go beyond their defined social boundaries as vassals of the Crown. He did not even attempt to persuade the Franciscans, leaving them oblivious to his conversations with the other two orders.<sup>31</sup>

Charles V's problems centered on wrangling a jumble of factions that all believed themselves to have prestige and rights, and his son Philip II was also saddled with the conundrum of how to manage the expansive and unruly empire from afar. A nagging problem was that Indians had become increasingly adept at moving within the new social system, with many of the elite indigenous men having benefited from their education with the friars.<sup>32</sup> As Barbara Fuchs argues, whereas the goal in educating Indians was "to reinforce existing class hierarchies [...] the nobles thus taught did not learn to be willing subjects of the colonial masters, but rather their equals" (20). Especially in their roles as

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<sup>31</sup> See "Al provincial de la orden de Santo Domingo de la Nueva España: Que procure como todos los religiosos de su orden enseñen a los indios la lengua castellana, Valladolid 1550" in García and Pereyra, *Documentos inéditos o muy raros para la historia de México*. Vol. 15, 106–108.

<sup>32</sup> Clear examples of the double-edged sword of education for Indians can be found in Emma Pérez-Rocha and Rafael Tena's *La nobleza indígena del centro de México después de la conquista* which offers examples of forty Early Colonial documents written by Indians of New Spain (in Latin, Castilian, and Nahuatl), demanding restitution and privileges, many addressed to King Charles V and King Philip II.



intermediaries, educated indigenous men had the potential to dominate or take over important positions that the colonial structure was not prepared to concede since the economic success of New Spain depended on maintaining Indians in a subordinate social category (Pellicer 29; Gonzalbo 58). As such, Philip II's reign, 1554–1598 (coincidentally, nearly matching Rincón's lifetime [1555–1601]), was characterized by repeated attempts to legislate indigenous behaviors, including language.

In what seems to have been a flash of insight as to the linguistic realities of the New World, in 1565 Philip II declared that all missionaries ought to learn the language of *whatever indigenous group they were working with*. However, recognizing the difficulties that this directive posed, in 1572 he went against his own ruling by declaring Nahuatl the official language for *all* Indians in New Spain (Heath 26).<sup>33</sup> Whereas Heath reads this as Philip II's "iron sense of Christian mission" (26) aimed at simplifying the linguist kaleidoscope in order to better disseminate Catholic teaching in the colony, it could be argued that this was also a shrewd tactic to circumvent the potential unification of Indians and *criollos*/mestizos against the Crown. The universalization of Nahuatl indeed presents the idea of language as companion of empire, not only in terms of facilitating administrative tasks, but more importantly in maintaining distinct social/racial categories. Besides an administrative nightmare, Philip II also faced a population that was becoming increasingly racially mixed along with a new generation of *criollos* coming of age. By separating Indians and *criollos*—identifiable by spatial organization (*república de indios*

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<sup>33</sup>See Philip II's 1565 order, "A los prelados de Nueva España: Que procuren que los clérigos curas sepan el idioma de sus feligreses, Buengrado, 1565" in García and Pereyra, *Documentos inéditos o muy raros para la historia de México*. Volume 15, p. 163–5. The 1570 decree declaring Nahuatl the lingua franca can be found in *Cédulas reales*. Volume 47, Archivo General de la Nación, México.

and *congregaciones*), material identifiers codified in sumptuary laws, and now also by language—the racial/ethnic hierarchy would be clear. Understanding themselves as “different” members of society, subjects in the colony would not be inclined to unite against the Crown. Much like most other decrees during the Colonial Period in New Spain, the move to impose Nahuatl as official language of all of New Spain’s Indians demonstrated the Crown’s attempts to control the subjects of the empire by legislating economic, political, and social difference. However, along with Philip II’s decree intended to contain and control the New World population came new opportunities for power. The Jesuits, while latecomers, would respond to Philip II’s challenge with vigor and rapidly establish their own niche by adding to their ranks three priests, including the gifted *nahuatlato* Juan de Tovar, and eight native speaker students to their cause, one being Antonio del Rincón (Guzmán-Betancourt 386). It is important to note here the confluence of Philip II’s declaration of Nahuatl as *lengua general*, the arrival of the Jesuits, and the addition of Rincón to their ranks shortly thereafter. As a classic example of Foucault’s conceptualization of power as circulating through a “net-like organization” where people are “simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power” (98), Philip’s move to contain one group unwittingly created space for others to advance their own agendas.

Whereas the Jesuits (and native speakers such as Rincón) strategically responded to Philip II’s decree of Nahuatl for all Indian subjects, in many instances the decree was largely ignored. A unifying language for the indigenous population may well have been an easy solution to a series of Crown concerns in territories that already had contact with

Nahuatl. However it appears that the existence of substantial populations that had never had any contact with the Aztec empire or its language, particularly in areas where the Dominicans and Augustinians worked, was not fully considered (Heath 22–3). This is yet another example of the differences between theory and practice in the New World context, and demonstrates what historian James Lockhart has suggested as the hallmark of Spanish American administrative/legislative iteration: noncompliance. According to Lockhart, “legislation, regulations, and policies are declared intentions but cannot be presumed to have been carried out; in the Spanish American context in fact the presumption is very much in the other direction” (“Introduction” 6). In short, during the first one hundred years of the colony, the idea of linguistic colonization, or the Castilian language as “companion to empire,” was impractical in that the priests often served the Pope before the King. Theories articulated at an administrative level had little to do with the realities of quotidian life in the colony. Indeed, it would not be until the Bourbon Reforms of the eighteenth century that the idea of a single language for a single empire would be unilaterally deployed across the colonies and embraced by both Crown and Church.<sup>34</sup>

The previous section has outlined the framework of linguistic policies of the Early Colonial Period in order to demonstrate the necessity and utility of native speakers in the evangelization project being carried out by the religious orders. With this context in mind, from today’s perspective it would seem that Rincón’s experience as a native-

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<sup>34</sup> For more on the uneven installation of Spanish as language of Empire in the Early Colonial Period, see Juan Lodaes’s essay “Language, Catholicism, and Power,” where he argues that linguistic heterogeneity, differences in Crown theories and practices in terms of linguistic policy, and expansion of the Spanish language correlating with the Empire’s decline (as opposed to the Spanish language as technology of unilateral domination), were the defining characteristics of the time period.

speaker priest would have been the rule rather than the exception. But such was not the case; the ordination of Indians was extremely infrequent and controversial. The section that follows outlines official Crown and Church opinions regarding the place of indigenous men in the clergy during the Early Colonial Period in an effort to more precisely locate Rincón in his unique historical context as an indigenous Jesuit priest and indigenous language grammarian.

### **Indian/Mestizo Priests in the Early Colonial Period**

In 1524 the famous twelve Franciscans arrived in New Spain and, following the example of Pedro de Gante who had arrived one year earlier, began the process of evangelization. To do so they learned the dominant language of the power center, Nahuatl, and established primary schools for noble Indians. Stafford Poole characterizes this first stage of Franciscan work with Indians (1524–1555) as one of idealism in terms of both the mendicant’s perception of the effectiveness of their missionary efforts, and their goal of establishing an Indian clergy (“Church Law” 637). In line with the 1539 Junta Eclesiástica that decreed that Indians could be ordained to the four minor orders in preparation for the priesthood, Indians were *not* seen as “perpetual neophytes” by the religious powers, as would be the case later in the century (Poole, “Church Law” 640).

The second stage, punctuated by the Mexican Provincial Councils of 1555 and 1585, is characterized by the Franciscan’s realization that not all Indians would embrace (nor, according to the friars, understand) Christianity, which tempered their initial strong support of indigenous participation in the Church as priests. The Councils’ discussions

demonstrated increased caution in terms of indigenous education and access to sacred scriptures. The First Provincial Council of 1555 would formally exclude Indians (as well as mulattos and mestizos) from the priesthood. According to Poole here the Church appears to have accepted the “classic Spanish concept of *linaje maculado* (‘tainted or blemished lineage’ that rendered a person’s orthodoxy or capabilities suspect) and added the Indians and *castas* to it” (Poole “Church Law” 641). He also insightfully suggests that this move to bar Indians and mestizos from the priesthood was to ensure the status quo in the increasingly unstable racial/social hierarchy (Poole, “Church Law” 641).

The Mexican Provincial Councils would not be the only group debating the idea of Indians and the priesthood. The King and the Pope had opinions as well, and interestingly they were not in agreement, demonstrating increased tensions between the Crown and the Church. Between 1575 and 1578 Philip II issued a series of cédulas regarding what the (perhaps too) powerful religious orders and his Indian subjects were doing in *his* empire.<sup>35</sup> Sent to the archbishops and bishops in the colonies, the cédulas explicitly “forbade the ordination of mestizos” which Poole reads as a sign of anxiety over possible separatist movements among mestizos, arguing that “[i]t can be surmised that the social advancement involved in ordination to the priesthood was viewed as a potential power base for mestizo separatism” (“Church Law” 642–3). Demonstrating papal and royal disagreement, Pope Gregory XIII issued the *Nuper ad Nos* on January 25, 1577, which stated that “the illegitimate sons of Spaniards and Indian women, as also of Spaniards who live in the Indies, [can] receive all the orders, hear confessions, and preach the word

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<sup>35</sup> See Philip II’s letter “Al Arzobispo de Mexico: Que por ahora no de las ordenes a los mestizos, sino solo a personas de reconocida suficiencia, El Pardo, 1578” in García and Pereyra, *Documentos inéditos o muy raros para la historia de México*. Vol. 15, 215–16.

of God, provided they master the native language and have the qualities that the Council of Trent prescribes for ordination” (cf Poole, “Church Law” 641). The Vatican’s ruling had assessed the colony through the lens of Christian evangelization, not the consolidation of imperial Spain’s power. The reality the Pope interpreted was that of an increasingly mixed population and a chronic shortage of priests that were fluent in the native languages. With the Pope’s mention of the Council of Trent, we are also reminded that the Church was more concerned with its own internal divisions than Spain’s fears of separatism in the colonies. In this particular “war of the wills” the Pope was victorious in that he succeeded in securing the revocation of Philip’s cédulas in 1588 (“Church Law” 643).

For their part, the Mexican bishops that met for the Third Provincial Council of 1585 appear to have been intent upon a continued exclusion of Indians to their ranks in stating that “[w]hence also neither those of mixed blood, whether from Indians or Moors, nor mulattoes in the first degree are to be admitted to orders without great caution” (cf Poole, “Church Law” 644).<sup>36</sup> However, the wording of the decree was ambiguous enough to provide a loophole for Indians to enter the priesthood (Poole, “Church Law” 638–9).<sup>37</sup> Poole identified that from 1585 to 1591, there was in fact “no formal legal exclusion of Indians from the ranks of the clergy and only a qualified one for mestizos and other *castas*” (“Church Law” 639). The Provincial Council’s attempt to exclude Indians from

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<sup>36</sup> In regards to the deliberation of Indians and the priesthood at the Third Provincial Council, it is not clear to what extent the Franciscans and Jesuits participated in these conversations (Poole, “Church Law” 650).

<sup>37</sup> For further reading on the issue of the ordination of Indians see Juan Álvarez Mejía, “La cuestión del clero indígena en la época colonial”; Margarita Menegus and Rodolfo Aguirre’s *Los indios, el sacerdocio y la Universidad en Nueva España, Siglos XVI–XVIII*, and José Llaguno, S.J. *La personalidad jurídica del indio y el III Concilio Provincial Mexicano, 1585*.

the priesthood may have been a reflection of the heightened racial prejudices that demanded continued vigilance in order to maintain the colonial hierarchy. Ignacio Osorio-Romero points out that if the *peninsulares* or *criollos* accepted Indians as equals on the religious plane, they would be obliged to do so in civil society as well, something they were not willing to do (*La enseñanza v*). Ricard astutely asks “[w]ould the white population, especially the white clergy, have submitted to the orders of Indian bishops?” (Ricard 293). The fact that a native clergy was never developed answers this question.

Of course, as in the case of the differences between linguistic theory/legislation and quotidian practice, there were surely cases of Indians and mestizos entering the “clerical ranks under false designations” when social and racial prejudices were tempered by necessity (Poole “Church Law” 650; 641). “Practical accommodation” characterized the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries, explaining how Indians and mestizos were admitted to the clergy when legislation deemed this an impossibility (Poole, “Church Law” 637).

Taking into consideration the intense racial climate of the second half of the sixteenth-century New Spain and the politics surrounding the intellectual and spiritual capacities of the Indian as manifested in the Mexican Provincial Council papers, it is perhaps unusual, but not impossible that an Indian or mestizo would be admitted to the Company of Jesus. And while Rincón’s ordination in 1583 does not coincide with the “legal loophole” identified by Poole, we can certainly imagine to what extent the Jesuits obeyed the Pope before all other masters.

### **Teopixqui iamox: A Priest and His Book**

Historians place Antonio del Rincón's birth around 1555 and his death in 1601. General consensus is that he was from the royal house of Texcoco, in descent from the famous poet-tlatoani, Nezahualcóyotl, although there is a good deal of speculation regarding whether both of Rincón's parents were indigenous, or if he was mestizo. One source even suggests he was *criollo*: John Frederick Schwaller's reference in the 1973 Lilly catalogue states that Rincón was born of Spanish parents. The Jesuit historian Pérez de Ribas's data on Rincón is as follows: "Nació en la ciudad de Texcoco, cuatro leguas distante de la de México, de muy nobles y cristianos padres, los cuales le criaron en temor de Dios, en honestidad, en toda virtud [...] (130) (He was born in the city of Texcoco, four leagues from the city of Mexico, to very noble and Christian parents, who brought him up with fear of God, honesty, and virtue [...]). At first glance this reference to noble and Christian parents might evoke a Spanish blood line, but one must be mindful of two issues at play during this time period: 1) the common occurrence of noble Indians embracing Christianity, particularly those of Texcoco; and 2) the relative frequency of intermarriage between both noble Indian males and Spanish women, as well as Spaniards with high-born Indian women (Menengus and Aguirre 32–33). We cannot be sure if Rincón was a "pure" Indian, as Decorme calls him. However his much-cited connection to Texcocan nobility, and his innovative scholarship on contrastive vowel length and pronunciation of Nahuatl as recorded in his grammar, clearly mark him as a native speaker.

It is a distinct possibility that the varied reports regarding Rincón's ethnicity stem from his being ordained as a Jesuit priest during a time period when, as outlined above,



Indians were explicitly prohibited from ordination in the Provincial Council decrees as well as by the Spanish Crown. How could an Indian—or even a mestizo for that matter—have become an ordained priest? But we know that within the ranks of the Church certain concessions were made to respond to the realities of life in New Spain. Priests, specifically priests who knew native languages, were few and far between. Add to this that at the time of the Jesuit arrival, epidemics were again decimating the native population (small pox, measles, and then typhus) (Florescano and Malvido 187). Tending to the afflicted natives was increasingly necessary and priests with a command of the indigenous language were scarce. The Company of Jesus needed native speakers, particularly those who had a command of the Texcocan regional variety, considered by natives and non-natives alike to be the most refined and elegant manner of Nahuatl speech. Texcocan Nahuatl would appropriately reflect “the high seriousness of [the priests] sacred purpose, [the Indians would hear] in ‘lordly speech’ an echo of the authority of the true Faith” (Errington 39). Thus, a son of Texcoco would be an ideal recruit to the order in terms of linguistic abilities and as a manner of solidifying Christian ties with the *altepetl*.

### **Texcoco**

The *altepetl* of Texcoco, known as the pre-Cortesian intellectual center of the Aztec Triple Alliance (Tenochtitlán, Texcoco, and Tlacopan), had strong reactions to the arrival of the Spaniards and Christianity. For example, don Hernando Ixtlilxochitl (Ixtlilxochitl II, son of Nezahuapilli installed as ruler by Cortés) vigorously embraced Christianity and

European customs from the very beginning, and was even said to have threatened to burn his own mother alive if she didn't follow suit (*Códice Ramírez* 188). In return for Cortés selecting him as the new lord of Texcoco, Ixtlilxochitl ordered baptisms, Christian marriages and the establishment of a church (Lopes 580). The Flemish Franciscan, Pedro de Gante, began his Nahuatl language studies and evangelization project as a houseguest of don Hernando Ixtlilxochitl's family.

Other Texcocans notoriously resisted the imposition of the new religion, such as the case of don Carlos Ometochtzin Chichimecatecutli, (half-brother to Ixtlilxochitl), mentioned earlier as burning at the stake for continuing with his "idolatrous" ways. Taking into consideration the fact that Christianity was a prerequisite for maintaining or achieving any degree of power in the new social hierarchy (Gibson, "Aztec Aristocracy" 173–4; Gruzinski, *El poder* 61), that a young Indian boy such as Rincón would aim to become a Christian priest should come as no surprise. A grab for power or prestige, or the lesson of being burned at the stake for heresy might have "encouraged" Indian obedience to the new religion. However, it seems that Rincón's calling to the ministry was genuine, as suggested by the fact that he did *not* study at the famed Franciscan center of higher education for noble Indians, the Colegio de Santacruz de Tlatelolco.

### **Why Not El Colegio de Santacruz de Tlatelolco?**

Since the First Provincial Council in 1555, it had become clear that the initial Franciscan plan of forming an Indian clergy was no longer supported. Between 1546 and 1566, the Franciscans put the school at Tlatelolco in the hands of the *colegiales* (Indians trained at

the school during the initial years of operation), albeit officially still under Franciscan auspices (SilverMoon 49). This period is marked by a decline in the quality and prestige of the school, which Silvermoon explains was due to “corrupt Spanish overseers, plague decimations, loss of funding and support, and perhaps due to the scholars’ lack of experience at such endeavors as running an institution which they had no financial control nor final say [...] (49). The years that Rincón would have commenced his formal education are included in the “Textual Period” of Tlatelolco (1566–1590), when Fray Bernardino de Sahagún “assumed control of the school, shifting it toward a center for research, translation, and textual production” (Silvermoon 50). In short, during the time that Rincón was making decisions about his educational and professional future, Tlatelolco was no longer the most prestigious option for a noble-born Indian, nor was it a center of formation for Indian priests.

Instead, Rincón studied ecclesiastic law at the Real y Pontificia Universidad de México (Zambrano 489; Nagel 448), an institution founded in 1551 with the idea of offering an education such as that of Spain for “naturales e hijos de españoles, sin ninguna distinción” (Sánchez 294) (Indians and sons of Spaniards, with no distinction). Margarita Menegus and Rodolfo Aguirre explain that an education at the Real y Pontificia was a viable strategy utilized by the noble indigenous families to access not only the benefits and privileges of an education, but also as a way to attain the (secular) priesthood (58). Studying at the Real y Pontificia, and then a renewed possibility of joining a religious order with the arrival of the Jesuits (who we can presume were quite aware of his ethnicity, in fact may have found this attractive) would have been a dream

come true for an indigenous or mixed-blood man intent upon becoming a priest at this particular moment in time.

Rincón's experience with the Company of Jesus follows the classic Jesuit path leading to the priesthood.<sup>38</sup> Joining the Company of Jesus on August 25, 1573 as a novice, he took his first vows (as a brother) in September of 1575 (Nagel 448). From there he began his Scholastic period, normally a four year educational process with the first two years devoted to the humanities and arts (such as grammar and rhetoric), and the third and fourth year devoted to philosophy. During this time, Rincón is listed as studying at the Colegio de San Pedro y San Pablo (Osorio, *Colegios* 26). The next stage of the Jesuit education toward the priesthood, the Regency, is the period when the man is sent out from the monastery, generally to teach or carry out some form of ministerial work. For his Regency, Rincón was sent to Puebla de los Ángeles around 1578–79 and was instrumental in founding the Casa de la Compañía del Nombre de Jesús de Espíritu Santo and the Colegio de la Compañía de Jesús de San Gerónimo as its first rector (Zubillaga 78; Decorme 22). In Puebla, Rincón worked diligently toward the firm establishment of the Jesuit colegios. He is also cited by the Jesuit historians as regularly teaching grammar (Latin and Nahuatl), explaining Christian doctrine to the Indians, visiting the sick, and carrying his message to prisoners in the jails and the workers at the *obrajes* (sheep farms, quite akin to slave plantations). He would return to Mexico City in 1581 to study theology with Pedro de Ortigosa before being ordained on September 30, 1583 (Nagel 448–9). From here it appears that Rincón returned to Puebla to work as a priest and

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<sup>38</sup> I wish to thank Father Joseph Weiss, Ph.D., S.J. at St. Thomas More Catholic Community in St. Paul, Minnesota for explaining the path of Jesuit priesthood in detail.

confessor of Indians (Nagel 449). His trace is minimal again during what is termed a “Tertianship,” when the Jesuit traditionally embarks upon a period of contemplation, study, and prayer before petitioning for final vows, which he took in 1592 (Nagel 450). During this decade, Rincón is mentioned in the annals of Jesuit history as visiting Tepotzotlan and Mexico City where he was more than likely teaching Nahuatl to novices and priests. He would have commenced working on *Arte mexicana* in 1584, since as he explains in the grammar’s dedicatory letter to the Bishop of Tlaxcallan Diego Romano, dated Saint Ambrose’s Day in 1594, it took him ten years to complete.<sup>39</sup>

Through Rincón’s experience we are presented with an example of how in certain circumstances dicta and decrees were ignored in favor of practicality. We also witness how education, both secular and religious, created opportunities for social mobility. In the previous pages Rincón’s location in the historical context has been established by reviewing official linguistic and educational policy in relation to quotidian practice, as well as the perceived (and actual) place of Indians in the evangelization project. The missionaries astutely recognized from their initial contact with the Indians, that to identify and uproot pagan customs, replacing them with the new religion, they needed to learn the indigenous language. They also quickly realized that they could not do this without the participation of the native speaker, initially in the capacity of teacher and informant. The next section highlights the work of the alphabetization and

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<sup>39</sup> The choice of Saint Ambrose is appropriate, as this patron saint of bees and beekeepers was known for his eloquence in preaching, sometimes called the “honey-tongued” bishop. Now, with the help of Rincón’s *Arte mexicana*, the Jesuit priests could more eloquently, and therefore more successfully, instruct and cultivate the tender plants/flowers of God’s garden.

grammaticalization of Nahuatl by the religious orders, and Rincón's contribution to this tradition.

### **Writing and Fixing Languages**

It is common knowledge that the religious orders appropriated indigenous languages, wrote grammars, and recorded indigenous cultural history to better evangelize/colonize the so-called pagan populations of the Americas. The alphabetization of the indigenous languages made it possible for the priests to write grammars and dictionaries aimed at facilitating communication with the indigenous population and the collection of information on the cultures' current belief system and rhetoric to properly instruct the tenets of Christianity. As such, the languages themselves became, in Mignolo's words, "instruments of Christianization" (*The Darker Side* 54). The imposition of the Roman alphabet can indeed be seen as a suppression of one technology and the destruction or oppression of another; however, this alphabetic "lassoing" or "taming" of the indigenous languages was not a one-sided effort. Nahuatl appropriation of the alphabetic script, and of the Latin and Castilian languages, was just as much a "possession" (Fountain 264). From the very beginning, Indians energetically appropriated the new technology and utilized it to their own ends. Indigenous elites associated with the religious orders and their centers of learning were not simply instrumental, but crucial in the accumulation of written knowledge on their culture, which led, perhaps paradoxically, to the preservation of indigenous language and cultural knowledge. SilverMoon points out how indigenous students at Tlatelolco were connected to pre-colonial understandings of the world when

they researched pre-Hispanic texts and interviewed elders with Sahagún, even if his work was aimed at rooting out heresy (109). In discussing historical writings such as texts by Chimalpahin, Ixtlilxochitl, or Muñoz-Camargo, Mignolo identifies this paradox of the imposition of the letter by stating that “Western systems of writing and discursive genres were actually adapted and used by Amerindians in order to sustain their own cultural traditions” (*Darker Side* 204). Besides recording “their version” of history, the written word—in Latin, Nahuatl, and Castilian—was also regularly deployed by indigenous people to demand and defend property and hereditary rights throughout the Colonial Period. Yet others took on this technology of writing, not necessarily to preserve the old ways, but to support their own present-day agenda. Rincón is one such case, using his knowledge of the intricacies of the indigenous language to teach other Jesuits in order to better evangelize and tend to the Indian population. Regardless of the intent or audience of his work, as the author of one of the first three grammars of the Nahuatl language, Rincón is an early protagonist in the post-conquest Nahua intellectual tradition.

### **Artes y Vocabularios / Grammars and Dictionaries**

During the three hundred years of Imperial Spain’s rule of present-day Mexico, fifty-seven indigenous language grammars (*artes*) and dictionaries (*vocabularios*) were written, many to support the task of Indian conversion to Christianity. While the bulk of Colonial Period grammars and dictionaries dealt with the Nahuatl language,<sup>40</sup> other larger

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<sup>40</sup> The seventeen extant Colonial Nahuatl grammars and dictionaries are as follows: Grammars: Andres de Olmos, 1547; Alonso de Molina, 1571; Antonio del Rincón, 1595; Diego de Galdo Guzmán, 1642; Horacio Carochi, 1645; Agustín de Vetancourt, 1673; Juan Guerra, 1692; Manuel Pérez, 1713; Antonio Vázquez Gastelu, 1726; Carlos de Tapia Zenteno, 1753; José Agustín Aldama y Guevara, 1754; Ignacio de Paredes,

language-populations such as Otomí, Tarasca (Purépecha), Zapoteca, Mixteca, Maya, Totonaca, Popoluca, Malatzinca, Huasteca, Mixe, Cakchiquel, Tarahumara, and Tepehuana received their share of attention. Rincón's brief grammar and dictionary, *Arte mexicana* (1595) is not only one of the earlier examples of this genre, but also the very first written by a native speaker as well as first from the Jesuit order. *Arte mexicana* ranks sixth chronologically after the following works:

1. Andrés de Olmos (Franciscan) Nahuatl, *Arte para aprender la lengua mexicana* (1547)<sup>41</sup>
2. Maturino Gilberti (Franciscan) Tarasca, *Arte de la lengua tarasca ó de Michoacán* (1558)
3. Alonso de Molina (Franciscan) Nahuatl, *Arte de la lengua mexicana y castellana* (1571)
4. Juan Baptista de Lagunas (Franciscan) Tarasca, *Arte en lengua michuacana* (1574)
5. Antonio de los Reyes (Dominican), Tarasca, *Arte en lengua mixteca* (1593).<sup>42</sup>

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1759; Joseph de Carranza (siglo XVIII); Gerónimo Thomas de Aquino Cortez y Zedeño, 1765. Dictionaries: Alonso de Molina, 1555; Bernardino de Sahagún, 1590; Anónimo, 1590; Anónimo, 1598. See Catherine Fountain, *Colonial Linguistics in New Spain: The Nahuatl Tradition* and Gonzalo Aguirre-Beltrán, *Lenguas vernáculas*.

<sup>41</sup> The Olmos grammar was known to have circulated since 1547, but was not actually published until 1875 by Remí Simeón. For a detailed analysis of Olmos's extraordinary texts and pioneering efforts in ethnographic/linguistic matters in New Spain, see Georges Baudot, *Utopia and History in Mexico*, specifically Chapters Two and Three.

<sup>42</sup> See Gonzalo Aguirre-Beltrán *Lenguas vernáculas*, 205.



While a comparative study of the six sixteenth-century indigenous language grammars produced in New Spain would perhaps be enlightening, it does not fit in the scope of this chapter. Instead, the focus is on only the Nahuatl language texts—those of Olmos, Molina, and Rincón. In addressing their individual peculiarities and similarities, the intention is to again contextualize Rincón’s contribution, as well as highlight his work’s distinguishing characteristics. This chapter concludes with a brief philological comparison of the three works, pointing to future research in terms of reading grammars to reconstruct visions of Colonial society.

### **The First Nahuatl Grammars**

Published in 1595 by Pedro Balli, *Arte mexicana* is divided into five sections and includes a dictionary of approximately six hundred and fifty words.<sup>43</sup> In comparison with the other sixteenth-century Nahuatl grammars, Rincón’s is the most compact, with seventy-three pages devoted to grammatical explanation and nineteen to the dictionary (due to its brevity, the dictionary should perhaps be called a glossary). The so-called dean of Nahuatl studies, Ángel María Garibay, ranks Andrés de Olmos’s text as “uno de los mejores artes antiguos,” (one of the best older grammars) and Alonso de Molina’s as “excelente” (excellent), while Rincón receives a lukewarm “bueno” (good) (*Llave* 122). Garibay’s assessment of the grammars is accurate if the criterion used is whether or not one can use the text for self-study and/or actual work in the field. However while unified in certain aspects, each text is also stylistically distinct from the other and as such each

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<sup>43</sup> Pedro Balli, of Salamanca, Spain, was the fourth printer in the New World authorized by Philip II (in 1574).

has strengths in areas where the other does not. Olmos's oeuvre is much more an ethnographic text than the others, particularly with his inclusion of the *huehuetlahtolli* or exhortations of the Nahuatl elders (Baudot 225–234). For his part Molina, more widely known for his monumental dictionary *Vocabulario en lengua castellana y mexicana* (1555; 1571), demonstrates his talent for lexicography and is very user-friendly to the non-native speaker in that Nahuatl words are nearly always accompanied with their Castilian translation.<sup>44</sup> Rincón's work, on the other hand, appears much more concerned with the articulation of phonological aspects. Furthermore, Rincón's text is not particularly user-friendly since, in contrast to Olmos and Molina, he provides very few translations for the Nahuatl words he uses in the body of the text. Many, but not all, of the Nahuatl words in Rincón's grammar are instead found in his dictionary/glossary. Nor does Rincón include Nahuatl translations of prayers (such as Molina's detailed translation and gloss of the *Pater Noster*), or metaphorical phrases/sayings as spoken by elders (as in the final chapter of Olmos's grammar). Schwaller is correct in stating that "[Rincón's] grammar of Nahuatl represents not so much practical hints on how to use the language but a scholarly treatise on the structured language." The *Arte* was perhaps used more as a reference guide for a teacher in preparing class plans, as opposed to a tool for the autodidact, or a classroom textbook (Karttunen, "La contribución" 391). In terms of linguistic investigation, Rincón's contribution lies in his important insights and systematic documentation regarding key phonological aspects of the language, specifically his groundbreaking scholarship on contrastive vowel length and glottal stops that had

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<sup>44</sup> Regarding Molina's unparalleled bilingual dictionary, see Mary L. Clayton and R. Joe Campbell's essay "Alonso de Molina as Lexicographer" in *Making Dictionaries*.

previously eluded the non-native grammarians. Additionally, his list of forty word pairs and triplets provides clear examples of the perils of mispronunciation in Nahuatl. In the case of Rincón, Louise Burkhart's assertion that in writing grammars and dictionaries the friars "aim was translation, not linguistic investigation" does not necessarily apply (*Slippery Earth* 23). Besides distinct approaches in style and implied use, the three grammars, each separated by at least two decades, also bear witness to an evolving Nahuatl-centric approach to the explanations of the grammars. While each grammar is clearly indebted to the example of the great Spanish grammarian Antonio de Nebrija, the manner in which his example is engaged over the course of the century by these three first grammarians is markedly different.

### **Nebrija's Influence on Early Grammars of New Spain**

There is no doubt that Antonio de Nebrija has been extraordinarily influential in the New World. In the Early Colonial Period, it was not so much his famous treatise on Castilian (*Gramática de la lengua castellana* [1492]), as is commonly reported, but his earlier work on Latin (*Introductiones latinae* [1481]) that would provide the model for the categorical descriptions of indigenous languages (Lodares; Mignolo, *The Darker Side* 50). Like Olmos and Molina, Rincón's grammar acknowledges Nebrija's Latin grammar as a reference point, with no explicit mention of the Castilian grammar. Surely the early grammarians were aware of the Castilian grammar; however in reading their texts we are offered another example that in the realm of the religious orders, the Castilian language was not the monolithic "companion of empire." Below I reproduce the three

grammarians' narratives regarding the influence of Nebrija's grammar on their New World texts, followed by an analysis of their engagement with Nebrija and his work:

**Olmos:** En el arte de la lengua latina creo que la mejor manera y orden que se ha tenido es la que Antonio de Lebrixa sigue en la suya; pero porque en esta lengua no cuadrara la orden que el lleua **por faltar muchas cosas** de las quales en el arte de gramatica se haze gran caudal como son declinaciones, supinos y las especies de los verbos para denotar la diversidad dellos, y lo que en el quinto libro se trata de acentos y otras materias que **en esta lengua no se tocan**, por tanto no sere reprehensible si en todo no siguiere la orden del arte de Antonio. (9)

(In regards to the grammar of the Latin language I believe that the best method and order is evidenced in that of Antonio de Lebrixa; but since in this language the order doesn't quite match the way he outlines Latin because **it lacks many things** that in grammars one normally sees much of such as declensions, nominalized verbs, and the type of verbs used to note their differences, and that which in [Nebrija's] fifth book dealing with accents and other materials that **in this language are not utilized**, therefore I won't be reprehensible if I don't follow exactly the same order as in Antonio's grammar.)

**Molina:** Es de advertir que no ponemos aqui las significaciones de muchas dictiones de la lengua Mexicana, imitando en esto a Antonio de Lebrixa en su Arte de latin, el

qual dexo a sabiendas y de industria por declarar las significaciones de muchas dictiones, para con mas facilidad se entendiesse la dicha Arte de latin: lo qual hazemos aqui nosotros, para que este Arte de la lengua Mexicana sea mas breue; saluo quando fuereos compelidos a declarar algunas dellas, las quales no se entenderian, sino se pusiesen y declarasen sus significaciones: especialmente en la conjugacion de los verbos **para saber y entender la diuersidad** de los tiempos y modos. (Argumento)

(Be advised that I do not record here the meanings of many dictions of the Mexican language, imitating Antonio de Lebrixa in his Latin grammar, in which he intentionally avoided declaring the meaning of every single item, so that one could understand more easily said grammar of Latin: this is what I am doing here also, so that this grammar of the Mexican languages will be brief, except in the case where I am compelled to clarify something, such as that which would not be understood without explicit explanation of the meaning: especially in the conjugation of verbs to be able to understand the **different kinds of tense and moods**.)

**Rincón:** [...] no se puede negar sino que el camino mas llano y breue para aprouechar en qualquiera de las lenguas, es, el que an hallado la latina, y griega, como se ve por el artificio con que se enseñan y aprenden [...]. Por lo qual haviendo yo de escreuir Arte para deprender y enseñar la lengua mexicana no me parecio apartarme del ordinario camino por donde procede la lengua latina, que es mas sabida

entre nosotros, ni tampoco me he querido obligar a seguir del todo sus reglas, porque seria llevar muy fuera de proposito (y como dizen) de los cabellos muchas cosas que aca piden muy diferentes preceptos. [...] De manera que en aquello que me e podido aprouechar de la gramatica latina siempre me y rearrimando a ella pero en las demas cosas, **en que esta lengua se diferencia de la latina por ser ellas nuevas a sido forçoso reducirlas a nuevas reglas, con el nuevo estilo que se require.** (Prologo al lector)

(It can not be denied that the most straightforward and concise route to get the most out of any language is that which has already been articulated in the study of Latin and Greek, as seen in the manner in which they are taught and studied [...]. Therefore, in needing to write a grammar to learn and teach the Mexican language, it did not make sense to stray from the traditional route of the Latin language, that is the most familiar to us, nor have I wanted to be obligated to follow all of [the Latin grammar's] rules, because it would be contrary to my goal (and as they say) out of place, since **many things here require different rules.** [...] When it made sense to utilize the Latin grammar I always returned to it, but in other areas, **where this language was different than Latin, since these aspects were new, it was necessary to create new rules, and a requisite new style.**)

In these examples one can see that Nebrija's Latin grammar clearly served as model and springboard for the study and description of the indigenous languages. However, as work

in the language progressed, so did the approach to grammatical explanation. As a Spaniard with no other New World model, Olmos interpreted Nahuatl vis-à-vis Nebrija as lacking due to his literal eurocentrism. Molina, a *peninsular* who spent nearly his entire life since childhood in New Spain, moved to an increasingly flexible imitation of Nebrija with the recognition that the language was indeed different, but not necessarily understood as lacking. His approach seems more representative of one who had the ability to appreciate fully both cultures, perhaps due to his early exposure to Nahuas and their language.<sup>45</sup> Rincón, the native speaker, boldly closes the sixteenth century by stating that Nebrija's work is indeed useful, but will require modification *to accommodate* Nahuatl. In fact his prologue begins with a radical assertion: No es posible guardarse en todo vn mismo methodo y arte, en enseñar todas las lenguas, siendo ellas (como lo son) tan distantes y diferentes entre si [...] (it is not possible that one single method or grammar can be used to teach all languages, since they are all so different [...]). Latin here is just as "different" as Nahuatl. Rincón's understanding of the alterity of equal value, as opposed to lack, of the Nahuatl language could point to ethnic pride, or be a reflection of the Jesuit perspective that tended to be more open than the other religious orders to alternate ways of being. Regardless, if in the early examples of grammatical description the Nahuatl language was made to bend to Nebrija, in the hands of the native speaker Nebrija bends to Nahuatl. Rincón's grammar is a classic example of the

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<sup>45</sup> In Molina's prologue he begins by saying that the language *lacks* letters. My assertion that Molina sees alterity, but perhaps not lack, has more to do with his global comparison of Nahuatl to Latin in terms of structure. Regarding the issue of lack of letters (seen repeatedly in Colonial grammars), I believe this speaks more to the grammarian's audience (non-native speakers) that will attempt to come to terms with the new language by making correlations with their own, than to a kind of sinister eurocentrism. Perhaps the native speakers of Nahuatl found Castilian and Latin to have a lack or excess of letters, in comparison with their own.

appropriation of something that works (Latin grammar) and its modification to the context (Nahuatl language in New Spain). This would be the pattern for grammatical investigations throughout the ensuing years of the Colonial Period, which progressively developed a Nahuatl-based grammatical tradition that became increasingly attuned to the specific needs of the indigenous language (Fountain). This increasingly Nahuatl-centric grammatical research is most evident in the fourth and fifth chapter of his grammar, where Rincón replaces Latin syntax with “Composiciones,” outlining how the polysynthetic language’s word-phrases are constructed. He also acknowledges Latin’s (limited) role in the writing of the fifth chapter dealing with pronunciation:

El V y vltimo libro trata de la pronunciacion y accento, y aun en esto auendonos aprouechado del latin en lo que el mexicano le es semejante: van juntamente puestas reglas para la pronunciacion y accentos nuevos que a esta lengua le son propios [sic], y no se hallan en las demas (Prologo al lector)

(The fifth and last chapter deals with pronunciation and Accent, and while in this area I have taken advantage of Latin [grammatical explanation] in terms of what it has in common with the Mexican language, I also include pronunciation and accent rules which are specific to Nahuatl, and not found in other languages.)

It is in this last chapter where we find Rincón’s innovative work on diacritical markings to indicate contrastive vowel length, as well as the ambiguity of lexical items according



to their pronunciation. Like Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, who wrote of the Quechua language and how pronunciation can have radical semantic implications that non-native speakers either do not or cannot ascertain, Rincón, as a native speaker, was able to grasp and explain the ambiguities of certain words based on contrastive vowel length.<sup>46</sup> Olmos, a non-native speaker, recognized this in the language, but had not felt capable (or perhaps not understood its importance) to elaborate on the issue: “No hablo en el acento por ser muy vario [...], algunos vocablos parecen tener algunas vezes dos acentos; por lo qual lo dexo a quien Dios fuere seruido darle mas animo para ello, o al uso que lo descubra” (Olmos 7) (I don’t discuss pronunciation because it varies [...], some words appear to sometimes have two pronunciations; therefore I leave this to whomever God inspires, or through more practice discovers [the rhyme or reason of] this). Molina, bilingual from a young age, appears to have had an inkling about the subtleties of pronunciation. In his *Arte*, he points out how improper pronunciation can cause problems in religious ceremonies. The example he offers is the word *motlatiz*, which when pronounced one way means to light something (as in a candle), and while pronounced in another way, it would imply that something was extinguished (Molina 55). One can easily imagine the

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<sup>46</sup> Garcilaso in his *Royal Commentaries* states that “[...] there are three different ways of pronouncing some of the syllables. They are quite different from the pronunciation in Spanish, and the differences of pronunciation give different meanings to the same word” (5). “The Spaniards attribute many other gods to the Incas because they are unable to distinguish the times and idolatries of the first age from those of the second. Moreover they are not well enough acquainted with the language to be able to ask for and obtain information from the Indians, and their ignorance has led them to attribute to the Incas many or all of the gods the latter removed from the Indians they subjected to their empire [...]. A particular source of this error was that Spaniards did not know the many diverse meanings of the word *huaca* This, when the last syllable is pronounced from the top of the palate, means ‘an idol,’ such as Jupiter, Mars, or Venus [...] Because of these very various meanings, the Spaniards, who only understood the first and main sense of ‘idol,’ think that the Indians regarded as gods everything they called *huaca* [...]” (76–7). “The Spaniard who thinks he knows the language best is ignorant of nine-tenths of it, because of the many meanings of each word and the different pronunciation that a word has for various meanings [...]” (51). As the knowing subject, Garcilaso explains, in three continuous pages, the many meanings of the word *huaca* (79–81).

calamity this might cause in what ought to be a solemn occasion such as a Christian mass. But it is the native speaker, Rincón, who is able to clearly identify and articulate this important detail of the language. Rincón's *Arte* expands on Molina's by providing a detailed explanation of pronunciation and syllabic accents in section five, a diacritical system to note these differences, and a list of "minimum pairs and triplets" to demonstrate how meaning can change with different pronunciation.<sup>47</sup>

It must also be noted that besides the presence of Nebrija's Latin grammar as textual interlocutor, the Latin language itself is attendant throughout the three early grammars. In the licensing portion of *Arte mexicana*, Rincón's slim manual is described as being a grammar of "la lengua castellana y Mexicana," however it is actually trilingual since the metalanguage is a combination of Latin and Castilian utilized to explain the Nahuatl. There is an underlying assumption that the audience will have a command of Latin's grammatical structure and descriptive vocabulary. This reminds the present-day reader that the audience for Rincón's work was a small group of priests educated in the humanist tradition, in which a command of Latin and specifically Latin grammar was requisite.

### **License of Rincón's *Arte Mexicana***

As with other books written in sixteenth-century New Spain, Rincón's grammar was subject to a series of inspections before being granted license to publish. In the elaborate *Licencia* portion of the *Arte*, Don Luis de Velasco (New Spain's second Viceroy) affirms

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<sup>47</sup> Rincón surely had access to Molina's grammar as his dictionary portion of the *Arte* follows Molina's unique system of citing verbs. Regarding Molina's system, see Lockhart, *Nahuatl as Written* 153–4.

that Rincón “a compuesto vn Arte con que se podrá saber perfectamente la lengua Mexicana, y que para que se pudiesse comunicar a todos los que la quisieren tenia necesidad de imprimirla pidiendome le mandasse dar licencia para ello” (has compiled an Arte with which one can perfectly know/understand the Mexican language, and in order to communicate with all that might be interested, he needed to print it and so requested from me a license to do so). Illuminating the context of the Inquisition and preoccupations with religious orthodoxy, the Bachiller Pedro Ponce de Leon also reviewed the *Arte*, and found it to be free of anything “contra nuestra fe catholica y buenas costumbres” (contrary to our Catholic faith and good manners/customs). Esteban (Esteban) Paez, the Provincial of the Company of Jesus approved the request to print the *Arte*, and the governor Don Ihoan (Juan) de Cervantes Arcediano weighed in after receiving approval of the content from esteemed Nahuatl-language expert Iuan (Juan) de Tovar, who found the *Arte* to be “vtil y necessaria para los ministros de los sacramentos á los naturales” (useful and necessary for the ministering of the sacraments to the Indians).<sup>48</sup>

The license is then followed by a dedicatory letter that Rincón addressed to don Diego Roman, Bishop of Tlaxcallan. The letter begins with the story of how in the beginning all of the trees and plants were abundant and gave fruit without need of human tending or toil. However, Rincón explains, because humans have sinned they have been punished and must work for their sustenance. Without substantial effort, the plants will not bear fruit. He then goes on to compare the labors of the Church in this same manner:

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<sup>48</sup> Juan de Tovar also vouched for the value of the second edition of Alonso de Molina’s *Arte de la lengua Mexicana y castellana* published in 1576.

“las tiernas plantas” (the tender young plants) are the indigenous populations that must be cultivated. While at one time, Rincón continues, the Apostles might have been able to understand all languages and could preach the gospel without linguistic barriers, now that time was long gone. Echoing the Church opinion that viewed indigenous languages as the best vehicle for evangelizing, Rincón states that the “tantas y tan preciosas plantas” (many precious plants) in the burgeoning garden of the Church in New Spain will bear fruit, that is, embrace the Holy Faith, by hearing the word of God. However, if the priests do not know the native language, this task will be impossible. The priests must study and work diligently to attain some level of accuracy in the language they preach in (or he rather comically adds, expect a miracle), and his *Arte* is offered so that they may more readily achieve the linguistic capabilities necessary.

Rincón states that he intended his *Arte* to assuage the linguistic difficulties that fellow Jesuit encountered “entre estas bárbaras naciones donde estamos” (among these barbarous nations where we are). The words “donde estamos” (where we are) surely implied Puebla and the surrounding missions, where Rincón is known to have been working during the writing and publication of his text. In his reference to being “among these barbarous nations,” it is possible that Rincón is revealing his own sense of difference from other Indians, even as the *peninsulares* and *criollos* attempted to compress and consolidate various native groups into a singular (barbaric, and therefore inferior) entity. Regardless of the efforts to create clearly segregated groups of “us” (Spaniards) and “them” (Indians), Rincón’s brief phrase suggests that ethnic and *altepetl* affiliations continued to hold weight. Here it might also be appropriate to refer to

Bartolomé de las Casas' mid-sixteenth-century treatise on "The Meanings of Barbarous" found in his *Apologética historia sumaria* to arrive at a more clear idea of Rincón's use of the term. The four manners in which people may be called barbarous, according to Las Casas are as follows:

The first way, taking the term broadly and improperly, is because of some **strangeness, ferocity, disorder or unreasonableness** [...] [that] somehow become or are fierce, hard-hearted and cruel [...]. These are men who seem to have stripped themselves completely of their human nature.

The second kind of barbarous people is something narrower; under it come those who do not have a written speech that corresponds to their language as Latin does to ours—in brief, **who lack the use and study of letters**. These peoples are said to be barbarous *secundum quid*, that is, according to some part or quality which they lack—which they would need in order to be barbarous. [...] Likewise, a man is apt to be called barbarous, in comparison with another, **because he is strange in his manner of speech and mispronounces the language of the other** [...]. From this point of view, there is no man or race which is not barbarous with respect to some other man or race....Thus, just as we esteemed these peoples of these Indies barbarous, so they considered us because of not understanding us.

There is a third kind of barbarous people [...] They neither have nor care for law, right, nation, friendship, or the company of other men, because of which **they lack towns, councils, and cities, since they do not live socially**. And so they neither have nor endure lords, or laws, or political rule. [...] These are the men of whom Aristotle particularly speaks [...] saying they are slaves by nature [...].

[The fourth kind] includes all those who **lack true religion and the Christian faith**, that is, all pagans, however wise and prudent they may be as philosophers and statesmen. (142–6, my emphasis)

Puebla and the surrounding missions were often portrayed as presenting extraordinary challenges to the religious orders in terms of the pagan and “unruly” behaviors of the natives. Jesuit historian Alegre states that Rincón worked tirelessly in Puebla, even while surrounded by “escuelas de maldad y unos pequeños ensayes del infierno” (278) (schools of wickedness and little manifestations of hell on earth). As such, Rincón could have been referring to the first and the third lascasian definitions (ferocity and lack of recognizable social organization). However, as a grammarian and priest, it is more likely that he was ultimately concerned with the second and the fourth, that of peoples marked by unintelligible languages and lack of Christian faith. His subsequent reference to Nahuatl as the root of other “barbarous” indigenous languages supports an interpretation of “barbarous as unintelligible”:

es general en todas estas prouincias de la nueva España, [...] ella misma es como madre de las demás lenguas bárbaras que en estos reynos se hallan, y assi me parescia seruia a todos en abrir y llanar el camino de la lengua Mexicana pues por este se entra a las demas, fuera de que esta misma lengua a menester todas estas ayudas para hazer algun progreso en ella, por los exquisitos primores y elegancias que tiene [...]

(it is the general [language] in all of the provinces of New Spain [...] it is the root of the other barbarous languages that we encounter in those regions and so it seemed to me to it would be useful to all and create easier access to the Mexican language since through this language we can understand the others, besides the fact that [to learn] this language we need all the help/assistance we can get to make any progress at all in it, due to the exquisite intricacies and elegances that it contains.)

This final point regarding the complexity and elegance of his mother tongue also implicitly argues along the lines of Las Casas who urged against conflating linguistic alterity and inferiority. Here perhaps we also hear intertextual whispers of Cicero, the great Roman philosopher that insisted on linguistic eloquence as the marker of civilization (Errington 27). Besides being the knowing subject, Rincón also squarely places himself in the center of “civilization,” establishing his own place in the Colonial hierarchy while simultaneously rejecting the notion of indigenous inferiority.

Here we have come full circle, returning to the idea of race and place in Early Colonial Mexico. Besides what has been intended as firmly establishing Rincón in the

Nahua post-conquest intellectual tradition, the previous pages were aimed at providing a distinct viewpoint from which to analyze the rapidly shifting social hierarchies in the first century of Spanish colonization, and one example of indigenous protagonism in the midst of these changes. Whereas Rincón's personal experience is indicative of the rapidly changing social climate, interestingly his lexical choices for the *Arte*, as analyzed in conjunction with the earlier two grammars, do so as well. A review of the three early grammars suggests progressive shifts in the vocabulary related to changing social structures. As such, Rincón's often overlooked grammar can also be a source for reconstructing stages of social change through an analysis of the lexical items deemed important enough to include in the text. The final section will offer some initial observations along these lines as suggestive for future research.

### **Reconstructing Social Change through Grammars**

Much of the more revealing scholarship of the past several decades that has centered on indigenous experience in the Colonial Period is indebted to the example of historian James Lockhart. Lockhart's method, often called New Philology, holds as its basic premise that the very best way to study a culture is to utilize "sources created by the people themselves, in their own language, revealing their outlook, their rhetoric, their genres of expression, the intimacies of their lives, above all their categories" (Lockhart, *Of Things of the Indies* 350). New Philology as deployed by Lockhart (and among others, a cadre of his former doctoral students, now established scholars<sup>49</sup>) utilizes a combination

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<sup>49</sup> See the volume *Sources and Methods for the Study of Postconquest Mesoamerican Ethnohistory* at <http://whp.uoregon.edu/Lockhart/> for further reading on New Philology and its practitioners.



of career pattern research with philological investigation bent on “seeking patterns in the language and in behavior across a very broad spectrum” (Lockhart, *Of Things of the Indies* 366). A comparison of the early grammars utilizing New Philology methods—a comparison of grammatical concepts, morphology, loan words, and neologisms—can be utilized to compare and contrast linguistic and social micro-transitions as recorded by Olmos, Molina, and Rincón in their grammars.<sup>50</sup> Of course, this kind of a reading does have its limits, and can in no way represent the entire social landscape (in fact, Lockhart reminds us that it might take a word decades or even centuries before it appears in a text [*Nahuas* 289]). However, the grammars can convey what the men responsible for them found to be important enough to include in the texts they wrote and utilized to describe the language properties to their fellow priests. A very cursory review and comparison of the sixteenth-century Nahuatl grammars shows changes in vocabulary (and corresponding frequency), particularly related to social identities and shifting social realities. The comparative table below offers some examples.

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<sup>50</sup> These methods were developed in Karttunen and Lockhart’s *Nahuatl in the Middle Years: Language Contact Phenomena in Texts of the Colonial Period*, and continued in Lockhart’s unparalleled cultural history *Nahuas After the Conquest*.

**Table 1: Comparison of Olmos, Molina, and Rincón Grammars**

<b>Olmos (1547)</b>	<b>Molina (1571)</b>	<b>Rincón (1595)</b>
<i>tlayulle</i> , dueño del mayz (corn farmer) (9)		
<i>tlacutli</i> , esclauo (slave) (19)	-	-
<i>teuctli</i> , principal (lord) (20)	-	<i>teuctli</i> , <sup>51</sup> el señor (lord) (15)
<i>achcauhli</i> , glossed as “principal” (high priest) (20)	-	-
<i>pilli</i> , principal (noble) (20)	-	<i>pilli</i> , el niño o príncipe del señor (lord’s son, prince) (13)
<i>maceualli</i> , vassallo (common person) (24)	-	-
<i>tlatoani</i> , señor o hablador (high lord/leader/speaker) (24)	<i>tlatoque/tlatuani</i> , señores (the high lord/leaders/speakers) (137)	<i>tlatoani</i> (20) a translation for <i>tlatoani</i> is not included in this text, however his dictionary includes <i>tolatocaiotl</i> , reyno (kingdoms); <i>tlatocapan</i> , palacio o lugar de los reyes (palace, place of the kings); <i>tlatocati.ni</i> , reynar (to reign); and <i>tlatocatiua</i> , hacerse reyes o señores (to become a king or lord)
<i>tlacuilo</i> , escriuano (scribe) (24)	<i>tlacuilo</i> , pintor o escriuano (painter/scribe) (136)	-
<i>tlacatl</i> , persona (person) (19)	<i>tlacatl</i> , hombre o persona (man or person) (135)	<i>tlacatl</i> , cosa racional (something rational) (88)
-	-	<i>cacatzac</i> , negro, etiope (black person, Ethiopian) (15)
-	<i>mille</i> , dueño o señor de la tierra (landowner) (136)	-
<i>tzitzimitl</i> , demonio (devil) (20)	-	-
<i>angel</i> , <i>angelotin</i> (angel) (20)	-	-
<i>yaoyutl</i> , guerra (war) (16)	-	-
-	<i>cocoxcatzintli</i> , enfermo al qual tenemos buena voluntad (sick person with whom we take great pity) (140)	-

In terms of indigenous identities, from Olmos and Molina there is a reduction in the variety of indigenous social markers, perhaps speaking to the progressive compression of indigenous society toward a singular entity. The Olmos grammar contains the most Nahuatl words that pertain to the different social positions within Nahua society. Molina,

<sup>51</sup> Note the Jesuit orthographic convention of *teuctli*, which often appears in Franciscan texts as *tecutli* (although curiously in Olmos’s grammar it is also *teuctli*). In Rincón’s glossary, however, he writes *tecutli* (not *teuctli*). See Lockhart’s discussion on the lack of uniform alphabetic representation of [k<sup>w</sup>] in *Nahuatl as Written* 105–6.

circulating some 20+ years after Olmos, mentions substantially less variation, and omits the *pilli*, the intermediary noble class.<sup>52</sup> Rincón's grammar, as can be expected from one who is associated with the noble class of Texcoco, recognizes more social stratification of indigenous society than Molina, and includes the *pilli*. Note that Rincón does not include the *tlacuilo*, the indigenous painter/scribe as do Olmos and Molina. One of the more revealing entries found in each grammar is the term *tlacatl*. It is not the Nahuatl term that is interesting (it is the same in each text), but instead the author's translation to Castilian: Olmos glosses *tlacatl* as "persona" (human being), Molina as "hombre o persona" (man or human being), which alludes to the encroaching machinations of the colonial project in the civic domain, where hierarchies of gender and sexuality are established. Finally Rincón defines *tlacatl* as "cosa racional" (something rational). As any indigenous (man) can be a *tlacatl*, the Jesuit gives a pointed response to those who still aren't quite sure whether or not Indians are rational beings.

Regarding the use of isolated examples of words, Olmos's grammar reveals the earlier attempts to correlate the devil with the Nahua concept of *tzitzimitl*, Aztec celestial demons (Klein; Burkhart, *Slippery Earth* 42–3), and is alone in including the term *yaoyutl*, war, perhaps referencing the still-recent memory of the initial conquest period. Molina's *cocoxcatzintli* evokes the omnipresence of the plague and other illnesses of the first century of contact. His inclusion of *mille*, or landowner, highlights the increasingly important social institution of "ownership" of land. Unlike the earlier grammars, Rincón introduces *cacatzac*, black man, Ethiopian (15) to the social milieu, in his section

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<sup>52</sup> To be sure, Molina's extraordinary *Vocabulario* records these terms. What I am interested in here is which lexical items were included in the grammars utilized to describe the language to other priests.

dedicated to explaining how adding the suffixes *-tin* or *-me* to a root that ends in *-c* signifies an insult. The examples given are *cacatzacme* and *cacatzactin* (expletive! blacks!) (15). Unique socio-historical markers are also found in the combination of the first four words of Rincón's grammar that discreetly sum up the Jesuit economic/religious project: *ichcatl*, *oquichtli*, *teotl*, and *teopixqui* (sheep, man, God, priest), reminding us of the importance of the revenues from sheep farms (*haciendas* and *obrajes*), the financial lifeline of the Jesuit colleges.<sup>53</sup> Although far from complete, an analysis of this kind supports Lockhart's assertion that "[I]n linguistic phenomena prove to be the most sensitive indicator the historical record contains of the extent, nature, and trajectory of contact between two populations" (*Nahuas* 261). The earliest grammars, microcosms in themselves, can prove fascinating sources for further research on the Early Colonial Period, across the lines of both ethnic and religious affiliation. As such, Rincón's contribution as grammarian should not be underestimated. Not only does his intellectual work itself prove valuable in future research, but his experience is also emblematic of the next four hundred years of the Nahuatl intellectual tradition in that Indians in Mexico, regardless of official policy, have long participated in the intellectual life of their language community and "nation" at large.

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<sup>53</sup> Regarding *obrajes*, see Richard Salvucci's *Textiles and Capitalism in Mexico: An Economic History of the Obrajes, 1539–1840* see Carmen Viqueira and José I. Urquiola, *Los obrajes en la Nueva España, 1530–1630*.

## Chapter Two: Faustino Galicia Chimalpopoca: Politician and Scholar (1802?–1877)

It is in the context of early nineteenth-century Mexico's transition from colony to independent nation that we turn to Faustino Galicia Chimalpopoca (1802?–1877), a Nahuatl public servant and scholar of his own language and culture. With a career that straddled the legal, political, and cultural realms of the Indian and the non-Indian in Mexico City, Chimalpopoca devoted much of his time as a *tequitlato* (attorney) and political appointee in both liberal and conservative regimes, most notably in the Second Empire (1864–1867), representing, or lobbying on behalf of, indigenous communities. Simultaneously, he was Professor of Nahuatl and Law, and as one of the most active scholars of the Nahuatl language during this time period, he transcribed and translated scores of Colonial-era Nahuatl texts, and authored a variety of didactic and religious works in both Spanish and Nahuatl.

Nineteenth-century Mexico is rarely considered the ideal time or place to identify Nahuatl intellectual activity. In establishing independence from Spain, *criollo* politicians erased ethnic identities with the stroke of a pen, deeming all people residing in Mexican territory “citizens” with newly enacted laws. The process of ethnic compression that began in the Early Colonial Period (*caciques* into Indians) was traded for the erasure of ethnic distinctions. As such, during this time period it is rare to find mention of ethnic affiliations that might aid us in identifying indigenous intellectuals. Add to this the fact that the consolidation of the Mexican nation included the declaration of Spanish as the language of the nation. As such, in terms of the state of Nahuatl letters, the century is

often considered a black hole. No longer utilized in administrative dealings, the Nahuatl language became all the more peripheral, and written creative work in indigenous languages was virtually nonexistent.<sup>54</sup> This is not to say that Nahuas ceased to act as intellectuals. We find Nahua intellectual protagonism in the same arenas that we find non-Indigenous intellectual activities of the time, particularly in politics and in research utilizing a scientific approach aimed at solving the problems of the new nation (Cifuentes, *Lenguas para un pasado* 19). However due to the political climate, oftentimes in the nineteenth century the indigenous intellectual would work in his second language, Spanish. Don Faustino is no exception, working in Nahuatl, Spanish, and Latin in a broad range of areas.

Valuable, yet limited, research on Galicia Chimalpopoca (or Chimalpopoca Galicia as he sometimes signed his name) has detailed the different aspects of his career.<sup>55</sup> However, most studies have kept separate his political and scholarly endeavors. For example, Antonio Escobar-Ohmstede places Chimalpopoca in the middle of the action in his assessment of the conflicts at the Colegio de San Gregorio in Mexico City; Andrés Lira addresses Chimalpopoca's legal and administrative labors on behalf of indigenous communities in Mexico City; Jaime del Arenal-Fenochio and Jean Meyer have noted his protagonism in the Second Empire; Barbara Cifuentes highlights don Faustino's contribution to the field in her study of nineteenth-century linguistics; María Teresa

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<sup>54</sup> While it is commonly assumed that administrative documents were no longer written in Nahuatl after the very early 1800s, Miriam Melton-Villanueva and Caterina Pizzigoni's essay "Late Nahuatl Testaments from the Toluca Valley: Indigenous-Language Ethnohistory in the Mexican Independence Period" analyzes recent discoveries of mundane documents written in Nahuatl from the Toluca Valley dated through 1825.

<sup>55</sup> Andrés Lira suggests that Chimalpopoca changed the order of his last names depending on the politics of the time (269). That is, if the government in power was Indianist, he placed the surname Chimalpopoca first. This in and of itself points to an individual who is strategically situating himself in society.

Sepúlveda y Herrera has made a clear case for Chimalpopoca's contributions to the field of pre-Colonial and Colonial studies with his transcription and translation of many foundational texts; and finally Ángel María Garibay has repeatedly mentioned Chimalpopoca in his publications, though mostly in unfavorable terms.<sup>56</sup> My goal in this chapter is to weave a more complete vision of Chimalpopoca's work in the areas of politics and scholarly research on Nahuatl language and culture, so as to situate him as a touchstone in the nineteenth-century Nahua intellectual tradition.

### **Formative Years at San Gregorio**

Like Antonio del Rincón of the previous chapter, Chimalpopoca is said to be descended from the royal house of Texcoco, in direct descent from the great poet-King Nezahualcōyotl (Sepúlveda 11). Little is known of his childhood, except that he was a student at El Colegio de San Gregorio around 1810. The school, founded by the Jesuits in

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<sup>56</sup> Garibay has been quite vocal in his disdain for our protagonist. Regarding Chimalpopoca's version of the *Relato de las Apariciones Guadalupeñas*, published by the Jesuit historian Mariano Cuevas (1879–1949), Garibay says that the translation is “infeliz,” unfortunate (*Historia de la literatura náhuatl* 760). He suggests that it was “su impericia de la lengua de los documentos que quiso usar, lo dejó tranquilo en su crédito al cacareado Chimalpopoca, cuyas fantásticas traducciones han hecho un caos en la investigación antigua” (*Historia de la literatura náhuatl* 760–1) (Cuevas' lack of skill in terms of the language of the documents that he attempted to utilize that would allow him to trust the the translations of the over-esteemed Chimalpopoca, whose bizarre translations have made complete chaos in the research of classical documents). Garibay's diatribe continues in other publications. In the prologue to the 1960 edition of Manuel Orozco y Berra's *Historia Antigua y de la Conquista de México* Garibay laments: “la adoración casi se daba a peritos de la lengua, del tipo de Chimalpopoca Galicia, a quien su carácter de instructor imperial de Maximiliano en esta lengua no quitó la ignorancia de la lengua antigua en sus fuentes genuinas y mucho menos eclipsó su manera fantástica de traducir. Este juicio duro alguna vez espero hacer de conocimiento publico, bien matizado y comprobado con hechos. (Garibay, “Estudio previo” t. I, xi–xii) (there was a great deal of fawning over experts in languages, like Chimalpopoca Galicia, who, even though he was imperial instructor of Nahuatl to Maximilian, couldn't hide his ignorance of the classical language in genuine sources, much less conceal his bizarre translations. Some day I hope to publically make known concrete proof supporting of this harsh judgement). To my knowledge, Garibay never published this promised proof to back up his diagnosis of Chimalpopoca's skill (or lack thereof). His only token of generosity is found in his evaluation of Chimalpopoca's grammar, *Epítome o modo fácil de aprender el idioma náhuatl* (1869), which he deemed “bastante útil” (*Llave* 122) (very useful).

1586, was originally dedicated to the secondary education of indigenous males from prominent families (Schmidt-Díaz 157). Like the other schools operated by the mendicant orders, the primary goal was to prepare (mostly Indian) students to serve as teachers and models of Christian and Spanish behaviors in their own communities. Besides general instruction (reading, writing, arithmetic), students were given a conservative Catholic religious and moral upbringing. During the Colonial Period, San Gregorio was a renowned center for the training of *padres lenguas*, priests that spoke and studied indigenous languages. Indian students were encouraged to continue to speak their languages (along with Latin and Spanish), since, as outlined in the previous chapter, the *padres* needed native speaker teachers and informants to better tend to their indigenous flock and root out heresies. San Gregorio was known to have amassed what was considered one of Mexico City's most magnificent collections of indigenous language documents, with a large majority in Nahuatl.<sup>57</sup> We can safely assume that Chimalpopoca, like the other students, had access to the vast repositories of Colonial-era documents housed at the school. Surely one of the factors that led to Chimalpopoca becoming what John F. Schwaller has termed “the most active Nahuatl scholar of the nineteenth century” was the fact that he grew up surrounded by his own cultural patrimony. He is a product of this environment in many ways, and we will see the influence of this San Gregorio education in his later political and scholarly endeavors.

During Chimalpopoca's attendance at San Gregorio, the school was *not* under the auspices of the Jesuits since they had been expelled from Mexico in 1767. However the

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<sup>57</sup> Arturo Soberón Mora's *San Gregorio, un colegio transcolonial* discusses the holdings of the library at San Gregorio, 149–159.



educational model was in line with the earlier Jesuit mission, but in transition. As Mexico struggled for independence, San Gregorio moved from a focus on producing missionaries of the Catholic faith, to the education of secular “emissaries” that were “útil a la patria y capaz de enfrentar los retos del progreso y la modernidad” (Díaz-Schmidt 168) (useful to the nation and capable of meeting the challenges of progress and modernity). This is still evangelization in a sense, but it is a new dogma based on individualism, capitalism, and nation-building. Instead of an education aimed at creating “good” governors of the separate Indian sphere of society (la República de indios), the students of San Gregorio were taught to become public servants. During Chimalpopoca’s formative years, San Gregorio’s curriculum consisted of a novel blend of scientific, humanistic, and moral-religious education (Díaz-Schmidt 159). This educational experience is reflected in Chimalpopoca’s political profile as a conservative Catholic that took a scientific approach to solving social problems, availing himself of what he considered to be the best of both worlds.

### **“Independence” and the Juridical Erasure of Indians**

The difficulties that the nascent republic faced were myriad as Mexico attempted to move from the old Colonial structure to that of an independent nation, with little consensus as to how that should be accomplished. The constant clash and power-grabbing of the two major political groups, the conservatives and the liberals, was indicative of a nation bitterly divided. On one hand, the conservatives were “strongly Catholic, Spanish, and landed”; on the other the liberals were “largely anti-clerical, pro-republic, democratic,

and anti-Spanish” (Heath 58). The conservatives felt that the new nation ought to maintain traditional (European) structures and values, embodied in the Church and monarchy. The liberals, however, had diagnosed Mexico’s problems as stemming from these very traditions (Duncan 51). Mexican politicians attempted to organize the nation according to the needs of the capitalist market, shepherding the uneven and chaotic transfer of power from landowners, military, ranchers, and merchants to City Councils, and State and National government officials (Escobar 264). While a time of change for *criollos* and mestizos, it was even more so for the Indian in that the nineteenth century marks their legalized disappearance and the dispossession of their communally held lands.

In 1821, as Mexico moved toward official independence from Spain, Agustín de Iturbide announced the *Plan de Iguala*. This plan established the “Three Guarantees” of the colony-turned-independent Empire under Iturbide’s rule, declaring that the republic would be Catholic, free from Spain, and based on equality for all (hence the slogan Religión, Independencia y Unidad [Religion, Independence, and Unity]). With the flourish of a pen, the *Plan de Iguala* “declared that all Mexican nationals were citizens, without further distinctions” (Haake 91). In its most positive light Iturbide’s declaration was aimed at eliminating the deeply ingrained Colonial social structures that had created a highly stratified society based on difference. But with this attempt to unite the people of Mexico, the *Plan* formally and “legally” erased ethnic difference. Not long after, in 1824 liberal politician José María Luis Mora famously proclaimed claimed that “por la ley no existen indios” (Cifuentes 16) (legally, Indians don’t exist). It is worth remembering that

while independence movements in the early nineteenth century were sometimes invoked in the name of the poor and the indigenous, there is no indication that indigenous people were consulted as declarations and constitutions were drafted (Villoro 167). Indians were not included in the debates that gave them a new juridical designation as citizens, but they would soon need to respond to these changes.

With their new legal personality, the few protections afforded them under Spanish Colonial rule were eliminated (Haake 91). These protections ranged from the continued right to hold communal lands, exemption from military service and the Inquisition (Weber 263). The Spanish Crown had established these protections after having decided that Indians were minors before the law. Now with independence, this “minor” status was removed and Indians were rightfully considered equally adult as any non-Indian adult. However, while the juridical designation changed, the hierarchical social structure did not (Bonfil-Batalla, “El concepto de indio” 118). Now the Indian was expected to negotiate this new place in society with less protection *and* all of the inherited baggage of the Colonial experience. Economic, political, and social marginalization of the indigenous population continued as before. The declaration of equal rights for Indians did not result in the *experience* of equal rights.

Often the rights codified in the Independent nation’s founding documents proved out of reach for most Indians. At various intervals between the 1824 and 1857 constitutions, many Mexican states revoked the basic civil rights of domestic servants, and those who were illiterate (González Navarro 209–210; Pellicer 41). As Moisés González Navarro argues, “[n]o necesitaban estas leyes mencionar por su nombre a los indios, para

directamente anularlos en la vida política. (210) (it wasn't necessary to mention Indians explicitly in reference to these laws in order to directly annul their participation in political life). The nature of Indian experience (servitude and limited access to education resulting in illiteracy) inherited from the Colonial Period often made it impossible to enjoy these new constitutional rights as citizens. Perhaps this reality provides a clue as to Chimalpopoca's intense interest in both the law and education for Indians. In this climate one needed to understand the slippery legal terrain and to identify and eliminate the barriers to equal enjoyment of rights. This is where people such as Chimalpopoca would become increasingly important in defending and promoting the rights of marginalized communities that were suddenly forced to play by new rules. In order to secure their place in the nation, indigenous communities, and their intellectuals, would need to exhibit an extraordinary amount of ideological flexibility, what Guy Thomson has termed "political bilingualism" (Ducey 127). As examples of political bilingualism, in the following section I discuss Chimalpopoca's activities on behalf of Indians, and his deployment of both conservative-religious and liberal-scientific discourses of ideals for the nation.

### **The Debate at San Gregorio**

The discussions of national politics were rehearsed in the halls of Chimalpopoca's *alma mater* San Gregorio, particularly between 1828 and 1834, at which time he was a member of the faculty. The conservative and liberal viewpoints were hotly debated at the school by what Escobar has called the "pequeña intelectualidad indígena" (264) (small group of

indigenous intellectuals). Tensions mounted as the stakeholders—students, faculty, and interested government representatives—argued over how this particular institution, founded as a Catholic school, should function in an independent republic. Chimalpopoca was one of the more vocal participants of this debate. San Gregorio was one of the few corporate establishments that had been able to conserve its properties with the advent of independence.<sup>58</sup> According to Escobar, the ample rents from the properties had allowed the school to maintain the aforementioned library, and to provide scholarships ensuring the education of Indians (and supposedly mestizos and *criollos*) that would have otherwise been unable to pay tuition. Suddenly, in 1828 these property rights and the brand of education to be imparted at San Gregorio were being questioned. Would San Gregorio hold to tradition and serve primarily Indians with a curriculum that included religion? Or would the school be open to all citizens, scouring away the traces of the Jesuits? What kind of an education should San Gregorio offer, and for whom? Should it (or could it) be exclusively for Indians as in the past? And if the answer was affirmative, was this idea of a separate education for Indians in agreement with Indians' new legal status as "equals"? Besides these questions, the Independence-era laws aimed at stripping the Church of power brought questions of corporate land ownership to the forefront. The issue for San Gregorio was that the Spanish Crown had ceded properties to the school (as a religious corporate entity) in conformity with the old laws, the *Leyes de Indias*, for the specific purpose of funding the educational needs of Indians. With disentanglement, or the

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<sup>58</sup> The following properties belonged to San Gregorio: the Hospital de Naturales, the San José Acolman, Tetespan and Ixtapan haciendas in Chalco, the Coliseo (Mexico City's principal theater [later sold in exchange for four urban fincas]). Besides the rents from thirty-seven urban fincas, San Gregorio also received the donations from the Iglesia de Loreto (Escobar 265).

dissolution of corporate property ownership, it was no longer clear who owned, who should administer, or who should benefit from these (substantial) holdings.

Chimalpopoca and Francisco Mendoza y Moctezuma were prominent members of one sector of the indigenous intellectual elite at San Gregorio that lobbied for exclusivity in terms of who should be educated at San Gregorio (Indians only), and were in favor of a continued foundation of moral-religious instruction. Demonstrating a “traditional” stance on the role of religion and the value of indigenous languages in the curriculum, they wished the rector to not only be a priest, but also fluent in an indigenous language (Escobar 268). They also argued for exclusive rights and administration of the San Gregorio properties (Escobar 266–7; Lira 83–4), and were vehement in their wish to see indigenous control over what they thought was, and should be, an indigenous institution. They complained that they did not need shepherding (i.e. they were no longer minors before the law as in the Colonial Period), stating that they were perfectly capable of managing San Gregorio themselves: “el Colegio permanence como si necesitamos todavia de esos guardadores que dan las leyes a los que no pueden defenderse por si mismos” (cf Escobar 270) (the Colegio continues as if we still needed those guardians that make laws on behalf of those who are incapable of defending themselves).<sup>59</sup> Here Chimalpopoca and Mendoza make a case for separate and exclusive rights, the hallmark of Colonial policies that legislated separate spheres for Indians and non-Indians. At the same time, they reject the idea of their supposed helplessness, as “children that need

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<sup>59</sup> See full texts related to this issue at San Gregorio filed at the Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City: *Justicia e Instrucción Pública* vol. 1, exp. 44, fs. 285r–286v; “Clamores de la miseria ante el Supremo Gubernino”; “Carta de Francisco Mendoza y Moctezuma al gobierno de la República, 1833” vol. 1, exp. 49, f. 298.

shepherding,” which was the very foundation of the Colonial laws and societal structure. This conservative indigenous faction of San Gregorio had much in common with the basic tenets of Iturbide’s First Mexican Empire (1821–1823)—religion, independence, and equal rights—that had recently been abolished in favor of a republic. Yet this is their own version of independence that includes separation/exclusivity based on ethnic distinctions that, as opposed to being eliminated in the name of nation-building, should be reinforced and supported <sup>60</sup>

Chimalpopoca and Mendoza’s argument was representative of the conservative indigenous perspective, while his childhood schoolmate (and candidate for the rectorship of San Gregorio at the time) Juan Rodríguez-Puebla held the liberal point of view. Rodríguez-Puebla, like Chimalpopoca, was a Nahua intellectual educated at San Gregorio and now faculty. But in as much as Chimalpopoca was conservative and religious, Rodríguez-Puebla was a liberal who believed in a more secular education. In sharp contrast to the Chimalpopoca front, Rodríguez-Puebla’s camp wished to facilitate the integration and assimilation of the Indian in a strictly non-religious atmosphere. They were both in agreement in that the properties of San Gregorio should remain with the school, with rents dedicated to supporting the education of Indians. However these Nahua intellectuals were in disagreement with the *kind* of education that the Indians should receive, and to what end it would serve. Rodríguez-Puebla would eventually attain the rectorship and move the school toward his secular vision. While Chimalpopoca continued

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<sup>60</sup> Chimalpopoca’s *padrino* for his graduation as a lawyer was the conservative-religious emperor himself, Agustín de Iturbide (Sepúlveda).

to teach at San Gregorio, he was soon otherwise occupied in matters of education at the citywide level.

### **President of the Board of Public Education (1849)**

We can again pick up Chimalpopoca's trail in his role as the president of the *Comisión de Instrucción Pública* (Board of Public Education) in the "monarquist" *Ayuntamiento* (City Council) of Mexico City in 1849. During this time, the new nation was perpetually on the verge of complete disintegration, and the fighting between Indians and *criollos*/mestizos in the Yucatán Caste War (1847–1901) was a constant reminder of this instability. Politicians and government officials of the Mexican capital desperately sought viable solutions to bring the nation together. Chimalpopoca weighed in on what he thought the educational system must concern itself with in order to foster national unity:

La ciencia, las costumbres y la religión son los tres grandes e importantes poderes por los que indudablemente se cría, alimenta y crece el bien de la sociedad. Por el contrario, la ignorancia, la falta de moralidad y el carácter impío, derramando el mas activo veneno de la corrupción en todos los corazones de los mortales no tienden sino al incendio, la ruina y la destrucción” (cf Lira 203).<sup>61</sup>

(Science, traditions, and religion are the three great and important powers from which undoubtedly the good of society is cultivated, nurtured, and augmented. On the

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<sup>61</sup> Full text can be found at the Archivo Histórico del Distrito Federal (Historical Archive of Mexico City). Instrucción Pública en General. 7.2481. Exp 468.f.1.



contrary, ignorance, the lack of morality, and ungodliness, spreading the most active poison of corruption in all mortal's hearts, lend themselves only to hellfires, ruin, and destruction).

Here we have a first-hand account of Chimalpopoca's hybrid version of good public policy that had room for both science and religion. As a man of his times, his outlook embraced both the "enlightened" scientific approaches of the Independence era, and the foundational discourses of religion and Christian morality harkening back to the Colonial Period. In terms of embracing a scientific approach, during his tenure as president of the Board of Education, Chimalpopoca implored the creation of a Normal School for teachers that would follow the Lancasterian models already employed in Oaxaca, Zacatecas, and Guadalajara, in order to regulate instruction.<sup>62</sup> While this project was of too grand a scale for the Council, he was able to successfully secure two hundred pesos for school supplies to girl's schools in the city. Reminding us of his strict Catholicism and pro-indigenous language stance, in he also lobbied for religious materials to be printed in Nahuatl and distributed throughout the City (Lira 203–4).

I have included these narratives of Chimalpopoca's activism in the educational realm because they are representative of the social and political atmosphere of his earlier years. They are indicative of his ideological position on issues such as the place of religion in education and government, and conceptualization of indigenous people as separate ethnic entities that ought to be afforded and experience equal rights on their own terms. In his

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<sup>62</sup> The Lancasterian system of education, as developed by British Quaker Joseph Lancaster, had at its basic premise the idea that as each student became proficient in an area of study, he/she would then teach another student (peer learning). This method lent itself to areas where trained teachers were few and far between.

work as attorney and property administrator of indigenous communal holdings, he would continue to be in the middle of affairs that dealt with indigenous autonomy *and* their rights as citizens, especially concerning issues of land.

## **Land**

In the process of becoming “full and equal citizens,” Indians suffered a debilitating blow with land disentailment codified in the 1856 *Ley Lerdo*. This liberal-sponsored law deemed “corporate” land purchase or administration as illegal, forcing the Church to “disentail” or dissolve its real estate holdings, the base of the Church’s power and the source of its funding. Not only did the *Ley Lerdo* affect the Church, but was also seen as an “all out assault” on indigenous villages (Katz 49). Whereas Indian lands were previously held in common, the disentailment process revoked communal holdings and redistributed land to individuals (Kicza xxi). If in its most benign manifestation the *Ley Lerdo* was aimed at creating opportunities for individual proprietorships of “fallow land” (Lira 247), it was interpreted as explicit aggression toward the traditional spatial and financial organization of Indian communities. Speculators waited like vultures, swooping up land that, if not properly protected, was forced into sale at a discount to “make the transaction attractive to buyers” (J. Bazant 9). Some communal lands were exempt from this law. However for the most part the disentailment legislation launched a scramble for the organization and defense of indigenous property rights. Indian communities needed good administrators, savvy with the complicated and shifting legal terrain, to protect their interests.

## Property Administrator

As an attorney fluent in the intricacies of both Colonial and Independence-era legal canons, Chimalpopoca had extensive experience representing indigenous people in land cases even before he became the *administrador de bienes* (property administrator) for the Indian barrio of San Juan (Tenochtiltán) in Mexico City in 1855.<sup>63</sup> In this capacity he was responsible for managing community funds for civil and religious obligations (weddings, baptisms, burials, charity for the poor, patron saint fiestas, public works, scholarships, etc.), and regulating community properties and waters. This post was especially important during the disentailment process where decisions needed to be made as to how and when lands were held corporately, who owned them, how they could be distributed, and if they could even be sold. During the Colonial Period, Indian barrios such as San Juan had been organized and administered as communal structures called *parcialidades*. After the passage of the *Ley Lerdo*, attempts were made to force Indian *parcialidades* to cede their land to the city. During Chimalpopoca's tenure as property administrator of San Juan, no land was unwillingly relinquished. This is probably why he was asked to represent the barrios of Santiago (Tlatelolco), Nonoalco, and Magdalena Salinas during the disentailment process as well. *Criollos* and mestizos more than likely had mixed feelings about Chimalpopoca's management of San Juan and other Indian *parcialidades*. They must have found it quite unsettling that regardless of all of the legal changes, the basic administrative structure and day-to-day operations of these long-established Indian

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<sup>63</sup> For a detailed look at the role of the *administrador de bienes* in nineteenth-century Mexico City, see Andrés Lira, *Comunidades indígenas frente a la ciudad de México*, 366–72.

communities had not changed. Lira rightly suggests that this stubborn entrenchment of Indian land tenure, and the adept management by Chimalpopoca, was perhaps conceived as threatening, especially in light of other Indian “uprisings” across the nation (202). But Indians may have looked warily at Chimalpopoca’s collaboration with the government as well. But on the whole he seemed dedicated to avoiding chaos, and was quite proficient in his role as mediator throughout the negotiations. He appears to have been well-received by the liberals for his administrative capacities, and worked well with upper class *criollos* and Indians alike (Lira 258). Throughout the lurching changes of governments—liberals 1856–57, reactionaries 1858–61, liberals 1861–63, and Maximilian’s Empire 1864–67, Chimalpopoca’s role did not vary: he was a constant mediator between the State and indigenous people, nearly always present when it came to issues of land (Lira 243). He was the ideal go-between, measuring and mediating government impositions along with the needs of the Indian communities. With his knowledge of both Indian and non-Indian custom, and especially his in-depth knowledge of both the old and new legal systems, he was able to maneuver enough to protect Indians and while promoting his own ideas of the progress of the nation.

Lira tells us that as *administrador de bienes* Chimalpopoca personally received complaints and requests for financial assistance from the people of San Juan at his home at #3 Plazuela de Loreto (258–9).<sup>64</sup> This is indicative of the manner in which Chimalpopoca would continue to utilize his knowledge and access to power on behalf of

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<sup>64</sup> Lira located complaints and requests that Chimalpopoca received in his capacity as *administrador de bienes* at the Archivo General de la Nación in the following files: *Gobernación* leg. 1610, *Parcialidades*, *Indiferente General*, and *Junta Protectora de las Clases Menesterosas*.

his marginalized brethren, attending to them personally. This style would continue in his political appointments of the Second Empire (1864–1867). As an example, in his role as the president of the *Junta Protectora de las Clases Menesterosas* (Council for the Protection of the Impoverished), he consistently went straight to the people, listened carefully to their problems, and sought viable solutions that took into consideration both the historical and present realities of the communities.

### **The Second Empire (April 1864–June 1867)**

The so-called Second Empire is an important piece in the narrative of Indian experience in nineteenth century Mexico, as well as the personal trajectory of Chimalpopoca. October 31, 1861 marks the date that Spain, England, and France agreed to military intervention in Mexico in response to liberal Benito Juárez's refusal to pay foreign debt (Duncan 30). Jan Bazant states that "[i]t soon became clear, however, that Napoleon III had ulterior motives and designs for Mexico. Hence Britain and Spain withdrew their forces, leaving the enterprise to the French" (43). Often intentionally glossed over in Mexican historiography, the French military intervention led to the crowning of Archduke Maximilian of Habsburg as the Emperor of Mexico. Maximilian's brief reign began in April of 1864, and lasted only through June of 1867 when he was executed and Juárez's liberal regime resumed control of the government.

Marking the apex of his power as a public figure, Chimalpopoca was an indefatigable political participant in the Second Empire. He served as personal teacher and interpreter of Nahuatl to Emperor Maximilian, and as president of the *Junta Protectora de las*

*Clases Menesterosas*. This protagonism in the short-lived Empire is quite possibly the reason Chimalpopoca's is often overlooked in the narratives of Mexican history and Nahuatl letters. Both Mexican and foreign historiography tends to remember collaborators of the Second Empire as a group of traitors.<sup>65</sup> To give an idea of how the allies of the Second Empire were portrayed by the liberals (the victors who got to write history), Pani cites José María Iglesias' *Revistas históricas sobre la intervención francesa en México* outlining how the *Revistas* painted the conservatives as "monstruos criminales" (monstrous criminals) whose project was "antinacional y estúpido" (against the nation and stupid) (Pani, *Segundo Imperio* 49). Iglesias stated that: "No hay entre ellos una sola persona de recomendables antecedentes; todos son asesinos, salteadores, modelo de cinismo y de ferocidad [...] Para juzgar de la popularidad de la invasión francesa, basta saber que han salido del fango todos sus aliados" (cf Pani, *Segundo Imperio* 49) (There isn't a one of them with decent backgrounds: they are all assassins, highway robbers, models of cynicism and ferocity [...] To judge the popularity of the French invasion, let's just say that all of its allies crawled out of the mud). If the collaborator of the Empire was not executed or exiled, they were often victims of character assassination.<sup>66</sup> Chimalpopoca's punishment was that of being portrayed, if mentioned, as yet another inconsequential member of Maximilian's entourage. In the following section I hope to show that he was much more than a "hanger-on." Instead he

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<sup>65</sup> Mexican historiography of the Second Empire is notoriously manichean and propagandistic, a clear case of the victors writing history. See Erika Pani's 2004 book *El Segundo Imperio: Pasados de usos múltiples* for a "history of the history" of the Second Empire.

<sup>66</sup> It must be noted that not all Imperialists were doomed. Pani tells us that some were even recycled into the new Republican regime ("Dreaming" 7).

worked tirelessly on behalf of indigenous communities, continuing to promote his version of progress and independence that would include Indians as truly equal citizens.

Chimalpopoca was at Maximilian and Carlota's side as they were met by Indian masses in Naranjal, Veracruz, on their way to the capital of the nation. He translated the Indian mayor's welcome to the foreign prince: "No mahuistililoni tlatocatzine, nicantiquimopielia moicno masehualconetzitzihua" (Our great and honorable Emperor, here we are your poor Indian children). Through Chimalpopoca, Maximilian replied: "Cenca no huey paqueliz, no tlazo pilhaune, in anhualmicaque cetiliizca impampa amo altepeltzin" (I am very pleased, my dear children, to receive you as a commission of your town) (Teixidor 304).

Why would Indian people be so willing to embrace a foreign prince? First, we must remember that when Maximilian arrived in Mexico, a large portion of Indians on Mexican soil were at arms. Maximilian may well have represented the hope of an end to the fighting (González y González 108). Erika Pani explains that Maximilian might have embodied the possibility of a new, better, reality for indigenous people:

El imperio fue percibido por varios sectores de la sociedad como un momento lleno de posibilidades, como un aire nuevo. Como tal, para las comunidades indígenas, que venían sufriendo un proceso de desgaste desde las reformas borbónicas—tanto por el ataque a la propiedad comunal como por la pérdida de los derechos tradicionales, proceso que se había acelerado con la promulgación de las leyes de Reforma—, la

llegada de Maximiliano se presentó como una oportunidad para ‘reestructurar’ sus relaciones con el poder. (“Verdaderas” 579–80)

(The Empire was perceived by various sectors of society as a moment full of possibilities, a breath of fresh air. As such, for indigenous communities that had suffered a process of erosion since the Bourbon Reforms—in as much from the attack on communal property holding as the loss of traditional rights, a process that had accelerated with the passage of the laws of the Reform—the arrival of Maximilian presented itself as an opportunity to ‘restructure’ power relations.)

### **Asamblea de Notables**

This “restructuring” of the power relations and the nation itself was already in process when in 1863 a group of public figures was formed as the *Asamblea de Notables* (Assembly of Notables). Chimalpopoca is listed in the ranks of the 215 members of those elected to the *Asamblea* (Tafolla Pérez 85; 93–5). At their initial meeting it was agreed that Mexico should be a monarchy, with Maximilian as the Emperor. The decision to support a foreign regime was, for many of the *Asamblea*, a painful decision, but they felt that in the present state of near-anarchy, the only solution was to pin their hopes on Maximilian (Pani, *Para mexicanizar* 239).

By this time Chimalpopoca had become even more conservative, perhaps as a consequence of the *Ley Lerdo*’s assault on the Church and Indian land holdings, followed by the 1857 Constitution that failed to declare Catholicism as the national religion.



Chimalpopoca's religiosity, and his support of religion as integral to the betterment of the nation, is clear in an October 1863 speech given in both Nahuatl and Spanish. As a representative of the *Asamblea de Notables*, he urged Indians to support the crowning of Maximilian as Emperor:

Macehualtzitzintine, ihuan mochtin altepeme:

In yeclatocayotl in qui paleuhtoc in huei altepetl Francia, cenca mo centilana mexica tlalpan. In huel nelli Totazin Dios oquimo tlaocoltilli in to huey tonetequipachol, ihuan yehuatzin oquinmixpololtilli in huexcatlotoque, qui milhuia impíos. Impampa ca immanel inique oqui tlatlallique miec yaotlacenhualiztli, ocholloque ihuan cholotihui, inayac qui pelehuz itlacuimanaliz, ihuan ihuey iztlacatil.

Ipampa inon ximo yolchicauhtzinocan, ihuan xicmo chiquilican queme miectin iquizayampa in tonatiuh, ihuan mictlampa altepeme quichiuhticate, omo cen macocque huicpa in tlahueliloc demagogia ihuan momoztale qui hualtitlanilia in Regencia inecenpa tlatol, ic machiltiloz iteglacamatiliz, In Imperio omacoc impampa to teoyolicanemiliz anoce to Religion impamp inon, amo ximo mauhtizinocan, ximacocoztinocan. Yuh quinín ihueca tlachietliztzin in To teuico Dios quimonceliliz in to netequipachol. ([Sepúlveda 51; Zamacois Vol. 5, 755])<sup>67</sup>

(Esteemed Indians and All Peoples,

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<sup>67</sup> H. de León-Portilla cites this speech as appearing in *La Sociedad, Periódico Político y Literario* under the heading "Una proclama" (*Tepuztlahcuilolli* II, 114).

The good rulership assisted by the great nation of France, expands throughout the Mexican territory. The righteous and true God Our Father has shown mercy and compassion for our suffering and has confounded the blasphemous and ungodly ones. Because even though they have accumulated many weapons, they have fled, and continue to flee, without honoring their promises, revealing their illegitimacy.

Because of this, you must strengthen your hearts, and raise your voices in protest as the other nations of where the sun rises [the East] and toward Mictlan [the North] have done, sending away demons and demagoguery. Every day they send messages to the Regency, with which they make known their obedience to the Empire that commands here once again. They have embraced the Empire because of our spiritual way of living, our Religion. Do not be afraid. Stand Up. God watches from afar and will relieve us of our misery.)

If the choice to support a foreign regime was for many a move toward national reconciliation, for Chimalpopoca it may have seemed like a long awaited vindication of his own beliefs. For even though Maximilian was known to be influenced by European liberalism, at least he was Catholic. In this short speech, Chimalpopoca portrays the Empire as chosen by God, appealing to not only those that are already Catholic, but also perhaps those that are not but at least believe that the universe is divinely ordered. The military prowess of the liberals is no match for the unseen, yet omnipresent, hand of a benevolent God. Below I reproduce the Spanish-language version of the speech, since while yielding only very subtle differences from the original Nahuatl proclamation, it

demonstrates Chimalpopoca's ability to utilize the appropriate discourses of the distinct culture/language groups.

Raza indio y pueblos todos:

El gobierno de orden, protegido por la gran nación francesa, va cundiendo con inexplicable velocidad por el vasto territorio mejicano. El Señor de los ejércitos, no haya duda, apiadado de tanto padecer nuestro, ha confundido al impío y blasfemo. Porque no obstante haber acumulado éste tantos aparatos de guerra, él ha huido y sigue huyendo, sin que le valgan tampoco tantos engaños, promesas y mentiras.

Por tal motivo, cobrad aliento é imitad cuanto antes á tantos pueblos del Oriente y Norte que en gran masa se pronuncian contra la demagogia, dia á dia manda á la Regencia sus actas en que patentizan su libre y expontánea adhesión ó reconocimiento al Imperio, que la Asamblea de Notables ha restablecido. La causa de ésta es justa; porque es la de la religión, y por lo mismo no debeis titubear en seguirlo, y porque veo que por medio de él la adorable providencia divina merjorará nuestra suerte. ([Sepúlveda 51; Zamacois Vol. 5, 755])

(Indians and peoples

The government of order, protected by the great French nation, spreads with inexplicable speed across the vast territory of Mexico. The God of armies, without a doubt, has taken pity on our suffering, and has confounded the ungodly and blasphemous ones. Because even though they have accumulated so many weapons of

war, they have fled, and continue to flee, caring not for all of their deceptions, promises, and lies.

Because of this, gather your strength and quickly follow the example of all of the great masses of people in the East and the North that have stood up against demagoguery, that day after day send declarations in which they express their free and spontaneous support and recognition of the Empire, that the Asamblea de Notables has reestablished. The Empire's cause is just, because it is that of religion. Because of this you should not hesitate to support it, and because I believe that through the Empire, adored Divine Providence will improve our future.)

In the Nahuatl version, imperial government is termed “yectlatocayotl,” good rulership, whereas the Spanish calls this the government of *order* during this extraordinarily chaotic time. In these different phrasings, Chimalpopoca appeals to both Indians and non-Indians alike. Indians might have seen good rulership in terms of treating them as equal citizens of the nation, and non-Indians were desperate to see the end of violence that often sprang from unresolved agrarian struggles. Both speeches evoke God as favoring the movement. However, in the Spanish version Chimalpopoca offers a more militaristic discourse of “law and order” by proclaiming God as the as General of the military. In both speeches he urges the people to join what he portrays as a far-reaching movement, reminding the Indians that (besides God being on their side) those to the East and North have joined the cause. Chimalpopoca knows that the words “East” or “North” will mean little to the Indian population, and so communicates these ideas in a manner that will be quickly

grasped by this sector “iquizayampa in tonatiuh, ihuan mictlampa altepeme” (where the sun rises, the East, and toward Mictlan, the underworld of Aztec mythology that is to the North). Another culturally salient difference is that in the Nahuatl version he uses terms that connote traditional indigenous structures of governance such as declaring that the Empire “commands again” (inecenpa tlatol) and that others are proclaiming their “obedience” to this ruler (ic machiltiloiz iteglacamatiliz), reminiscent of tributary relationships of long ago. But in the Spanish version, perhaps appealing to mestizos in the crowd versed in the discourse of the independence movement, Chimalpopoca frames support of the Empire as “free and spontaneous.” Additionally in the Spanish version, the imperial government is portrayed as legitimately established by a powerful group of politicians. No mention is made of the *Asamblea de Notables* in the Nahuatl version, as this would mean very little to the Indians who were more than likely skeptical of career politicians. Finally, the Nahuatl version closes with a promise that the Empire will relieve the suffering of Indians in the present day, whereas the Spanish speech projects the long-term progress of the nation into the future by promising a better tomorrow. Chimalpopoca expertly read his public and was able to promote the Empire as being in concert with the concerns of both cultures. This is not to say that he simply knew what the crowd might want to hear. Instead, this brief bilingual and bicultural speech is demonstrative of Chimalpopoca’s nuanced understanding of the preoccupations of this divided and pluricultural nation. If he truly believed, as this speech suggests, that religion and foreign leadership would solve the nation’s most pressing problems, he would have the opportunity to put these theories into action once Maximilian was installed as Emperor.

### **Junta Protectora de las Clases Menesterosas**

In a letter written to King Leopold (May 12, 1865), Maximilian claims that “[t]he best are and continue to be the Indians; for their sake I have just passed a new law which creates a council concerned with aiding them, attending to their wishes, complaints, and needs” (Krauze, *Mexico* 183).<sup>68</sup> The council he spoke of in the letter, the *Junta Protectora de las Clases Menesterosas* (hereafter JPCM), was established April 10, 1865, and was comprised of five council members with Chimalpopoca appointed by the Emperor as president (Meyer 334–5).<sup>69</sup>

The JPCM was created to receive and review the complaints of the most impoverished citizens of Maximilian’s empire, mostly Indians, and to recommend to the Emperor the appropriate solutions. The Council was also charged with suggesting measures to aid the improvement basic education, and facilitate access to education for all citizens, and distribute uncultivated lands to the poor. Since the JPCM was an “*órgano de consulta y no de decision*” (Meyer 337) (of a consultative nature, not a decision-making body), one might be led to believe that the Council was “only for show” or a token offering to the poor. However, the JPCM was one of the very few commissions appointed by Maximilian to have enjoyed unlimited and direct access to the Emperor. As we will see in the following section, the members of the JPCM were able to develop the

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<sup>68</sup> For full text of this law creating the Junta, see *Colección de leyes*, “Decreto imperial que instituyó la Junta Protectora de Clases Menesterosas” vol. 3, t. VI.

<sup>69</sup> The other original members of the JPCM were Francisco Villanueva, Victor Perez, Evaristo Reyes and Marino Degollado. The last two would be intermittently replaced by Francisco Morales y Median, José Raimundo Nicolín, Francisco Sladana, Isidro Díaz and Pedro Montes de Oca (Meyer 334–5).

framework for, and influence Maximilian's formal declaration of, some of the most forward-thinking legislation of the time dealing with worker protection rights and agrarian reform.

Sometimes interpreted as romantic, utopian, or even paternalistic, Maximilian's stated objective in the creation of the JPCM was to ensure that Indians had the same sort of political access—ideally leading to better social and economic opportunities—that non-Indian citizens of the Empire enjoyed. However, these opportunities should not be taken as the kind of indigenism geared toward affording special treatment or protection to Indians, as in the Colonial Period. These kinds of measures were designed to ease the incorporation of the Indian into the nation. As opposed to the Indian himself being the problem, Maximilian's brand of indigenism identified the barrier to progress and national unification as the woeful poverty and inequality that the vast majority (Indians) of the nation suffered. In line with Chimalpopoca's earlier ideological position, “[I]a junta no defendía lo que hoy podríamos llamar ‘derechos indígenas,’ sino los derechos de los indígenas como ciudadanos—comunes y corrientes—del imperio” (Pani, “Veraderas” 591) (the council didn't defend what today we might call “Indian rights,” but instead the rights of Indians as ordinary citizens of the Empire). Following Pani's interpretation, while Maximilian's politics could be considered “sensitive” to Indian issues, this was more in terms of reconciling liberal principles with the very real problem of the marginalization of a massive portion of the population.

Pani sees Chimalpopoca's appointment as president of the JPCM as logical. He had already been named *Visitador de Pueblos de Indios* by the Emperor, and had substantial

experience dealing with land issues (“Verdaderas” 584). His literal and political bilingualism made him, in fact, the ideal candidate to assess the challenges at hand and recommend viable legislative solutions. Again demonstrating Chimalpopoca’s intellectual flexibility, in their evaluation of the complaints and subsequent recommendations to the Emperor the JPCM regularly referenced both canons of law, as well as the great thinkers of the time such as Adam Smith, Jovellanos, Campomanes, Burke, J.B. Say, Benjamin Constant, and J.G. Courcelle-Seneuil y Mora (Meyer 338; Arenal 172).

Examples of the kinds of issues the Council dealt with can be found in the file *Junta Protectora* at the Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico City which holds 188 files of complaints submitted to the JPCM (Meyer 336).<sup>70</sup> A cursory review of the summaries listed in the files catalogue (compiled by Alfiero and González) demonstrates that an overwhelming majority of the complaints were registered by Indians regarding problems with working conditions, and land and water issues.<sup>71</sup> In the scant two years of the JPCM’s existence, besides reviewing each and every one of the complaints they received (Meyer did not encounter a single complaint that went unanswered [336]), the Council also managed to open a maternity hospital and an orphanage. The JPCM was also

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<sup>70</sup> Meyer estimates that 4,800 pages of 272 complaints submitted to the JPCM are scattered between the *Junta Protectora*, *Gobernación*, and *Segundo Imperio* files at the Archivo General de la Nación (Meyer 336).

<sup>71</sup> Some of the complaints say “workers” but it is clear that they could easily be Indians as well.



responsible for the preparation, under Imperial orders, of some of the most progressive legislation of the time.<sup>72</sup>

### **Laws from the Empire**<sup>73</sup>

In the first year of the JPCM's operation, Chimalpopoca gave a summary to the Emperor detailing the Council's including their work on suggested legal reform:

El primer trabajo de la Junta fue ocuparse de un proyecto de ley sobre reglamento del trabajo de los operarios de campo. Otro sobre colonización, otro de instrucción secundaria a los indígenas. Se ocupa actualmente de formular un proyecto de ley sobre instrucción primaria que comprenda todos los pueblos del Imperio. (cf Meyer 342)<sup>74</sup>

(The first task that the Junta concerned itself with was a project writing a law on workplace regulations for farm workers. Another dealing with colonization [land distribution and resettlement], and yet another having to do with secondary education

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<sup>72</sup> Jaime del Arenal's essay "La proteccion indígena en el Segundo Imperio mexicano" thoroughly outlines the JPCM's involvement in the development worker protection rights and three agrarian reform laws (178–88).

<sup>73</sup> See *Colección de leyes, decretos y reglamentos que interinamente forman el sistema político administrativo y judicial del imperio* for a complete listing of "laws from the Empire." Representative of Mexico's disdain for this episode in their history, these laws do not appear in any of the nations legislative compilations edited and published since that time (Pani, "Dreaming" 3).

<sup>74</sup> Full text at the Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City in the file *Segundo Imperio* box 21, Diario de extractos del Emperador.

for Indians. Right now we are working on a law regarding elementary education for all peoples of the Empire.)

After receiving recommendations from the JPCM, on November 1, 1865, Maximilian called into effect two laws: the *Ley sobre la libertad de los trabajadores de campo* and the *Ley para dirimir las diferencias sobre tierras y aguas entre pueblos*. In the *Ley sobre la libertad* Maximilian proclaimed debt peonage illegal, that regardless of debt accumulated to the hacendado, workers were free to come and go as they pleased. The law canceled debts over 10 pesos, regulated work hours and instated child labor restrictions (possibly the first child-labor law in Latin America), prohibited physical punishment of workers, and essentially dissolved the practice of the “company store,” mandating the opening of markets at the hacienda (Dabbs 119; J. Bazant 45). The *Ley para dirimir diferencias sobre tierras y aguas entre pueblos* established an administrative framework to put an end to the seemingly endless lawsuits between landowners and indigenous communities over land and water (Arenal 185).<sup>75</sup> This legislation “recognized the legal character of the pueblos so that they could defend their interests and reclaim rights to their land and water” (Krauze, *Mexico* 183). The following year, again based on decrees proposed by the JPCM, Maximilian passed the Second Empire’s agrarian reform laws: the *Ley sobre terrenos de comunidad y de repartimiento* (June 26, 1866) and the

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<sup>75</sup> Arenal mentions the falsification of land titles in response to lawsuits filed by landowners that insisted that the indigenous communities produce title to the lands in question, reminiscent of Techialoyan codices that appeared in the 17th and 18th centuries under similar circumstances. During the nineteenth century, lacking the protection afforded them under Spanish rule, Indians resorted to violence and falsification of titles when they could not prove that they had been given the rights to the land by the Spanish Crown or had been in possession of the land as long as can be remembered (Arenal 186).

*Ley agraria que concede fundo legal y ejido a los pueblos que carezcan de él* (September 16, 1866). These laws were aimed at “not only the restoration of the land to its rightful owners but the donation of land to those villages in greatest need” (Krauze, *Mexico* 183). These laws would clearly benefit indigenous communities.

If legislation from the Empire seemed favorable to indigenous communities, this was because Indians were finally being afforded the same kind of consideration as non-Indian. To be clear, these laws did not, however, promote any kind of protection or promotion of indigenous custom or culture in terms of land. In fact, nothing in Maximilian’s political behavior or legislations suggests anything more than being directed toward improving the life of *all* Mexican citizens. Maximilian did not conceptualize Indians as a distinct community with special status and rights; instead he saw them as marginalized (Pani, “Verdaderas” 594). Chimalpopoca’s collaboration with the Empire, including his (co)authorship of the above-mentioned laws, offers an idea of this particular intellectual’s evolving notions of citizenship. Whereas his earlier activism in the San Gregorio debates suggested a separatist outlook that harkened to Colonial structures, at this point in his career he seems to be more invested in an “integrated” idea of citizenship that promised Indians equal footing (which might include land restitution in a chronically unfair system). But in this acceptance, he was all the more dedicated to ensuring that the rights of citizenship were actually experienced by all, including Indians.

The problems taken on by the JPCM and the solutions they offered were not popular, particularly with the landed class, and Chimalpopoca and the other members of the JPCM were subject to regular attacks by journalists and public intellectuals (Arenal 167).

Liberals and conservatives alike were distressed by Maximilian's law that protected workers from hacienda owner abuses. According to Robert Duncan, liberals felt that Maximilian's labor reforms "interfered with the freedom of contract" and conservatives were unhappy with any meddling with what they conceived as their traditional right to control their workers as they saw fit (65). Regardless of public criticisms, we can imagine that Chimalpopoca was pleased with seeing his ideals turned to public policy. But this satisfaction would be short lived. Maximilian's laws were tossed out with the Emperor in 1867, and those associated with the Empire were executed, exiled, or treated as social pariahs.

Concepción Chimalpopoca Osoy, Chimalpopoca's only surviving child (with Francisca Osoy Romero Rincón Gallardo y Castel de Oro), recounts her father's experience after the Emperor's execution: "Cuando entraron los liberales, buscaron a Faustino Galicia Chimalpopoca para fusilarlo, pero se ocultó en un sótano; saquearon la casa y rompieron los muebles. Allí habían ocultado las alhajas más costosas de muchas iglesias" (cf Sepúlveda 15) (When the liberals came to power, they searched for Faustino Galicia Chimalpopoca to execute him, but he hid in the basement; they looted the house and broke the furniture. They [the imperialists] had hidden some of the most important treasures of the churches [in our basement]). All of his properties were confiscated, and it is rumored that he went briefly to France to escape persecution, although this claim cannot be substantiated. Like many other collaborators of the Empire banished from public intellectual life, Chimalpopoca went to work at the National Museum (H. de León-

Portilla 114). It has also been suggested that he eventually returned to defending indigenous land claims, but his prestige and political power had disappeared.

It is possible that in these final years of his life, impoverished and shunned by society, that Chimalpopoca saw his efforts as having been in vain. It is important to recall, however, that some fifty years later the same basic tenets of the Second Empire agrarian reforms developed by the JPCM—restitution and land grants—would be the cornerstones of twentieth-century reforms (Meyer 353). Therefore, when discussing agrarian reform and Indian rights in Mexico, it seems clear that one needs to consider Chimalpopoca's efforts during the Second Empire. Furthermore, the political sphere is not the only area where Chimalpopoca was occupied; throughout his political career he was simultaneously a teacher and scholar of Nahuatl language and culture. Over the years he held formal teaching appointments at the Colegio de San Gregorio, teaching Nahuatl and Law, was Professor of Nahuatl at the University of Mexico 1858–1865, and Professor of Nahuatl and Otomí at the *Seminario Conciliar del Arzobispado* 1866–?. He was also regularly involved in the restoration, transcription, and translation of Colonial-era indigenous language documents, as well as working on linguistic studies as a member of the *Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística* (Mexican Society for Geography and Statistics). The following section addresses this scholarly profile.

### **Scholar**

Chimalpopoca's intellectual and scholarly pursuits are representative of the kinds of research activities undertaken by major public figures and intellectuals in nineteenth-

century Mexico. Following the lead of other nations such as Germany, England, France, and the United States, the Mexican nation turned to scientific methods to accumulate and analyze the fragmented data that qualified and quantified who and what the Mexican nation was and would become. Having grown tired of the “deformada imagen” (Cifuentes, *Lenguas amerindias* par. 4). (deformed image) that foreign writers had inadvertently created of their country, Mexican intellectuals were intent upon writing their own nation. They embarked on a massive inventory-taking project dealing with the state of the economy, agriculture, industry, and commerce. They also sought to understand the people—physically, morally, and culturally—that inhabited the territory (Cifuentes, *Lenguas amerindias* par.4). To answer these questions, members of the *Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística*—Mexicans, foreigners, liberals and conservatives—went to work.<sup>76</sup> Chimalpopoca and his peers were “preocupados todos por la existencia de ciertas estructuras heredadas de la época Colonial que interesaba comprender, definir e incluso defender, y se lanzo [...] a la complicada labor de inventariar recursos, de hacer diccionarios, de escribir o interpretar la historia” (Moreno-Toscano 6) (all concerned with the existence of certain inherited structures from the Colonial Period, and interested in understanding, defining (and perhaps defending) themselves. And so they went about the complicated task of taking an inventory of resources, making dictionaries, writing, or interpreting history [...]). Research along these lines often included the transcription and translation of Colonial Period indigenous language documents which explains why so many of of the published Colonial

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<sup>76</sup> José Fernando Ramírez, Manuel Orozco y Berra, Joaquín García Icazbalecta, Francisco Pimentel, and Alfredo Chavero were some of the more influential Mexican members of the SMGE with whom Chimalpopoca worked.

documents accessible to us today are editions from the nineteenth century. Many were transcribed, translated, and published by the *Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística* (SMGE) and its members, including Chimalpopoca.

### ***Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística (SMGE)***

Chimalpopoca appears as a member of the *Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística* (SMGE)<sup>77</sup> beginning in 1850 as an honorary associate, and is listed from 1854 through 1865 as a member (Sepúlveda 12). Along with other supporters of Maximilian he was removed from the society's membership list with the fall of the Empire, but reappeared in 1871, this time as an honorary member. Besides authoring two philological studies published in the *Boletín de la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística*, Chimalpopoca also regularly participated in group projects commissioned by the SMGE, including the ambitious *Comisión de Investigación de Idiomas y Dialectos Aborígenes* (Aboriginal Language and Dialect Research Commission). Chimalpopoca has been considered one of the most important contributors to the field of nineteenth-century linguistics in Mexico, along with José Fernando Ramírez and Francisco Pimentel (Sosa xxi).

Similar to the present-day work of INALI (Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas/National Institute for Indigenous Languages), the SMGE carried out one of the first systematic attempts to collect and organize data on the indigenous peoples and

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<sup>77</sup> Enrique Olavarría y Ferrari's, *La Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística. Reseña Histórica*, and Barbara Cifuentes' *Lenguas amerindias* and *Lenguas para un pasado* both treat the history of the SMGE in detail.

languages of the newly independent nation. The linguistic and ethnographic studies launched by the SMGE were particularly concerned with the “calidad, origen y diversidad el universo amerindio,” (quality, origin, and diversity of the Amerindian universe) to provide a scientific evaluation of the historical trajectory of the Indians (Cifuentes, *Lenguas amerindias* par. 6). Through linguistic research, intellectuals of the time, including Chimalpopoca, believed they could reconstruct the history and evaluate the evolutionary progress of particular groups of indigenous peoples. They hoped to calculate the perceived value to the metanarrative of the nation that indigenous pasts could lend. At the same time, it was assumed that the accumulation of data regarding distinct languages/cultures would allow for comparative work so as to arrive at an understanding of the “progress” of indigenous development.

Interestingly, while research projects of SMGE members were immersed in the evaluation of indigenous languages, they were in no way a vindication of indigenous languages or culture. Nor were any geared toward the promotion or revitalization of indigenous language for anything other than the study of antiquities. Also, as opposed to actually speaking with Indian themselves, the majority of the studies analyzed Colonial-era texts for their studies (Cifuentes, *Lenguas amerindias* par. 18). One is left wondering what a native speaker of Nahuatl might have thought about the projects of the SMGE. Did Chimalpopoca believe that his language was something of the past, useful for only linguistic studies? In my research at the Archivo Histórico of the Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia in Mexico City, I discovered a previously unpublished document in the Chimalpopoca file (*Colección Antigua* No. 254) that can perhaps give us a clue as



to his disposition on the matter. While undated, we can assume that it was written some time between 1852 and 1867 when Chimalpopoca was a member of the *Comisión de Investigación de Idiomas y Dialectos Aborígenes*. One also senses that this is either a draft destined for publication in the *Boletín*, or a speech that Chimalpopoca delivered to the SMGE:

Señores,

Grande sentimiento me causa la ignorancia en que me encuentro de no conocer el suelo que piso y en el que tanto tiempo perdido La Providencia Divina ha conservado mi existencia, y tanto mas se aumenta mi pena, cuando que veo que cada día si no se han acabado completamente, se ban disminuyendo en gran manera los elementos que me podian dirigir, aunque por tradicion al conocimiento de tantos tesoros y preciosidades que oculta en su seno Mexico.

Porque por desgracia nosotros los mex.(icanos) desde que mal entendimos, que ya eramos libres y podiamos vestir pantalones, no solo no debiamos hablar la lengua mexicana sino obvidarla del todo; por que ¿qué se diria de un Señor de pantalon hablando en tal idioma? Lo siento en extremo porque la verdadera historia de mexico esta marcada en su idioma o en la lengua náhuatl.

Ademas, nos alentamos, si no nos atrevimos, al desprecio de la propia lengua (india, desde) que cierta vez se mando en Toloacan, que nada se enseñase en tal idioma sino todo en el puro castellano y ved aquí, que no encuentro a quien preguntarle ¿cómo debo pronunciar el nombre que es la materia de las investigaciones que está

encargada de ejecutarlas la comision científica, para decir yo en la inteligencia de la naturaleza de lo que se trata. Podre decir:

¿Cacahuamilpa? No se, porque veo que uno de los componentes del nombre es cacahuaca verbo que significa hacer mucho ruido, hacer grande destemplanza.

¿Cácahuámilpa? Viene el verbo cácahua q<sup>e</sup> significa ir dejando por partes, o poco a poco algo como depósito o como vulgarmente se dice deposadera.

¿Càcahuamilpa? Se presenta el verbo càcahua que significa soltar completamente, o irse separando poco a poco.

¿Cacahuamilpa? Veo en el compuesto el nombre cacahuatl, que significa lo que se dice hoy cacao, o arbol de cuyo fruto se hace el chocolate.

¿Chachahuamilpa? Se hace ver en él, el nombre chachahuatl que significa lirón, y chachahuamilpa da a entender lugar en que hay abundancia de estos animales.

¿Çacahuamilpa? Veo en él el nombre zacahuitztlí que significa grama y zacahuamilpa quiere decir lugar que abunda de grama. Además ignoro también si el lugar en q<sup>e</sup> se halla la grieta o cueva es el que tiene tal nombre o la misma cueva.

Con tal ignorancia mal haria yo decir magistralmente que cacahuamilpa quiere decir lugar en que se dan muchos cacahuates, cuando este nombre castellanizado se expresa en el mexicano con el de tlaliacahuatl fruto que es de dentro de la tierra. O como un anticuario satisfecho de su inteligencia dijo que el nombre Acamapic, primer emperador mexicano, queria decir boca fruncida estaria bonito el primer magistrado con su boca fruncida. Mas espero que las observaciones que haga con empeño la

comisión me den el verdadero nombre de cacahuamilpa para saber cual es un objeto o cual es su notabilidad.<sup>78</sup>

(Gentlemen,

It causes me great pain the ignorant state in which I find myself, of not understanding the land that I walk on, and thinking of all of the time I have wasted that Divine Providence has conceded me. My sorrow only increases when I see that, if they haven't completely come to an end, they've certainly diminished greatly, the sources of information that I could go to. Even those that traditionally hold an understanding of all of the treasures and lovely things that are Mexico are fewer and fewer.

Because unfortunately, we Mexicans, thinking that since we were free and we should wear pants, we misunderstood in thinking that not only should we not speak our native language, but we should forget about everything else from our culture. Because, what would the people think of a man in pants that spoke with *that* language? I am so sorry for this because the true history of Mexico is marked in her language, in Nahuatl.

Moreover, we encourage the disdain for our own language that at one time was the language of Tlalocán, and [promote] that we no longer teach in the language, instead everything is in Castilian. So now it happens that I can't even find anyone to whom I can ask how I should pronounce the name of the things that the scientific commission is researching, in order to speak knowledgeably on the subject. Should I say:

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<sup>78</sup> All accents (or lack thereof) and spelling are original to the document.

Cacahuamilpa? I don't know because I am seeing as one of the components of the word cacahuaca, a verb that means to make a lot of noise, excessive disruption.

Cácáhuámilpa? This comes from the verb cácáhua that signifies to go leaving pieces, or little by little depositing something, or as the common people say *deposadera*.

Càcahuamilpa? Here we have the verb *càcahua* that signifies to let go completely, or to go along separating little by little.

Cacahuamilpa? Here I see a compound with the word cacahuatl, which means what today we call cacao, or the tree whose fruit we use to make chocolate.

Chachahuamilpa? In this one we see the word chachahuatl which means dormouse, and chachahuamilpa implies a place where there is an abundance of these animals.

Çacahuamilpa? Here I see the word zacahuitztli that means a kind of plant/grass and zacahuamilpa means a place where there is an abundance of this plant. I'm not even considering if in the place where this plant is found, it is the crevice or the cave that has this same name or if it is the cave itself.

With this ignorance I would be remiss to say, with any authority, that cacahuamilpa means a place where there are many cacahuates, when this castilianized word expressed in Nahuatl references tlaliacahuatl, fruit from underground. This would be like when that aficionado of antiquities, smug with his intelligence, said that the name Acamapic, first Nahua emperor, meant frowning mouth. It would be neat to have the first leader with a frowning mouth. I only hope that the observations that the

commission strives to record give me the true name of cacahuamilpa in order to truly know which object is which, and to understand its properties.)

This speech is yet another example of Chimalpopoca's specific brand of religious-indigenous-scientific politics and scholarship. After (of course) invoking God within the first few lines, Chimalpopoca begins with a perhaps falsely modest appraisal of his own ignorance regarding the nature of the world around him and the history of the people and land he inhabits. In bemoaning the lack of sources that hold the secrets that the commission aimed to discover, surely Chimalpopoca references indigenous language texts since a good part of his career was dedicated to the collection, transcription, and translation of such documents. At the same time, he understands that human beings themselves are the bearers of knowledge and decries the trajectory of "Independent-thinking" that has silenced these living, breathing libraries with assimilative practices. Perhaps without understanding the consequences of the theories and practices of nation-building, the resulting de-Indianized national personality of Mexico has come at the expense of the cultural patrimony of the nation. Freedom, in Chimalpopoca's eyes, should not mean the derision or elimination of native languages or cultures. Most scholars involved in the commission would have agreed that "the true history of Mexico is marked in her language, in Nahuatl." This was the very basis of many linguistic studies, to understand the past through language. But very few would have said that this meant that indigenous languages ought to be protected or promoted, or even that Indians of the present day ought to be consulted. In general these languages were thought to be,

like Colonial documents, a thing of the distant past that should be documented and archived. Chimalpopoca goes against grain in denouncing the trend of Spanish-only education, and suggests that as native speakers “disappear” into the Spanish language and Euro-mestizo culture of the nation, the scientific commission’s project and ostensibly the good of the nation, will be in jeopardy. Furthermore, in the phrase “what would the people think of a man in pants that spoke with *that* language,” he succinctly brings to the forefront one of the key issues at hand: linguistic discrimination. *That* language is conceived of, by the general public and often by Indians themselves who have been on the receiving end of the message of indigenous inferiority for centuries, as subordinate to Spanish. At the time, indeed through the present day, indigenous languages were thought to have been less developed (proving their supposedly lagging position on the evolutionary scale of progress). Chimalpopoca implicitly counters this erroneous conception by demonstrating the complexities of the language with his discussion of one single word in the Nahuatl language. At the same time, this lengthy display of his own profound understanding of the language (including contrastive vowel length), situates the native speaker as the authority. He goes on to challenge the skill of the so-called experts in their etymological work, giving more credence to his position that the native speaker should not only be consulted in these kinds of studies, but encouraged to continue speaking his/her language for the good of the nation. By the end of the speech Chimalpopoca has made a strong case for reconsidering policies of the day, and demonstrated a scientific rationale for linguistic and cultural plurality.

### **Transcriber, Translator, Author**

A brief review of the documents bearing Chimalpopoca's mark as transcriber or translator—found in the Archivo Histórico of the BNAH in Mexico City, the Bancroft Library at University of California at Berkeley, the Newberry Library in Chicago, the Lilly Library at Indiana University, the New York Public Library, the Benjamin Franklin Library in Paris, and the British Museum, to name a few—show that he worked with an immensely varied corpus of texts, demonstrating the breadth of his interests.<sup>79</sup> Examples include copies and translations of original historical-mythological narrations (such as the *Anales de Cuauhtitlán* or *Codex Chimalpopoca* to be discussed in the next section); indigenous religious documents (drawings pertaining to the ritual month cycle); *cantos*/lyrical poetry; ecclesiastic translations from Spanish to Nahuatl for evangelization purposes (including catequisms, prayers, loas, and theater); land titles and transactions (both drawings and texts); anonymous letters to the King of Spain; toponym studies dealing with Texcoco; tribute lists; philological studies; Techialoyan codexes, a history (in Spanish) of El Colegio de San Gregorio; a Latin treatise on logic translated to Nahuatl; a (possibly original) Otomí grammar; and a variety of texts dealing with the Virgin of Guadalupe.<sup>80</sup> Besides transcription and translation work, Chimalpopoca is also

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<sup>79</sup> Sepúlveda's *Catálogo de la Colección de Documentos Históricos de Faustino Galicia Chimalpopoca* is the most detailed, yet still incomplete, compilation of the location and description of texts that form part of his transcription or translation corpus.

<sup>80</sup> The Guadalupan documents transcribed by Chimalpopoca, held at the New York Public Library, include two plays, a song by Joseph Pérez de la Fuente (1719), and two unsigned and undated texts (a sermon and a prayer). Sell, Burkhart, and Pool contend that the sermon and prayer were possibly written by Chimalpopoca himself: "Since Faustino Chimalpopoca Galicia provides no attribution for the sermon and prayer, it is possible that they are at least in part his own compositions, from the mid-nineteenth century. If this is true, they represent a Nahuatl scholar's original contribution to the 'Indianization' of Our Lady of Guadalupe. They are the earliest known works in the Nahuatl language to represent her as having an

author of several original texts. True to his religious roots, one of his first publications is a catechism in Nahuatl, the *Devocionario para oír misa en lengua mexicana: Dedicado a los indios* (1848). *Silabario Mexicano*, published in 1849, is a manual for teaching Nahuatl literacy which includes a brief introduction of the Nahuatl alphabet, several vocabulary words based on syllable length, and *huehuetlahtolli*-style texts that detail the proper comportment of boys and girls, including personal hygiene. *Disertacion hispano-nahua-latina sobre el origen y modo de contar de los indios nahuacenses* (1858), explains in Spanish (implying an audience of non-native speakers), the complex method of counting in the Nahuatl language.<sup>81</sup> Chimalpopoca published three more original texts of note in 1869. Two were geared toward non-native speakers: *Epítome o modo fácil de aprender el idioma náhuatl o lengua mexicana*, a grammar, and *Vocabulario correcto de la lengua mexicana*, a glossary. The third, *El centavo de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*, is a short pamphlet in Nahuatl and Spanish addressed to “No macehual icnihtzitzihuane” (Hermanos míos los indios) in which Chimalpopoca seeks donations to support the worship of the Virgin Guadalupe. Finally, while not the author of the text, Chimalpopoca has long been associated with the *Anales de Cuauhtitlán*, also called the Codex Chimalpopoca.

### **Codex Chimalpopoca**

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‘Indian’ appearance that gives her special relevance to indigenous Mexicans” (190). I would lean toward caution in attributing authorship to Chimalpopoca as he had a history of forgetting to record origins of texts (see the section “Codex Chimalpopoca” of this chapter).

<sup>81</sup> The title of this text suggests that there were also Nahuatl and Latin versions, however only the Spanish can be found in the Chimalpopoca file at the Archivo Histórico at the BNAH in Mexico City.



Chimalpopoca's political and intellectual endeavors have generally received little attention; however his name is quite familiar to those that study pre-Columbian and Colonial codexes. In honor of Chimalpopoca's attempt at the first transcription and translation of the *Anales de Cuauhtitlán* (1570) and *Leyenda de los Soles* (1558), the French mesoamericanist Charles Étienne Brasseur de Bourbourg renamed this important set of Nahuatl-language texts as the *Codex Chimalpopoca* (Bierhorst 12). This final section discusses the critical reception of Chimalpopoca's work with these texts.

Some of the earliest critiques of Chimalpopoca's work with these texts appear with the first publication of the *Anales de Cuauhtitlán* in 1885. Gumersindo Mendoza and Felipe Sánchez-Solís published Chimalpopoca's transcription and translation alongside their own revised translation.<sup>82</sup> In the "Advertencia" of the publication, they reproduced José Fernano Ramírez's (undated) reprimand of Chimalpopoca for having forgotten to annotate where the documents came from so as to verify their authenticity:

En copias de este género es muy importante marcar la procedencia como garantía de su autoridad. La llevan todas las que sacaron bajo mi inmediata inspección; mas faltan en las que, durante mi residencia en Europa, sacó el Lic. Faustino Galicia, a quien ocupé como copiante y traductor, no obstante el especial encargo que le hice. Circunstancias inopinadas han impedido suplir este descuido, bien que por lo que toca a la autenticidad de los originales no hay duda. —Téngola respecto a la fidelidad de la traducción, quizá porque mis conocimientos en la lengua mexicana son muy

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<sup>82</sup> Note that these authors have declined to use the title *Codex Chimalpopoca*. The next translation published in 1945 would return Chimalpopoca's name to the title.

limitados. Procede mi desconfianza de la dureza que se nota en la version, y de las varias enmiendas que se han hecho por mis indicaciones (2–3).

(In copies of this genre it is very important to note its origins to guarantee its authenticity. All of the copies that I personally inspected have this information. Some of them are missing however, on those that the Lic. Faustino Galicia (who I hired as a transcriber and translator), even though I was very specific about this. Unexpected circumstances have made it impossible to remedy this error, however there is no question as to the authenticity of the originals that the copies were made from. However, I can not be sure of the faithfulness of the translation, perhaps because my skills with the Mexican language are limited. My distrust comes from the fact that this is a rough draft. Note the various amendments made per my suggestion.)

The Mendoza and Sánchez-Solís edition, along with this public admonishment, was published nearly fifteen years after Ramírez’s death and eight years after that of Chimalpopoca. There is no way of knowing if what appears at first glance to be a biting admonishment of Chimalpopoca’s abilities by his close associate, was perhaps simply a note attached to the draft of the initial attempt at the translation. With this in mind it seems unfair (or even malicious if one considers that Mendoza and Sánchez-Solís were both prominent anti-imperialists) to print and publish Chimalpopoca’s rough draft in the guise of a complete translation, and then preface it with Ramírez’s critique, as if they were discussing a polished version. In this same “Advertencia,” Mendoza and Sánchez-

Solís also include more negative comments from Ramírez regarding Chimalpopoca's translations of Nahuatl names, cautioning the reader to not take his translations too seriously: "el Lic. Galicia es sumamente aficionado y propenso a las versiones metafóricas, y he notado que frecuentemente no convienen con los símbolos" (3) (Licenciado Galicia is extremely enthusiastic and prone to metaphoric interpretations, and I have noted that his translations don't always agree with the symbols). Did Mendoza and Sánchez-Solís use Ramírez's notes and Chimalpopoca's translations out of context to support their claim to a better, more complete translation, or was this a politically motivated discrediting of a collaborator of the Empire? Regardless, this pair would not be immune from criticism either.

In his 1945 edition of the *Códice Chimalpopoca: Anales de Cuauhtitlán y Leyenda de Soles*, Primo Feliciano Velázquez takes Mendoza and Sánchez-Solís to task for giving the false impression that the first and third portion of the *Anales* have the same author. Velázquez identifies where the Mendoza and Sánchez-Solís version omits letters and subverts letter order in words, and suppresses entire lines of the original leaving the general public with access to less than half of the original document (xii–xiii). In Velázquez's eyes, their translation was much worse than that of Chimalpopoca: "No podían ser tan enormes los yerros de Galicia Chimalpopca, *nahuatlato* que mamó el idioma y ennobleció más su progenie con su educación literaria y científica" (xv) (Galicia Chimalpopoca, being a native speaker of Nahuatl, and having ennobled his line with his literary and scientific education, could not possibly have committed the kinds of errors as those [of Mendoza and Sánchez-Solís]). He also affirms that while Mendoza and Sánchez

Solís had earlier claimed that Chimalpopoca's translations were given to them in terms of being a "complete" translation, this clearly was not the case. After describing *all* of the previous efforts at translation as incomplete (xiii), Velázquez humbly concedes that a translation is perhaps never complete:

[L]os traductores de que hemos hablado, sin medir la estatura de un Carochi o de un Olmos, dieron pruebas de conocer el *náhuatl* y merecen justamente nuestro respeto; con todo, cuantas veces creemos deber alejarnos de su sendero, lo hacemos, explicando, eso sí, en una o muchas notas la causa de nuestro desvío, persuadidos de que tanto provecho se obtiene de los aciertos del maestro, como de sus descuidos o yerros, que a nadie faltan. Hay que espigar aún en los campos por donde expertos segadores han pasado. (xxi)

(without the importance of a Carochi or an Olmos, the translators we have discussed proved to be knowledgeable in *nahuatl* and as such deserve our respect. When I have found it necessary to deviate from their translation I have done so, clearly explaining my reasons with one or many notes. I believe that we can benefit as much from the accuracies of our teachers as the oversights and errors—none of us is immune. We need to continue to return to the areas where experts have passed.)

Nearly fifty years later, in 1992 John Bierhorst published the first English translation of the texts as *History and Mythology of the Aztecs: The Codex Chimalpopoca*. Bierhorst,

who had the luxury of working with several translations, echoes Velázquez and makes detailed reference to earlier scholarly attempts that informed his translation, including the pioneering work of Chimalpopoca (12).

While not meant to be apologetic or a defense of Chimalpopoca's abilities, my aim in revisiting the history of the critiques of his work on the *Codex Chimalpopoca* is to suggest that, now with some distance, it is perhaps time to return to the dusty footnotes of the nineteenth century to fill in the gaps of this time period in terms of indigenous intellectual activity. Chimalpopoca's unpopular political decisions led to being nearly erased from historical memory, and public criticism of his overall abilities in relation to the *Codex Chimalpopoca* has nearly succeeded in characterizing his work as inconsequential. Yet I hope to have shown that revisiting his career offers a unique perspective of how one particular Indian participated in modernity, at a time "when Indians no longer existed," promoting his own vision of the nation. At the same time, Chimalpopoca's brand of politics and scholarship reveal an intellectual project that resonates in the twenty-first century. The issues with which he concerned himself are still at the forefront of political debate. Therefore a closer look at his example can potentially inform indigenous intellectuals of the present day as they weigh in on some of complex issues of the day. How does one legislate and govern in a pluricultural nation? What are the parameters of the term "pluricultural" and how does the theorization of an expansive definition of nationhood play out in actual practice? What is the role and value of indigenous languages in the nation? Not only have I aimed to recover a clearer picture of Chimalpopoca's activism, but also begin to identify the networks he belonged to and

mediated with, leading to the identification of other Nahua intellectuals, for example, Juan Rodríguez-Puebla or Francisco Mendoza y Moctezuma. In doing so, we can also analyze and evaluate the circumstances that prescribed and prohibited the kinds of intellectual work in which Chimalpopoca and his peers were engaged.

### **Chapter Three: Luz Jiménez: Muse, Model, Storyteller (1897–1965)**

In this chapter I examine the scientific, economic, and anthropological discourses of Social Darwinism at the turn of the 20th century manifested in the Mexican nation's resolve to deal with the "Indian problem" during the last gasps of the Porfiriato and the beginnings of the Mexican Revolution. To this end I analyze the testimony of Doña Luz Jiménez (1897–1965) a native speaker of Nahuatl from Milpa Alta, who among other professions was a muse and model for painters and photographers, working extensively with Diego Rivera and Jean Charlot. Luz's narrative of her experience with assimilative schooling, her first-hand perspective of the Mexican Revolution, and tales of day-to-day life, myths, didactic and comical tales come to us by way of Mexican anthropologist Fernando Horcasitas, who hired Luz as both a linguistic informant and co-teacher of the Nahuatl language at the Colegio de México during the late 1950s and early 1960s. This chapter deals with only a very small portion of a corpus that surely merits further investigation, as Luz's words offer an alternative perspective of Mexican literary and cultural traditions that can give new insight into what it means, and what it has meant, to be an Indian woman in twentieth-century Mexico. I also discuss, in the final section of this chapter, new meaning generated by a reading of Luz's words and experience with Nahua intellectuals today.

## Imagining Luz

In 1997 the *Museo Casa Estudio Diego Rivera y Frida Kahlo* in Coyoacán (Mexico City) hosted an unusual exhibition—the inspiration was not to pay homage to a particular artist, style, or school of painting. It was instead the model, Doña Luz Jiménez, the woman that for the scores of artists who had painted, drawn, photographed, and sculpted her likeness had come to represent the “arquetipo de la mujer mexicana” (Villanueva Hernández 27) (the archetypical Mexican woman). In honor of the exhibition, a richly illustrated catalogue entitled “Luz Jiménez, símbolo de un pueblo milenario 1897–1965,” showcased over one hundred images that Luz had modeled for, along with sixteen essays chronicling her contribution to the art world. For many of the great artists of the 20th century such as Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Fernando Leal, Jean Charlot, Tina Modotti, and Edward Weston, Luz embodied the “spirit” of Mexico in a time bent on solidifying who and what the Mexican nation was and would become.<sup>83</sup> In a 1971 interview, the celebrated French artist and Luz’s *compadre* Jean Charlot remembers Luz’s modeling career:

There is a whole image there that she projected. Now many of the other girls *could* put their village clothes on and pose with a pot on their shoulders, but they didn’t do it, so to speak, to the manner born. And Luz had one thing that was important: she could do it both naturally, as the Indian girl that she was, and know enough so that she could imagine from the outside, so to speak, what the painters or the writers saw

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<sup>83</sup> See Rick Anthony López, *Lo más mexicano de México: Popular Arts, Indians, and Urban Intellectuals in the Ethnicization of Postrevolutionary National Culture, 1920–1972*, for a thorough examination of the role of the arts in the development of national culture in post-revolutionary Mexico.



in her, and she helped both see things because of that sort of double outlook she could have on herself and her tradition. (John Charlot 3)

Charlot's comments point to Luz's active role in the artistic process. She was not "picturesque," but possessed an innate skill of mediating culture, which perhaps explains why a review of Mexican art from the first half of the 20th century feels like déjà-vu: Luz's image fills the museums of the world and dominates the murals on the walls of many buildings in Mexico City, including the Palacio Nacional, the Colegio de San Ildefonso, and the Secretaría de Educación Pública.

As Erica Segre demonstrates in her article "Representing a Model Autochthony: The Indian Artist's Model Luz Jiménez and the Mexican Avant-Garde," an analysis of the images of Luz can tell us much about the ideals of her time, particularly in terms of the proselytizing of *mexicanidad*. However this tends to be a one-sided proposal. Art using Luz's likeness can tell us something about the desires and interpretations of the artist or the critic, but very little of the subject, in this case, an Indian woman painted over and over again that had come to represent, metonymically, Indian *women*.<sup>84</sup> We can certainly attempt to read the possibilities of Luz in these images, as Rayna Green so skillfully demonstrates in her analysis of Frank Matsura's 1910 photograph of Indian girls on a fainting couch. But we can also read Luz's words. She wasn't only a model; she also had

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<sup>84</sup> For discussions of the reflection of the artist's/society's ideals in art, see Boris Kossoy; Lois Parkinson-Zamora; Alexander Dawson.

a lengthy career as a cultural and linguistic informant<sup>85</sup> for, among others, noted intellectuals such as Robert Barlow, Benjamin Lee Whorf, Fernando Horcasitas, and Sara O. de Ford, and it is precisely because of her work with them that we can read her words today. But why should we care about what she has to say?

Vine Deloria tells us that “[t]he missing dimension in our knowledge is *the informality of human experience*, which colors all our decisions and plays an intimate and influential role in the historical experiences of our species” (*Native American Testimony* xvii, my emphasis). By listening to real people with real experiences, Deloria maintains that the reader “will find him- or herself engaged in historical experiences in which the trivial becomes meaningful and the pompous event finds itself reduced to a human dimension” (Deloria, *Native American Testimony* xviii). This kind of an activity is less concerned with memorizing dates and names of skirmishes, policies, and figureheads. Instead I turn to another version, one that isn’t lived out on the pages of a history book. Historical events affect real people, and these real people can tell us how.

To consider this “other version,” I read Luz Jiménez’s personal testimony in Nahuatl as recorded and translated by Fernando Horcasitas in the Nahuatl/Spanish *De Porfirio Díaz A Zapata: Memoria Náhuatl de Milpa Alta* (1968), later published in Náhuatl/English as *Life and Death in Milpa Alta: A Nahuatl Chronicle of Díaz and Zapata* (1972). The testimonies recorded in *Life and Death in Milpa Alta* are fascinating

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<sup>85</sup> I use the term “informant” as this is what was used during Luz’s career. Today’s practices have moved to a more collaborative approach between the intellectual knowing subject and the intellectual academic. See Murphy & Dingwall, “The Ethics of Ethnography.”

in that they are one of the few that record of indigenous testimony in an indigenous language dealing with assimilative schooling and the Mexican Revolution.

The stories in *Life and Death in Milpa Alta* were recorded in a series of sessions where Luz narrated in Nahuatl as Horcasitas transcribed her words, which he then translated to Spanish for a bilingual publication shortly after her death in 1965 at the hands of a hit-and-run motorist on the streets of Mexico City.<sup>86</sup> A somewhat unusual feature of this text is that Luz regularly discussed her stories both before and after the sessions in Spanish, highlighting that these are not simply “captured words”; Luz had an active role in the transcription and translation. Horcasitas then inserted these “before and after” comments in brackets to the Spanish text *without* a corresponding Nahuatl translation (Horcasitas 14–5). According to Miguel León-Portilla, Luz was never aware of an intended publication of her words (117). Her audience was Horcasitas—this she makes clear in the first section of the book dedicated to stories that deal with her life before the Revolution: “Iqui in, temachtiani, niauh nimitztlanonotzaz inin tlatoli itech naltepeuh ihuan nonemiliz” (*Life and Death* 18) (“Así que, maestro, le voy a contar unas palabras acerca de mi pueblo y de mi vida” [*Life and Death* 19]). In the second section, Luz narrates her village’s experience of the Mexican Revolution, and we are reminded of her audience once again: “If only you knew, professor, all the things that happened to us when Zapata abandoned us!” (*Life and Death* 143, no Nahuatl).

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<sup>86</sup> It is worth mentioning that this was before tape recorders were used to capture informant speech, as such it points to the patience and skill of both transcriber and speaker. The translations, Horcasitas states, are “de una versión libre, apegada en gran parte a las palabras que usó nuestra informante” (12) (flexible translations, very close for the most part to the words that our informant used).

In his introduction to Luz's stories, Horcasitas was also clear in terms of who *his* audience was and why he was publishing Luz's testimony. His rationale was as follows: 1) he offers a distinct perspective of the experience of the last days of the Porfiriato and the Mexican Revolution, that of an indigenous person narrating her personal experience in her own language; 2) he impresses upon historians and linguists the urgency of seeking out more testimonies in this vein before the informants have all passed away; and 3) he provides texts for the student of contemporary Nahuatl. The intended audience of Luz's published words is clearly not native speakers themselves, which would explain why Horcasitas did not include a Nahuatl transcription for Luz's extemporaneous Spanish-language commentary. But a revised translation, with native speakers in mind, could be useful. For example, while telling a story about her parents ("The Village I Remember"), Luz says that "Nota, nonan, cuali otlatoyaya macehualcopa ihuan castilancopa [...]" (*Life and Death* 4) ("My father, my mother, they spoke both Nahuatl and Spanish well" [*Life and Death* 5]). When one refers to the Spanish translation of this same story in *De Porfirio Diaz a Emilio Zapata* we come to read Luz's Spanish-language commentary, filling in the ellipsis: "En esa época, no como ahora, nadie se avergonzaba de hablar el mexicano. Muchos no sabían el español" (21) ("It was very different in those times. No one was ashamed to speak Nahuatl. Many people did not even speak Spanish" [*Life and Death* 5]). My point is that a revised edition of the Nahuatl text, translating Luz's Spanish to Nahuatl could perhaps be enlightening to a native speaker today to read that in the not-so-distant past it was not an embarrassment to speak one's native language. I'll return to this idea when I discuss reading Luz's words with native speakers.

### **A Brief Word on *Testimonio***

*Testimonio* in Latin America generally consists of first-person narrative of a poor and/or illiterate individual and recorded (and often edited) by a sympathetic interlocutor, most often an academic. Luz's words are a classic example of this genre. As Ana Forcinito points out, *testimonio* has evolved in three major phases: 1) the political bent of the narratives recorded in solidarity with the Central American revolutionaries during the 1960s and 70s; 2) academic privileging of subaltern voices beginning in the 1990s, exemplified by the testimony of Rigoberta Menchú's being included in the canon of Latin American literatures; and 3) David Stoll's controversial intervention that challenged the veracity of Menchú's testimony, calling into question issues of collective representation (121 n4).<sup>87</sup> Taking into consideration this timeline, Horcasitas was very much ahead of his academic peers in recording Luz's words—some thirty years before the wholesale interest in these previously disregarded perspectives. He was also, it bears repeating, unique in his doing so in the informant's native language.

In the Spanish version of Luz's life history (*De Porfirio Díaz a Zapata*) Horcasitas terms Luz's words as *memoria*, noting the subjective and personal or individual nature of the texts. However, he also utilizes the word *testimonio* in his introductory discussion of the text. By Allen Carey-Webb's definition, "[m]arking any expression as 'testimony' stresses its truth content, the accuracy of its rendition of something experienced or witnessed" (6). With this idea of testimony in mind, the politics of authenticity and

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<sup>87</sup> For further reading on *testimonio*, see also René Jara and Hernán Vidal, *Testimonio y literatura* 1–21; Georg Gugelberger, *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America* 1–19.

understandings of “truth” enters. In a fashion quite similar to the Rigoberta Menchú controversy, some have questioned the truth content of Luz’s words since she attests to an implausible respect for both Porfirio Díaz and Emiliano Zapata (on opposite sides of the political spectrum), and her narrative contains historical errors (such as dates and the name of the person who killed Zapata) (León-Portilla 114). And what of the possible interference of the interlocutor? The mediation of oral history is riddled with challenges for the academic, some of which León-Portilla mentions in his introduction to *Life and Death*:

The ethnographer will always be exposed to criticism and suspicion. Even if he records his texts on tape, there will always be objections. Did he change the meaning and the feeling of the story? Was he forced to make a final selection of the texts according to his own criterion? And finally, was he in the hands of the ‘right’ informant, who selected certain aspects exclusively and evaluated them according to the anthropologist’s inclinations? (*Life and Death* viii–ix)

Horcasitas was not immune to this kind of scrutiny, and was criticized in the academic community for re-ordering and punctuating Luz’s texts, and for giving her stories titles. But I believe it is essential that we remember that Luz chose how and what she would share with Horcasitas—she controlled the exchange. Moreover, Horcasitas insisted that he and Sara O. de Ford resisted the temptation to correct and polish Luz’s language, which gives the sense that he did not alter the texts (*Cuentos* 7). As such, I read Luz’s

words with the understanding that they are the truth of a human being, which inherently implies subjective experience.

John Beverley's much-cited conceptualization of the testimonial genre "[equates] individual life history with the history of a group or people" (89). But is Luz speaking for a people? Frances Karttunen has read Luz's words as "more a history of a community than of a person," since Luz's testimony does not include her personal life after the Revolution (*Between Worlds* 195). León-Portilla, in agreement with Karttunen, asserts that "[c]orrespondió a doña Luz ser portadora de la palabra de un pueblo que se creía silenciado para siempre, "los indios", los nahuas" (118) (It was Luz's lot to be the carrier of the story of a people that we had thought silenced forever, that of the Indians, the Nahuas). However I want to caution that this idea of being a "carrier of the story of a people" can be problematic and can lead the reader to over-generalize indigenous experience. Horcasitas himself reminds us of the fact that the stories in *Cuentos* come from only one source, over the course of several years and under varying conditions, and as such can not be considered the "voz colectiva de un pueblo" (7) (collective voice of a people). I do not believe that Luz intended to speak for "a people," however one must consider that in Nahua culture identity is triangulated, always in relation to others.<sup>88</sup> At the same time, throughout her stories in *Life and Death*, Luz refers to herself as NiLuz which translates to "I, Luz." This might give the initial impression that this is simply Luz's autobiography. But as Maurice Halbwachs has stated, "autobiographical memory is

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<sup>88</sup> Regarding triangulation, Nahua identity is often couched in terms of relation to a third party. If I wish to mention my friend Delfina, I will call her "the mother of Jacqueline." If I am asked who a particular person is, I will not use their name, instead I will identify them by their relationship to another member of the community. ¿Acquia neh tlacatl? Itatah Manuel. (Who is that man? He is Manuel's father).

always rooted in other people” (24). This, coupled with a Nahuatl conceptualization of identity, I read “NiLuz” as a person that “depends on, [but] doesn’t replace, the collective” (Sommer 129). Luz’s experiences can both attest to her own unique individuality, as well as give us an idea of some of the common denominators that Indians, especially women, in Mexico faced during her time. Therefore, I read Luz’s words in terms of both *memoria* (memory in the individual sense) and *testimonio* (testimony in the collective sense).

### **Doña Luz<sup>89</sup>**

Julia Jiménez González was born in 1897 in Milpa Alta (one of Mexico City’s sixteen boroughs, located to the southeast of the city center) to Emilio Jiménez and Juana Manuela González, the second eldest of six children. Luz had a typical early childhood as the daughter of a subsistence farmer in a small village. When she was five or six years old, the discourse of “order and progress” for the nation arrived to Luz’s village in the form of grade-school education. Indians and their way of life were considered barriers to progress and a hindrance to Mexico’s successful entry into the capitalist market system. Through education, Indian girls and boys would be taught to conform to dominant cultural norms, to be different.

Luz tells us that “I have seen many good things and many bad things in my life, but what I loved most was when I was a little girl and started going to school” (*Life and Death* 5, no Nahuatl). She did quite well in primary school, winning several medals, and

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<sup>89</sup> The chronology of Luz’s life is as told by her grandson, Jesús Villanueva Hernández, via personal communication and his essay “Tecualnezyolehua.”



from an early age yearned to be a teacher herself. She eventually achieved this, in a fashion, but only after a series of detours, most importantly the arrival of the Mexican Revolution to Milpa Alta when she was thirteen years old. As narrated in the second part of *Life and Death*, Luz witnessed the massacre of nearly all of the Milpa Alta men, her father included, at the hands of the federal army. Eight months later, the remaining inhabitants of Milpa Alta, mostly widowed women and their children, were forcibly removed from the village by federal troops. Luz's mother and siblings emigrated to Santa Anita Zacatlalmanco of Mexico City (in today's eastern borough Iztacalco, where the Benito Juárez International Airport is located). Between 1918–1920, she entered and won a local beauty contest, *Izcalichpochtzintli* (a contest of pre-hispanic origin, which later gave way to “La india bonita”<sup>90</sup> and “La flor más bella del ejido” competitions [Villanueva 145–6]). Shortly after arriving in Santa Anita, Luz read a “help wanted” sign in Spanish, advertising modeling work. Her grandson Jesús recalled hearing this story from Luz many times, and how she was so very grateful for being able to speak and read two languages (with only a few years of schooling), enough so that she could find work to support her mother and sisters. Luz reinvented herself as “Luciana” the model, and began working at the Escuela de Pintura al Aire Libre de Chimalistac and the Escuela de

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<sup>90</sup> Carlos Monsiváis notes the racism in the moniker of the beauty contest *La india bonita*, “es decir, la excepción, lo insólito. La búsqueda de “la rareza” después se cambia, por razones de mínimo decoro, a La flor más bella del ejido, pero en éste y en cualquiera de los miles de ejemplos al indio lo vuelve inferior en la argumentación racista [...] su lejanía del modelo de belleza clásico” (61) (The pretty indian, is to say, the exception, the unusual. The search for this “anomaly” later changed, for reasons of decorum, to “The prettiest flower of the ejido,” but in this example and any of the other thousand examples, the Indian is the inferior in racist explanations [...] so far from classic models of beauty).

Pintura al Aire Libre de Coyoacán as a live model.<sup>91</sup> It is here that she met and modeled for Fernando Leal and the French artist Jean Charlot (who later became *padrino* to Luz's only child, her daughter Concha). Luz's dream to be a teacher was briefly revived again in the 1920s when she applied to become a *maestra rural*; but her application was rejected (Karttunen, *Linguistic Career* 268). With almost cruel irony, it is Luz who would model for Diego Rivera's painting *La maestra rural* (1932). Besides modeling, Luz took on whatever odd jobs she could cobble together, such as cleaning, cooking, caring for children, and designing and selling textile handicrafts.<sup>92</sup> She would finally take up the mantle of teacher, albeit informally, when she led artists, folklorists, anthropologists, and ethnographers that were keenly interested in Nahuatl culture and language on visits to Milpa Alta. It is thanks to her work with academics concerned with the Nahuatl language and culture that we can read her words today.

Valerie Yow urges the scholar of oral histories to consider the personal motives of those who agree to share their life stories with an academic (19). From Luz's testimony and her personal letters,<sup>93</sup> it appears that her motivations were a combination of

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<sup>91</sup> See Robert H. Patterson "An Art in Revolution: Antecedents of Mexican Mural Painting, 1900–1920" for information regarding the Open Air Painting schools and their political significance.

<sup>92</sup> See Marta Turok's essay in *Luz Jimenez, símbolo* regarding Luz's weaving skills. In a personal communication Jesús Villanueva told me that Luz "siempre se sintió orgullosa de ser una indígena que desde su infancia había aprendido a usar el telar de cintura. Hay fotos donde se aprecia su rostro alegre al mostrar el uso de este instrumento prehispánico" (December 1, 2008) (was always proud to be an Indian woman who, from her youth, learned to weave with a backstrap loom. There are photos where one can note her obvious joy in demonstrating how to use the loom). Always the teacher, in the video "Doña Luz: Imagen y palabra de México" (2005), an elderly woman from Milpa Alta recalls Luz giving weaving lessons in the community to young girls.

<sup>93</sup> I gratefully acknowledge the generosity of the Charlot family and Luz's grandson Jesús Villanueva Hernández for copies of forty years of personal letters between Luz and Jean Charlot and their families. The letters are held at the Jean Charlot Collection at University of Hawaii Manoa. Karttunen and Jesús

necessity and predilection. In narrating how the Carrancistas forced her people to leave Milpa Alta and emigrate to Santa Anita during the Revolution, Luz tells us that times were quite desperate: “Ihuan iqui on omonemili oncuan ica panozque tepilhuan ihuan tatatin amo motequipachozque ica tomin” (*Life and Death* 166) (They had but one thought—that of keeping their children and fathers and mothers<sup>94</sup> alive without starving for need of money” (*Life and Death* 167). Milpateña women sold whatever they could in the city—corn, firewood, tortillas, or homemade foods (atole and tamales) to survive. Others worked as servants or begged in the street (*Life and Death* 167–71). Many were raped, either during war or in the households where they later became maids. In Luz’s story “Zapata’s Lieutenant” from the second part of *Life and Death*, we learn of Zapata’s men carrying off girls: “Noihuqui oquinmichtequia ichpocame. Otlanonotzaloya que oquinhuicaya ica cuauhtla inca omahuiltiaya” (*Life and Death* 134) (“They also carried off girls. People said that they took them to the woods and raped them there” [*Life and Death* 135]). It appears that during the Revolution, it didn’t matter whose side one was on. In Milpa Alta, women were subjected to violence at the hands of all military forces, whether federal troops or Zapatistas.

Women, according to Mary Kay Vaughan, were “excluded from the postrevolutionary redistribution of land and water, except in their capacity as wives and daughters” (“Rural Women’s Literacy” 106). And Luz was neither—her father was dead

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Villanueva Hernández have worked on the organization and transcription of the handwritten letters over the years, although the transcription is not complete.

<sup>94</sup> Karttunen points out another problem with the (English) translation: The Nahuatl and Spanish read “parents” whereas the English says fathers and mothers. “There were no fathers among the refugees” (Karttunen 328 n48).

and the father of her child was absent. In 2009 Luz's grandson Jesús drove me to Milpa Alta to see a statue recently erected of her likeness on the main thoroughfare. Jesús spoke of Luz's life in terms of "destinos desviados," (altered course of destiny). First the violence of the Revolution and forced migration had squelched any hope of continuing her studies, of knowing her father, or of living in Milpa Alta. But the second time Luz avoided what seemed to be a predetermined course for indigenous women in the aftermath of the Revolution: a life sentence of poverty, violence, and destitution, or what Jesús called "la vida de la mujer dejada, viuda, violada, pobre y destituida" (the life of the abandoned woman, the widow, raped, poor, and destitute). While Luz did struggle, she traveled a different route, thanks to her intellectual interests and abilities. Karttunen confirms this by saying that "[a]nyone as intelligent as Luz would capitalize on whatever assets she had to avoid the poverty and exploitation she saw on every side" (*Between Worlds* 199). The kind of work that she did with academics was not simply pragmatic; it seemed that she reveled in being surrounded by intellectuals and was drawn to the life of the mind. In a letter to Jean Charlot (April 20, 1948), Luz expresses her gratitude to Charlot for facilitating her entrance to this world: "No sabe compadrito cuán agradecida estoy de parte de Ud., pues es Ud. Quien [sic] me enseña a vivir más mejor en mi vejez. Eso de tener roces con personas cultas y no tontas, por eso le pido a Dios que lo cuide y bendiga sus preciosos niños y mamá" (You have no idea *compadrito* how grateful I am, since it is you who has taught me how to live better in my old age. Being able to be around educated people and not stupid people, for this I ask God to protect you and to bless your precious children and mother). When asked by Karttunen "whether her mother

seemed to prefer the company of the artists or the anthropologists/linguists, [Luz's daughter] Concha replied that what she liked was being with people from whom she could learn [...] people of any sort who were in contact with modern civilization. That was the delight of her life" (*Between Worlds* 213). León-Portilla, having met Luz in the home of Horcasitas, maintains that one could see just by looking at her that she loved telling her stories in Nahuatl, patiently responding to the queries of her interlocutors (100). And although she did need the money, León-Portilla continues, it was obvious that this was a labor of love, that Luz finally "cumplía su deseo de ser maestra" (100) (had fulfilled her desire to be a teacher).

### **Education and the Porfiriato**

Alan Knight reminds us that an analysis of historical periods based solely on the publications of the renowned thinkers of the time can be too abstract (71). Instead of learning about what (white/mestizo male) intellectuals from the dominant culture in Mexico thought about indigenous people, in Luz's testimony we hear what an indigenous woman thought about herself and dominant culture during the last years of the rule of Porfirio Díaz (1876–1880, 1884–1911) and the tumultuous earlier years of the Mexican Revolution. Now, everyone has a story, but not everyone is a born storyteller, and Luz's skill in weaving tales and her incredible breadth of knowledge are immediately evident in her texts. What is truly extraordinary about these works is that her words offer a rare view of how theories of racial politics in twentieth century Mexico trickled down to real-world practice, and how the people most affected by these policies—and not invited to

the debate—reflected on them. Vaughan posits that “[i]t is difficult to characterize the general attitudes of the popular forces [during the Porfiriato] because [their] ideas were more dispersed, less articulated in print, and usually less developed than those of the middle strata” (*State* 86). But with Luz’s testimony, we are privy to at least one version.

The “order and progress” theme of the Porfirian state was based on, in varying degrees, adherence to the ideas of positivism (Auguste Comte) and Social Darwinism (Herbert Spencer) (Vaughan, *State* 13–38). Intellectual elites, in theorizing race and place in conjunction with nation-building, debated the hows and the whys of the Mexico’s *lack* of order and progress, and arrived at Indians. Economic progress under Porfirio Díaz was a question of the modernization and consolidation of “backward Mexico through economic development programs” (Powell 20), with Indians singled out as this “backward” component of society. Vaughan refers to Porfirian economic and social reforms as having the ultimate goal of “transform[ing] the behavior patterns of an entire population in order to create a modern labor force” (*State* 28). The Indian “problem” of “backwardness,” hypothesized as resulting from a wide variety of biological, environmental, behavioral, or even dietary reasons, needed to be transformed for the good of the nation and presumably for the Indian’s own good as well.<sup>95</sup> Indians, the source of the desired modern work force, were associated with terms such as “ignorance, lack of savings, lack of punctuality, lack of cleanliness, disorganization of family life, anger, jealousy, and the consumption of alcohol and tobacco,” (Vaughan, *State* 35) and as such were perceived as a formidable barrier to the “progress” of the nation. Instead of

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<sup>95</sup> For more detail on (dominant culture) intellectual opinions during the Porfiriato regarding the place and possibilities of the Indian, see Martin Stabb; T.G. Powell; Milada Bazant; and David E. Brading.

seeing these issues as the *consequences* of poverty stemming from the economic and political structure, during the Porfiriato (and still today)<sup>96</sup> Indian ways of being were understood in terms of being the cause, the problem. Economically, they were holding the nation back due to their pre-capitalist subsistence agricultural model. Politically, their lack of productivity—in a capitalist sense—made Mexico less able to compete in the capitalist market, thus being more vulnerable to the giant to the north, the United States (Vaughan, *State* 24). This vulnerability had already been manifested in the Mexican American War (1846–1848) resulting in the transfer of a massive portion of Mexican territory to the U.S. (California, Nevada, Utah, and large portions of Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Wyoming), as well as the short-lived foreign intervention of Second Empire of Maximilian (1864–1867). The Porfirian solution to the obstacles (read: Indians) to the progress of the nation was two-fold: the *colonización* of “unoccupied, uncultivated lands” which were, we can assume, quite occupied by indigenous people and

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<sup>96</sup> On January 28 of 2008, the following opinion piece written by Antonio de Mendieta, a well-known newspaper columnist and radio announcer in Northern Mexico, was published in “El Porvenir”: La carga de los indígenas: “En México se hablan 364 lenguas o dialectos indígenas y hay burócratas preocupados porque están en peligro de extinción. Pues qué bueno, que se extingan, porque no nos sirven de nada. Mejor que esos millones de indígenas aprendan el español, que es el idioma de México. Es más preocupante que no hablen español. Por eso están marginados, en la pobreza, en la incultura y en la enfermedad. Enséñenles español y que esas 364 lenguas indígenas se conserven en las bibliotecas y museos. Nada más. Por eso estamos como estamos, aunque deberíamos de estar peor” (Indigenous People’s Burden [or The Burden of Indigenous People?]) In Mexico, 364 indigenous languages or dialects are spoken and the bureaucrats are worried because they are in danger of extinction. Great, I hope they become extinct, because they have no use for us. It would be better if these millions of indigenous people would learn Spanish, which is the language of Mexico. It is more worrisome that they don’t speak Spanish. That is why they are marginalized, living in poverty, ignorant, and sick. Teach them Spanish, and file these 364 indigenous languages away in libraries and museums. That’s it. That’s why we are the way we are, although it should be worse). See also Teun A. van Dijk’s *Racism and Discourse in Spain and Latin America* (2005) for an analysis of present-day political speech that repeats early 20th century discourses of Indians as the national “problem.”

simply not cultivated in an enterprising fashion (Lund 1420; Powell 22), and the education of the Indian masses to facilitate their transformation (Powell 21).

According to Vaughan in her important study, *The State, Education, and Social Class in Mexico: 1880–1928*, the national school system as the main vehicle for the transformation of the inhabitants of Mexico, was “designed to increase the productive capacity of a hierarchical class society while insuring loyalty to the existing social order and nation-state” (14). This model has its roots in liberal Mexico: in 1868 Dr. Gabino Barreda wrote a series of laws at the behest of President Benito Juárez, legislating free and obligatory elementary education in the Federal District and its territories (Vaughan, *State* 19). Barreda, like many positivists of his time, had located the root of Mexico’s “backwardness” in the people’s “disdain for productive labor and rational entrepreneurial behavior which the Spanish colonial heritage had allegedly produced; clericalism which had inhibited the development of a scientific attitude; and liberal preoccupation with abstract principle rather than social realities and the pragmatism necessary to business expansion” (Vaughan, *State* 20). Some of the prevailing thinkers of the Porfirian regime debated the value and actual usefulness of education for Indians. In 1883 Francisco Cosmes declared that he “doubted that the school was of any use or interest to the indigenous peoples. It would deprive the family of workers. What did it matter if a child learned to read and write when he would never again hold a book or piece of paper in his hand?” (Vaughan, *State* 23). Justo Sierra, Minister of Public Education from 1905–1911 (and one of Luz’s heroes in her testimony), consistently responded to doubters such as Cosmes by saying that “obligatory public instruction was necessary to national survival



and growth—to the development of production, the unification of the country, and the maintenance of political order” (Vaughan, *State* 23). Sierra firmly believed that the key to improving the “Mexican” race was biological and cultural mixing, which would filter out all of the negative aspects of the Spanish/mestizo race, tempering them with an influx of indigenous blood that would, in a strange sort of alchemy, remove Catholic dogma, greed, and the perpetuation of social stratification and discrimination, while leaving intact other desirable attributes (7–11). According to Sierra, “El problema social para la raza indígena es un problema de nutrición y educación [...] Lo repetimos, el problema es fisiológico y pedagógico: que coman más carne y menos chile, que aprenden los resultados útiles y prácticos de la ciencia, y los indios se transformarán” (6–7) (The social problem of the Indian race is one of nutrition and education [...] I repeat, the problem is physiological and pedagogical: they need to eat more meat and less chile, learn the useful and practical workings of science, and the Indians will transform themselves). Sierra’s ideas were the basis of the kind of education Luz received in her five years of formal education, and she professes great admiration for him. In referring to Sierra, she calls him “inin tiatihuani Justo Sierras<sup>97</sup> [...] Omotequipachoaya inpampa momactiquez” (*Life and Death* 102) (a great man [...] completely devoted to see the progress of the students in their studies [*Life and Death* 103]).

It should not go unnoticed that free and obligatory education was now being extended to everyone. But what was the price of this new opportunity? Luz’s admiration for her

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<sup>97</sup> The extra “s” at the end of Sierra is in the original. See José Antonio Flores-Farfán’s *Cuaterros somos y toindioma hablamos* regarding this phenomenon in the speech of native speakers of Nahuatl and second language learners/speakers of Spanish. Also, Frances Karttunen (personal communication, May 15, 2010) points out that “tiatihuani” is a typo in the *Life and Death* publication, and should be “tlatihuani” as in the *De Porfirio Díaz version* (36).

teachers and her delight in receiving an education is tempered by the retelling of the harsh tactics of the delivery. The coercive measures and pressures brought to bear on Indian children and their parents to “be decent” and to assimilate to dominant culture are the common thread in Luz’s testimony.

### **Learning to Live Properly**

“Oquintlatolmachtiaya caxtilancopa ihuan telpochtiatzque nozo ichpochtiatzque quimatizque quenemizque ihuan tlen quichihuazque” (*Life and Death* 100) (We were taught to speak Spanish and to know how to live a proper way of life [*Life and Death* 101]). Learning to live properly, according to Luz’s stories, basically entailed de-Indianizing: Speaking Spanish, bathing regularly, and wearing Western clothing. Luz refers often to these “proper versions” of Indian children as palomaxtoton (little white doves), and whether she meant to imply that the Indian children had indeed become white is not clear, but the association of white and proper is not lost. Learning to become white, or learning to stop being Indian, was meted out in forceful terms. While Luz is clearly grateful for the education that made it possible for her to eventually make her living mediating cultures, from today’s perspective it is heart-wrenching to consider being on the receiving end of the constant message that being who you are is not good enough.

From a very young age Luz had designs on an education: “Nichocaya coz ipampa onicnequia nicmatiz tlen quitoa amama, inon tlacuiloltin” (*Life and Death* 22) (I cried because I wanted to know what was written on the papers [*Life and Death* 23]). Although younger than the other children, the schoolmaster allowed her to enroll after her mother

insisted that Luz was no ordinary child: “Coza quitequipachoa momachtiz. Ye quiixmati tepitzin letras” (*Life and Death* 22) (She likes to learn. She already knows a few letters [*Life and Death* 23]). The schoolmaster informed the parents that the schooling would be free, but insisted that Luz arrive to school in clean clothes, freshly bathed and with shoes on (*Life and Death* 25). “Iqui in motitizque quename nemizque icuac ye hueheuyi” (*Life and Death* 24) (In this way,” stated the principal, “children will learn to live properly for the time when they are grown-ups [*Life and Death* 25]). Arriving dirty resulted in the mortifying punishment of being sent to the boys’ school where the boys would wash the girls (*Life and Death* 27). In both Nahua culture and the dominant Euro-mestizo culture, there are specific understandings of appropriate behavior that preclude young boys from washing young girls. Luz tells us “Ican tepinauhtin quename pipiltoton otetzcuazhuiaya oteamohuiaya” (*Life and Death* 28) (“it was a terrible shame to have the boys comb and wash one’s head” [*Life and Death* 27]). This demeaning practice was enough to quickly “encourage” cleanliness, but the preposterousness of “arriving clean” is revealed matter-of-factly in Luz’s testimony: “Ompa Milpa Alta amo onyeya atl” (*Life and Death* 28) (“There was no water in Milpa Alta” [*Life and Death* 29]). Here we see how the teacher’s instructions to send the children to school clean were not necessarily well suited for the realities of Milpa Alta, demonstrating that apparently the “civilizing process” did not come with the accompanying accoutrement of Western living. Fathers of school-aged children were compelled to wake at four o’clock in the morning to go to the next village, Nochcalco, for water each day in order to comply with the teacher’s wishes.

The teachers also assembled the parents and gave lectures about childrearing, which Luz recounts in her story “The Good Teachers,” a tale peppered with words such as “otlaneltocaya” (translated as “decided to obey” but meaning also converted, or believer), “tlaneltocazque” (to be obedient). This use of the terms obedience and/or change of heart (conversion) shows how Luz had internalized the message that the original (the Indian) was wrong or faulty. Instructions—perhaps better termed demands—from the teachers included the purchase of stockings to hide the girls’ legs (so that boys couldn’t look up their skirts as they climbed the stairs to the second floor of the schoolhouse, demonstrating sexual tensions of the dominant culture more than anything). Also, boys ought never go barefoot. Again, this information was to ensure that “the young people would learn how to live decently” (*Life and Death* 101) But the parents wonder how they can obey these orders when they have no money? Living decently included forcing families, under threat of jail, to earn and spend money (as opposed to subsistence farming and trade in the traditional manner) —a sort of forced integration to the new capitalist order. The principal’s response to the parents was that “Tlacamo nantlanentocazque ticchihuazque que ye quezqui xihuitl: namechtzacuazque. !Solo [sic] iqui on namotitzque quename nantlaneltocazque” (*Life and Death* 100) (If you do not follow our orders, we will do what we did some years ago. We will put you in jail. That seems to be the only way you will learn to obey us! [*Life and Death* 101]). This brief exchange gives insight into the tactics utilized to incorporate all Mexican citizens into the capitalist system.

The schoolmaster promised to “quizazque coconentoton noihqui temachiquez nozo totopixque nozo *licenciados* ihuan occequi cuacuali tequitizque cana occeni” (*Life and*

*Death* 106) (turn out children who will become teachers or priests or lawyers. Others may have to find work far away from the village [*Life and Death* 105]). Here we see an example of the Porfiriato's recipe for Indian integration and acculturation to dominant culture: "education, migration, and occupational shifts" (Knight 73). But Karttunen points out that in Luz's school "girls were taught not only lessons from school books, but also drawing, dressmaking, embroidery, and how to bake wheat bread—skills to set them apart from their Indian mothers" (*Between Worlds* 194). This kind of training was aimed at disrupting and fragmenting traditional indigenous social patterns while ensuring that the young Indian women were prepared for their new place in the capitalist economy, in the service sector—dressmaking and baking do not make a lawyer.

Work as teachers, priests, and lawyers did not materialize, so one can imagine why parents might avoid sending their children to the school. The financial burden of buying clothing and shoes, the mighty task of securing water, and the hardships created when a contributing member to household and agricultural labor was unable to participate because of school obligations, were themselves enough of a deterrent. While teachers did indeed try to convince parents that it was for the good of the child, when that failed parents were badgered and threatened with being left by their children in their old age. Luz recalls one of the teachers grilling the parents:

¿Amo namechtlacoltia quenamehuan nanquipano? Tla nanquimatizquia amatl achi  
occe cuali tequitl nanquipiazqui. Huel mica namechilhuia itech xitlachacan inimequez

cocone. Namehuan nanhuehuetizque ihuan namopilhuan amo namechequictazque ipampa amo cuali omomachtique. (*Life and Death* 106)

(Are you not ashamed at the way in which you are spending your lives? Are you not sorry for yourselves? If you knew how to read and write, you would have a much better position in life. [...] You will grow old, and your children will turn their backs on you because you did not give them an education.) (*Life and Death* 107)

Here Luz gives us another example of what Knight terms the Porfirian regime's "famous *pan o palo* ('bread or the club')" (79) in her discussion of how students were recruited for the free and obligatory education. She recalls a day that all of the men in the village were rounded up, jailed, and interrogated:

Quintitlaniz tla quintitlanizque inpilhuan tlamachtilcalco. Aquen otlananquiliaya quititlaniz ipilhuan tlamachtilcalco oquincacahuaya. Ihaun tlen oquitoaya amo oquiapiaya tlen tzauhtazque ce metztli. Ihuan oquimilhuiaya: '¿Quezqui cocone nanquimpia? ¿Nanquititlanizque tlamachtilcalco?' Occequi oquitoaya: 'Amo nicpia cocone; zan nocnehuan.' '¿Can nozo xiquilhui motatzin ma quintitlani tlamachtilcalco! ¿Amotla tlaxtlahuazque!' (*Life and Death* 32)

(They were asked if they were willing to send their children to school. Those who answered 'yes' were freed. And those who claimed that they did not have any

children were locked up for a month. They were questioned, ‘How many sons and daughters do you have? Are you going to send them to school?’ Some answered, ‘I do not have any children – just brothers and sisters.’ ‘Well then, tell your father to send them to school. It won’t cost them a cent!’) (*Life and Death* 33)

Not only was pressure to attend school meted out in terms of incarceration, but pressure to change clothing to conform to dominant culture was also enforced by the threat of jail. In “A Proper Way of Life,” we see the association of a change of clothing with living in a better way. A local judge proclaimed “I have already told you that I do not want you to wear those white pants. I want the people of this village to learn how to live in a better way” (*Life and Death* 31–33). If the adults did not obey by changing their way of dress, Luz tells us, they were jailed for one month (*Life and Death* 33). Clothes and shoes arrived from Mexico City and were distributed to the poorest children in a rather humiliating fashion. They were called up on a stage and made to dress and put on the shoes right then and there, a shaming spectacle (*Life and Death* 115, 117)

In “The Good Teachers,” Luz gives a summary as to how Milpa Alta residents had finally responded to assimilative pressures:

Ye yiman on yomohtaya que melahuac nochtin chantlaca otlaneltocaya queni ca yazque cocone tlamachticalco. Aihmo ca olaya nian tzatzapaltic nian tzoyo. Iqui in ica yomomelauhta, momelauhtaque chantlaca. Aihmo onyeya nian tetzaco. Nian aihmo, tetzacuiloa impampan aihmo mohuicaya *pantalón*. Nochtlacatl yoquiapiaya

ipantalon ihuan cuali icoton. Nian tequixtililoz *multa*. Anca nochtin piltzitzintin quen palomaxtoton tzicuintihue ompan tlamachtilcalco. (*Life and Death* 98)

(By that time, it was clear that the people had decided to obey and were willing to send their children to school. Almost none of the children were ragged or dirty. They had taken the good path and gave an example to the people of the village. Men were no longer arrested or taken to jail for wearing trousers. By this time, every man had his good trousers and a good shirt. They were no longer fined, because all the children ran off to school like little white doves.) (*Life and Death* 99)

Luz's use of the word *yomomelauhta* (translated in the text as "the good path" with the root word "melahuac" meaning "verdadero, cierto, derecho, positivo" [Simeón 268] [right, true, correct, positive]) highlights her own internalization of the message of Indian = wrong, Euro-mestizo = right. It appears that the Indians of Milpa Alta had finally conformed to the wishes of dominant culture. However, Karttunen cogently points out that "it was fortunate for her [Luz] that the process designed to mold a new kind of citizen did not succeed in obliterating who she had been or where she had come from" (*Between Worlds* 194). It was precisely her identity as an indigenous woman who still spoke her language and knew her own culture that offered a form of employment that helped her survive the upheavals of the Mexican Revolution.



## Linguistic Informants-Collaborators

Because Luz's words were mediated by outsiders and academics (except for two stories published in the short-lived Nahuatl language newspaper *Mexihcatl Itonalama*),<sup>98</sup> a review of Luz's stories and career also returns the gaze to the academy, prompting an evaluation of the nature of collaborations between people separated by race, class, gender, and profession. Did Luz's relationships with academics reflect equality or inequality? Was she regarded as a peer? In this section I discuss Luz's collaborations with outsiders/academics, mentioning briefly the kinds of problems that are inherent in academic work with indigenous peoples. Since my work is caught precisely in this tangle, I'll address some of the ethical considerations of my own project.

Luz seemed to have a hand in the making of many careers, but she remained impoverished nearly her entire life and it hasn't been until relatively recently that the academy and the general public have come to understand the importance of her words. Often it seems as if Luz was—even in the words of her friend Fernando Leal—a “racial type,” a source of malleable material for artists, a vessel of information to be mined by the anthropologists, or even just the cook who told stories, but never an intellectual equal.<sup>99</sup> In a society steeped in the residues of coloniality, Luz seemed to be on the wrong

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<sup>98</sup> September 5, 1950 “Tewewentzin iwan tetepeh”; October 13, 1950 “Tlohkenawake (sasanilli).” *Mexihcatl itonolama* employed a phonetic alphabet promoted at the 1940 First Aztec Congress that took place in Milpa Alta. See Karttunen, *Between Worlds* 205–6.

<sup>99</sup> Luz modeled extensively for Fernando Leal. In his book *The Mexican Mural Renaissance*, Jean Charlot reproduces a letter where Leal recalls his relationship with the models and other Indians he worked with to feed his art: “To document myself on the costumes and steps, I made friends with a leader of dancers who let me witness the rehearsals of the brotherhood. Also Luciana, an Indian girl who had posed for many of my pictures, took me to her village to gather further data. My models had always been Indians, but the more I saw them the more interested I became, and I ended by feeling a true friendship for them, although I do not mean to sound condescending. I aimed at giving their racial types a monumentality undiluted by

side of every social binary (Indian-mestizo, lower-upper class, female-male, informant-academic), and this was manifest in her professional relationships. It is not really fair to critique Luz's working relationships from a presentist perspective. Instead I will simply describe some of the collaborative relationships between Luz and other professionals/academics (besides the previously mentioned work with Horcasitas), and reflect on how these relationships can inform our work today.

In her *comadre* Anita Brenner's book *Idols Behind Altars* (1929), Brenner often mentions "what she was told in Milpa Alta." We can safely assume that her informant is Luz as we know that Brenner and Jiménez had a long friendship<sup>100</sup> and it was Luz who led non-Indian friends, writers, and artists (including Brenner) to her natal village. The mixing of friendship and business may have caused some strain between author and informant as several of Luz's letters to Jean Charlot in 1942 suggest that she was upset that she did not receive the profits from the children's book that contained Luz's stories, *The Boy Who Could Do Anything and Other Mexican Folktales* (1942), published under Brenner's name with drawings by Jean Charlot.

Neither Luz nor her descendants own any of the paintings or photographs that she posed for, although we can't be sure that she would have wanted them. Luz blithely comments "They paid me for my time, no? And if I want to look at what they made of me, why there I am, all over the walls of the National Palace. Why should I need to own a

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occidental standards" (Jean Charlot 168). Leal's words demonstrate an understanding of difference between himself and these other "racial types." Karttunen notes that while Luz consistently wrote of her affection toward Leal, he did not (publicly) return this warmth – she was just "an Indian girl" (*Between Worlds* 197–8).

<sup>100</sup> Anita Brenner was also godmother to Concha, Luz's daughter, and both Brenner and her daughter Susana were at Luz's hospital bedside the day that she died.

picture of me, when it is there for me and anyone else to see, free?” (qtd. in Karttunen *Between Worlds* 192). It is as if Luz managed to separate herself from the images using her likeness—“to look at *what they made of me*”— underlining that these paintings are only fantasy, not really her. Several paintings and photographs show her posing nude, which was not (and is not) considered appropriate behavior for a Nahua woman. Did she perhaps not want a painting or photograph of herself because she was ashamed or did not want the people of Milpa Alta to know what she had done? I asked her grandson Jesús what Luz’s mother had thought of her work with the artists, to which he replied that neither Luz’s mother nor any other person in Milpa Alta for that matter knew that she was modeling. The classic Mexican film starring Dolores del Río, *María Candelaria* (1944) comes to mind when we consider Luz’s hidden activities. The film portrays the rejection and subsequent murder of the female Indian protagonist by her own community members for posing nude. Perhaps what Luz did to put food on the table was a source of embarrassment, or worse, danger.

Luz was much more open about her work with the scholars than she was about her modeling career. From her personal letters we also know that she worked with the American author and anthropologist, Robert Barlow.<sup>101</sup> However, the extent of Luz’s influence in Barlow’s work is unclear as he followed the protocol of his time, only citing Luz as his informant once. The elimination of an informant’s name was and is common ethnographic practice. Today, we might view this as problematic in that it obscures the fact that the *sources* of the information published are the real knowledge bearers. This

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<sup>101</sup> Luz mentioned in her April 20, 1948 letter that she enjoyed the Nahuatl work she did with Barlow, earning ten pesos for three hours of work.

anonymity, in its most positive light, can be seen as protective, but it also denies the possibility of the informant being considered an intellectual in her own right. Robert Barlow, not Luz, is listed as the author of a transcription of a story about the Day of the Dead in *Estudios de cultura náhuatl*, where she is noted as “la señora en calidad de informante lo narró a Barlow” (77) (the female informant that narrated the story to Barlow) in the introduction to the text. It must be stated that the mention of the informant’s name in academic publications during this time period is highly unusual, and as such it is intriguing that Luz is also credited by Benjamin Lee Whorf, with whom she had worked as an informant since 1929, in his 1946 article “The Milpa Alta Dialect.” Does the public recognition of the informant suggest Barlow and Whorf recognized that Luz’s skills went far beyond showing up and saying a few words? In discussing the complexities of the kind of work Luz did, Karttunen states that “(t)he process required the same sort of intuitive interaction between two people that modeling and painting requires. Luz needed to sense how much Whorf could hold in mind while he transcribed, how much to say and when to wait” (*Linguistic Career* 269). The fact that Luz continued to work with academics for decades attests to her innate capacity for the demands of this kind of work. It was, and is indeed a very difficult task, requiring not only stamina, but also a certain kind of personality endowed with the gift of storytelling, patience, and intellectual curiosity. We can imagine that she was recommended to others, as she was in the art world, for her competence.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Reflecting on Luz's experiences working with the academy, I want to make clear some of the guiding principles of my work with indigenous collaborators, which I will discuss shortly. First, scholarship with indigenous people needs to be a two-way street. Ideally, each party needs to benefit, and on equal terms. It should not be just the academic who receives recognition—we need to be careful to acknowledge the providers of information as equal participants and as intellectual equals. When preferable to the indigenous person, their name should *not* be disguised with a pseudonym. Second, we need to find ways to reconnect the theorization with the people being theorized, opening lines of communication and collaboration between indigenous and non-indigenous people. Third, as part of a research agenda that includes work with indigenous people, we need to make a conscious effort to provide access, opportunities, and training to the indigenous collaborator so that they may go on (if interested) to participate autonomously in the intellectual conversation that is so often dominated by non-Indians. Finally, we need to consider our how academic work can contribute to the community. We may offer copies of texts produced, but is this of sufficient value in return for the collaboration? Does the collaborator seek only financial remuneration or public recognition? Or perhaps community service that has nothing to do with a publication (as in the example of anthropologist Keith Basso who works with the Apache on projects that are never published for the academy)? One elder in the Huasteca suggested that as a researcher I could pay my debt to the community by doing the kind of research that questioned the circumstances that located (and maintained) Indians in subordinate positions, and to

return this knowledge to the youth of his community. In the previous section I began this kind of work by attending to the historical context of Luz's writings on her experience in grade school. In the following section I will discuss an initial attempt at returning this knowledge to the community.

### **Reading Luz with Nahuas**

While I have highlighted some of the more salient aspects of Luz's testimony in terms of her words on education, for both methodological and ethical considerations my intention has been to go beyond a narrative of "here is what I, an outsider, think about you." I wanted to turn the tables and listen to what Nahuas think about Nahuas. This kind of "reconnection" has in some ways been pioneered by León-Portilla who, as part of his Seminario de Cultura Náhuatl at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, invited non-native scholars and Nahuas to carry out a grammatical and literary study of Luz's testimony in the 1980s. León-Portilla reported that many of the native speakers saw themselves in Luz's words. They heard echoes of their parents' and grandparents' stories, or had even experienced the same things that Luz described in their own communities. "La lectura ha sido revivir la memoria de lo que fue su pueblo [...] Es—así lo dicen— como ver en un espejo algo de uno mismo y reencontrarse" (León-Portilla 116) (The act of reading was akin to reliving the memory of what their community used to be [...] It was—they say—like looking at themselves in the mirror and finding themselves again). León-Portilla is of the mind that Luz's texts have significantly influenced the community of contemporary Nahuatl writers, saying that they have been a rich source "[P]ara saber

más acerca de sí mismos, pensar y enriquecer la memoria de lo que han sido y ver lo que son ahora, estos relatos han venido a ser algo como su Biblia” (116) (to learn more about themselves, to think and enrich the memory of what their people had been and what they are now, these stories have come to be almost like a Bible). Some of the participants in this seminar, for example Librado Silva Galeana and Francisco Morales, have indeed gone on to become driving forces in what has been termed a “renaissance” of Nahuatl literature.

With this example in mind I wondered, what does this act of reading oneself, of recognizing oneself in printed texts do for native speakers of Nahuatl? Can seeing oneself in text really influence how a marginalized group views themselves? Carey-Webb’s discussion of reading testimony in the classroom hints at the possible effects that reading Luz’s work can have in the Nahua community: “As published validation of the lives and experiences of people that might otherwise be unknown, testimonials send the message [...] that all lives are important, that their own experiences may be worthy of serious attention and academic analysis” (8).

As I mentioned earlier, an elder in one of the communities where I studied the Nahuatl language challenged me to not only carry out the kind of research that highlights how Indians have responded to policies and practices that have left them at a distinct disadvantage in society, but to find a way to ensure that the younger generation had access to this information. To honor this directive I carried out focus group reading sessions in February and March of 2008 with five native speaker researchers (one male and four females, ages 18–35, from the Chicontepec region of the Huasteca Veracruzana)

affiliated with the Instituto de Docencia e Investagación Etnológica de Zacatecas (IDIEZ) (Zacatecas Institute for Teaching and Research in Ethnology).<sup>102</sup>

As discussed briefly in the introduction, the IDIEZ is a center in Zacatecas, Mexico where Nahuas and *coyomeh* (non-Indians) carry out research on Nahuatl language and culture. Founded by two Nahuas and one naturalized Mexican over ten years ago, one of the main activities of IDIEZ is supporting indigenous students as they complete university education by providing scholarships and work/study appointments to carry out research their own language. Indigenous affiliates of IDIEZ all teach Nahuatl (both on-site and through distance learning) and work on the first ever monolingual dictionary and grammar of Nahuatl, among other research activities. The working language of the institute is Nahuatl. These activities combat the kind of ideological (and physical) assault of assimilative education that is still the norm in Mexico today. Indeed, Mexico's educational system has gone to great lengths to separate indigenous students from their cultural patrimony, and all of the participants had been largely unaware of the existence of their own written intellectual tradition.

The researchers that participated in our reading sessions were either working on, or have acquired, university degrees in law, accounting, and social sciences. They, like Luz, work and live in multiple languages and cultures. They had also made the decision, based on varying combinations of intellectual curiosity and necessity, to leave their rural

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<sup>102</sup> The Nahua researchers that participated in these reading sessions welcome comments and inquiries. Their contact information is as follows: Abelardo de la Cruz de la Cruz (abe\_cuate@hotmail.com); Delfina de la Cruz de la Cruz (yehyectzin1@me.com); Ana Delia Cruz de la Cruz (delia\_266@hotmail.com); Catalina Cruz de la Cruz (caty020@hotmail.com); Ofelia Cruz Morales (ofecruz\_12@hotmail.com). Note that while their last names are the same or similar, only Ana Delia and Catalina are siblings. The Cruz and De la Cruz surname was bestowed on scores of Indian communities by the Catholic Church.



communities and move to the city. However unlike most members of their ethnic group, again like Luz, they have been able to make a living based on their “Indian-ness,” by acquiring rare employment in their own language.

We read Luz’s words out loud and commented on linguistic, literary, and thematic aspects of the texts—in short, we carried out critical readings of Nahuatl texts with Nahuatl as the language of our working group. Since I am not a native speaker of Nahuatl, power structures were disrupted from the beginning as I stumbled in the language. The goal for these reading sessions (1–2 hours per day, reading in a group out loud) was not to record every comment made by the native speakers, mining for information. Instead it was to create an intellectual community, to share knowledge, and in a sense, to repatriate cultural items. Anthropologist Edward Bruner, in discussing the influence of Barthes and Derrida in anthropology, has suggested that “(m)eaning is always in the present, in the here-and-now, not in such past manifestations as historical origins or the author’s intentions” (11). With this in mind, I wanted to get an idea of the *present meaning* that a reading of Luz’s words created for Nahuas today. I was curious as to how and where their experiences would resonate with Luz’s words, particularly in matters of schooling, migration, and the doubly marginal social position of being female *and* Indian. By way of conclusion, I present some of the more compelling results of our sessions, particularly dealing with issues of form (orthography, regional variation) and content (response to the stories themselves).

### **Orthographies**

Luz employed the Milpa Alta variation of Nahuatl, which is considered by many to be a “high” or “classical” form of Nahuatl that one will see often in texts from the Colonial Period. The participants of the reading group are from a region two hundred kilometers from Milpa Alta, and utilize a different variation of the Nahuatl language that has changed along a distinct trajectory. In terms of mutual intelligibility, most native speakers can understand other spoken Nahuatl regional variations. But what about the written word? There are basically two (academic) trains of thought on orthographies. Some argue that Nahuatl should today be written phonetically. Some even go as far as to say that it would be “easier” for the native speaker to learn to write her own language in a phonetic script which belies a discriminatory ideology that assumes that native speakers aren’t “smart enough” to grasp the intricacies of their language as fixed by religious orders and native scribes in the Colonial Period. A counter argument, which I agree with, is that orthographic conventions ought to follow the somewhat canonical forms that correspond to Colonial orthographies (I’ll call this a continuum orthography). Orthographic choices have much to do with the intended audience of the text (linguists? native speakers?). Considering the language community itself as a priority audience we need to very carefully consider how the language is recorded and taught. I believe that to have full access to his/her cultural patrimony, the texts written in their language over the span of nearly five hundred years, the native speaker needs the ability to navigate the older, and perhaps more complicated orthographies. At IDIEZ orthography has long been a topic of discussion, and the perspective of the institute is outlined in one of their grammars-in-progress:

Hueliz tiqitztoc ceyoc piltlahcuiloltzin tlen motequihuia ipan amoxtli tlen primaria. Huahcauhquiya macehualmeh pehqueh tlahcuiloah ica piltlahcuiloltzin: quiyiya ce centzontli huan epohualli xihuitl. Quihcuilohqueh miyac amatl huan amoxtli. Tohhuantin ticnequih ticequihuizzeh piltlahcuiloltzin tlen huahcapameh, pampa iuhquinon tihueliz ticpohuaz nochi tlen quihcuilohqueh ininhuantin, huan nouhquia tihueliz ticcuamachiliz mas cualli quenuhqui motecpantoc tlahtolli tlen nahuatl.

(It is possible that you have seen different letters [orthographical conventions] in grade school books. Indians began writing a long time ago: some four hundred and sixty years ago. They wrote many documents and books. We want to use this same orthography of the old ones because in this way you can read everything that they wrote, and you can learn/understand better how Nahuatl words are structured [grammar]).

Those in the “phonetics camp” disagree, saying that just as a native speaker of English can navigate, for example, Shakespeare or a King James Bible, a native speaker of Nahuatl should be able to easily move from a phonetic alphabet to older orthographies with no trouble. Would this hold true in practice? Luz’s texts are very similar to common Colonial (continuum) orthography and word choices, and so offered an ideal “test case” of the pro-phonetics hypothesis that native speakers don’t need training or experience in the Colonial continuum orthographies. My colleagues in the reading group had varying

levels of experience working with the continuum-style orthography, as this is the orthography employed at IDIEZ. Before working at IDIEZ none had received any kind of training in the grammatical description or historical properties of their language. During their time as researchers and teachers of their language in Zacatecas, some had minimal experience working on Colonial documents, and Ana Delia, the youngest, had little to none. So what happened?

Those with the most experience with the continuum orthography and formal training in their own grammar, specifically the history and change over time of the properties of the language, succeeded in accessing Luz's texts and were able to move quickly to commenting on content. The young woman with the least amount of experience, having mostly only heard her language spoken as opposed to seeing it written (although in the Huasteca one often sees road signs in phonetic Nahuatl) said that it was like trying to make heads or tails of a foreign language. Not only do Luz's texts utilize a continuum-style orthography (chosen by Horcasitas), but they also contain a fairly large quantity of lexical items not used in the Huasteca (but often seen in Colonial documents). Furthermore, the language Luz employed was at a different stage of change than the Nahuatl of the Huasteca Veracruzana today, which not only interfered with understanding verb tense (specifically the preterit), but presented vowel substitutions that tended to disguise words. The researchers that had not had previous training in continuum orthography and the general historical properties of the Nahuatl grammar were, in a word, lost.

Since languages change unevenly due to geography, contact with other cultures, etc., we see a wide variation in the Nahuatl language across regional variations and time periods, especially in the preterit form. This is one of the most complicated aspects of Nahuatl, in fact eminent Nahuatl scholar James Lockhart has termed the preterit “a morphological nightmare” (31). A polysynthetic/ agglutinating language, Nahuatl’s verb tenses are identifiable by suffixes and root word changes, resulting in four basic “classes” of verbs (Lockhart 31). Without going into too much detail here, over time Nahuatl suffixes are reduced, as the language constantly seeks to be more efficient. Lockhart discusses this in terms of “erosion” and notes that “any element that comes at the end of a word undergoes processes of reduction over time. An *a* becomes *e*, then *i*, then disappears” (31). With this reduction process in mind, depending on the particular variation’s stage in the process, a verb could end in the morpheme *-c*, *-ca*, *-que*, *-qui*, *-que*, or nothing at all to mark the singular preterit (luckily the plural preterit nearly always is found to end with *-queh*, a small consolation). Colonial-era documents (and Luz’s twentieth-century narrative) also mark the preterit (albeit inconsistently) with the prefix *o-*. After two days of reading and identifying that there was indeed a barrier to access due to inexperience with the continuum orthography and the historical change of the language, we stopped the readings and worked on these grammatical/historical issues as a group, with two of the more experienced native speakers guiding the discussions. I should also mention here that each collaborator was working with the most important reference works of the last three centuries (Molina’s *Vocabulario*, Simeón’s *Diccionario*, and Karttunen’s *Analytical Dictionary*) which also require instruction and experience

with a variety of orthographies as well to fully benefit from their use. After a few more days of moving between orthographies and dictionaries with Luz's texts as our resting point, the entire group was able to make progress in reading and understanding the texts. I also worked with one of my colleagues, Abelardo de la Cruz, on two of the essays that Luz contributed to *Mexihcatl Itonalama* (see note 98) that employ a phonetics-based orthography. This text was even less accessible in that without extensive reconstructive work of the text, all of the dictionary resources (which are not phonetic, but use the continuum orthography) were virtually useless. What I mean to highlight by including these observations is that we run the risk of shutting out native speakers from accessing their own texts by promoting (only) a phonetic alphabet. Therefore, I urge scholars of Nahuatl language and culture to carefully consider their audience when dealing with orthographies. Specifically, I believe it is of the utmost importance that we keep in mind the idea of repatriation, returning the full spectrum of Nahua cultural and intellectual production to those that are often unaware of this rich tradition that belongs to them.

### **Assimilative Schooling**

Although we all had the complete text, in the reading group we chose to read the stories "La escuela," "Muy propio y muy correcto," "Los buenos maestros," and "El Centenario" because they dealt with education. My colleagues' educational experiences over the last fifteen years in public education, like Luz's, were assimilative in nature and prompted ambivalent responses. Regardless of official rhetoric that espouses bilingual, bicultural, or intercultural education for the pluri-cultural nation, day-to-day experience in

indigenous communities with education provided by the SEP (Secretaria de Educación Pública) continues to be epistemologically and physically violent. My colleagues reported being punished and ridiculed for speaking their native language in school. The women in the reading group all recalled being punished by being “knuckle-knocked” in the head and being charged one peso per Nahuatl word that escaped from their lips (fines were kept in a large glass jar on the teacher’s desk in the front of the room). They remembered boys being sent outside in the broiling noon-time sun, made to hold a rock over their head for an hour each time they were caught using their language. Echoing Luz’s teachers, they had been told that this was to “help them get ahead,” by getting rid of their “backwardness.” The discourse of “progress” that we look at as something that happened a long time ago, something that has been overcome, is alive and well in the Huasteca Veracruzana. As students, they were told that there were evolved languages and primitive languages (indigenous languages are, of course, primitive), that sooner or later their language would disappear anyway, and that if they maintained their native language they would be permanently inhibited from learning Spanish (and “successfully” integrating into society). Abelardo, the only male participant in the reading group, from a different (although nearby) community than the female researchers, claimed that he had heard of these kinds of punishments, but that it was not his experience at school in Tepoxteco. All of the participants found this to be extremely strange, since they all lived in the same general vicinity and the educational discourse of “progress” was so very prevalent. Several days after this discussion Abelardo revealed the reason that the children in his community were not punished: they simply didn’t speak their language in

school. “They knew better,” he said. They had already internalized the lesson. Indeed, Tepoxteco is considered by other neighboring villages to be one of the more “de-Indianized” communities. Other communities even go as far as to say that they are no longer macehualmeh (indigenous), but coyomeh (Euro-mestizos) now.

Apparently the school system “succeeded” in Abelardo’s community. But not quite, since here he was, working as an intellectual in his own language, questioning what he had been taught in school, and through Luz’s words recognizing his own struggles and survival. We videotaped each session, and ideally soon more developed analysis can be carried out by the native speakers themselves, suturing these stories and histories together. Luz ends her tales in *Life and Death* by saying “nican yotlan notlatol ipan Momochco Malacateticpac” (*Life and Death* 178) (Here ends my story about Milpa Alta...[*Life and Death* 179]). Little did she know that it might only be the beginning, or that her memories of nearly one hundred years ago would today contribute to the lengthening of the trajectory of the Nahuatl intellectual tradition. I think she would be pleased.



## Chapter Four: Ildefonso Maya-Hernández: Bilingual Teacher, Playwright, Painter (1936– )

“Indigenous theatre, like all theatre, is storytelling” (Driskill 155)

In the previous chapters my analysis of several Nahua intellectuals focused on protagonists that lived in Mexico City, the cultural capital of the Mexican nation. In this chapter I move to the predominantly indigenous Huasteca region<sup>103</sup> of Mexico during the latter half of the twentieth century, analyzing the work of Ildefonso Maya-Hernández (1936– ), a prolific playwright, artist, bilingual teacher, and activist presently residing in Huejutla de Reyes, Hidalgo. Nearly his entire corpus depicts indigenous peoples in the Huasteca region of Mexico interacting with Church and State institutions that have intervened in their lives (beckoned or not) since the sixteenth century through the present day. While Maya is an accomplished painter (both canvas and over 140 large-scale murals scattered throughout the states of Veracruz and Hidalgo), this chapter will focus primarily on his work as a writer and director of popular theater, specifically his play *Ixtlamatinij* (The Learned Ones [1987] 2007). Considered by the author to be one of his best works, *Ixtlamatinij* takes on the controversial topic of the State co-optation of indigenous people as agents of assimilation to dominant culture in their roles as bilingual

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<sup>103</sup> The Huasteca region extends into several of Mexico’s northeastern states, encompassing approximately 40,000 square miles in northern Veracruz, southern Tamaulipas, as well as parts of the states of San Luis Potosí, Puebla, and Hidalgo. While Nahuas are undoubtedly the majority indigenous group in the Huasteca, the region is home to many peoples and cultures such as the Huastecos and Teneek to the north, and the Otomies, Tononacos, and Tepehuas to the south (Valle-Esquivel 6). In the past the Huasteca region was extremely difficult to reach; however today there are at least six major highways traversing the area and one can also fly directly into Tampico or Poza Rica (Ruvalcaba-Mercado 37). One of the most impoverished and underdeveloped regions of the Mexican Republic, the majority of the county seats did not have paved access until the 1980s (Valle-Esquivel 25).

teachers. Maya is a product of the State-sponsored bilingual education training program. As such, his critique of the bilingual educational model and its discourses and practices stems largely from first-hand experience within the system. My aim in this chapter is to introduce the reader to this underestimated contemporary figure in the Nahua intellectual tradition, highlighting a series of interviews I carried out with Maya in 2008 and 2009. To frame the discussion of *Ixtlamatinij* in a broader socio-historical context, I outline the role of the Mexican educational system in consolidating the nation and the official policies of the same, as well as the day-to-day experience of these policies in an indigenous community during the 1980s, as represented in the play.

### **Meeting Maya, Master Storyteller**

Ildefonso Maya-Hernández was born in the Huasteca Veracruzana (Chahuatlán, Iamatlán) in 1936 to Nahua parents, Felipe Maya and Felícitas Hernández. He has lived and worked in Huejutla, Hidalgo since 1956 where he met and married his wife Felipa Olivares Cortés, with whom he had three sons.<sup>104</sup> In the quote below I reproduce a fragment of Maya's unpublished grammar of Nahuatl, *Nauatl grammatical* (1953) in order to give an idea of Maya's thoughts on language's role in colonization and decolonization:

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<sup>104</sup> I recorded a video of Ildefonso Maya reading a short autobiography in May of 2008. See <http://kellysmcdonough.blogspot.com>. This site also includes digitized copies of four painted codexes (*amoxmeh*) by Maya that are the culmination of over 40 years of research in indigenous communities in the Huasteca.

Mi nombre es Piltat, mi lengua materna es el nauatl o mexkatl, porque la ranchería en donde yo nací, que se llama Chahuatlán, Municipio de Iamatlán, Ver., todos hablamos el nauatl o mexkatl, porque todos somos indios y aunque yo ya no vivo en mi tierra, sigo hablando el nauatl o mexkatl, que me enseñaron mis padres. [...] Esta modesta aportación que pongo en sus manos, es para que conozcan y aprendan no como dicen el dialecto nauatl, sino como la lengua nauatl, que como tal, está al nivel de cualquiera de las lenguas modernas de nuestro tiempo, como: el inglés, Alemán, Español, Ruso, Italiano o Frances. Advierto de que se trata de una lengua viva y de uso ordinario. A los hombres y a las mujeres que habitamos a este país: México, sepa que habemos más de tres millones de indios que usamos la lengua nauatl o mexkatl; a pesar de la imposición oficial del uso del español, que a saber claramente el castellano sí es dialecto del español de la península Ibérica. Insisto y me resta ofrecer esta pequeña obra para que aprendan el nauatl o mexkatl que realmente es la lengua nuestra que no hay que dejar perder nunca, como perdí mi nombre de Piltat y que hoy me llamo: Ildefonso Maya Hernández, aunque nunca ha sido de mi conformidad. Perdí mi nombre; pero la lengua que me enseñaron mis padres, la seguiré usando, aunque hable inglés, Italiano, Español, Kiliua, Tsoji, Pipil, Ña,Ñu porque el Nauatl o Mexkatl es mi primera lengua. IKA NOCHI NO YOLO, KIA KEJ NI MECH ON YOLMELAU, TLASKAMATIJ GRACIAS.<sup>105</sup>

(My name is Piltat and my native language is Nahuatl or Mexicano because in the village where I was born, Chahuatlán, in the municipality of Iamatlán Veracruz, we

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<sup>105</sup> Spellings and capitalizations are exact duplicates of Maya's prologue.

all speak Nahuatl or Mexicano, because we are all Indians. And although I no longer live there, I still speak Nahuatl or Mexicano, the language that my parents taught me. [...]. This modest contribution that I present to you is so that you may know and learn how the language Nahuatl (not a dialect like some say) is equal to any of the modern languages of our time such as English, German, Spanish, Russian, Italian, or French. Nahuatl is a living language that is used every day. To the men and women that live in this country Mexico: you should know that we are more than three million Indians that speak Nahuatl or Mexicano, even in the face of the official imposition of Spanish (and truth be told, Castilian *is* a dialect of the Spanish of the Iberian Peninsula). It remains for me to give you this humble work so that you can learn that Nahuatl or Mexicano is actually our true language and that we ought never to lose it in the same way that I lost my name Piltat. Today my name is Ildefonso Maya Hernández, even though I have never approved of it. I lost my name, but I will continue to use the language that my parents taught me—even though I can also speak English, Italian, Spanish, Kiliua, Tosji, Pipil, and Ña,Ñu—because Nahuatl or Mexicano is my first language. With all my heart, I tell you that all of this is true. Thank you, thank you.)

Evidenced by the above text, Maya has been long aware of the legacy of colonialism in the present day, particularly the manners in which Indians and their languages have been minoritized. He offers a corrective to “official” history, rejecting the commonly-held belief that his language is a dialect, and not-so-subtly pointing out that an Indian (often thought to be intellectually inferior) has mastered several languages. Maya’s use of

Spanish to critique its imposition exemplifies Fernando Ortiz's famous term *transculturation*, the strategic give and take of cultural elements. In discussing transculturation, Mary Louise Pratt has maintained that "(w)hile subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for" (6). Maya's use of the tools of dominant culture to critique and contest in the earlier days of his career foretells the nature of his work in the following decades.

I had the opportunity to visit *el profesor*, as everyone affectionately calls him, at his home in Huejutla in March and May of 2008, and in August of 2009. A few weeks prior to that first visit I had spoken to him briefly on the telephone to arrange the interview. He said he would be happy to receive me, and we established the date that I would arrive. When I inquired as to how I would find his home—which also currently serves as the "Hidalgo Huastecan Cultural Center"—Maya told me to go to the *zócalo* (main plaza) and simply ask anyone I came across if they knew where *el profesor* lived. While I was apprehensive, I soon learned that indeed everyone in Huejutla knew Maya, having had some sort of personal interaction with him over the decades, and everyone had an opinion about him.

My adventure began with the taxis. It seems that Maya is the patron saint of the taxi drivers of Huejutla; nearly every taxi driver I encountered not only knew *el profesor*, but also credited him with the high quality of life that they lead today. Maya cured one fellow's alcoholism, he taught another to read, he got one off of drugs, and he taught yet another to paint. Maya has had a love affair with the taxi drivers as well. Over the years

they have chauffeured him around Huejutla, whether it be to teach Nahuatl to nuns and priests, or to visit the local “house of ill repute” to teach reading, writing, and typing to prostitutes. They have also fetched him from jail, supposedly incarcerated for one of his overtly political murals near the town center. He is notorious for thanking taxi drivers instead of politicians whenever he is in front of a crowd or gets his hands on a microphone, when the customary provincial Mexico approach is to acknowledge high-level bureaucrats. Maya also lays claim to instructing a group of twenty-five homosexual men how to make piñatas, so that instead of being referred to as *los putos* (the “fags”) they would be known as *los de las piñatas* (the fellows that make the piñatas).

These are only a few examples of Maya’s colorful life story that he did not hesitate to share. Stooped and dependent on a cane to walk, Maya’s body seemed tired but his eyes still twinkled with mischief, and his mind and tongue were sharp. When I stepped out of the taxi at his home, I found him sitting on a plastic chair in the doorway. He looked me up and down, and grunted “I thought you were coming two weeks ago.” His wife Felipa, recovering from surgery and sitting much further back in the house, waved her hands at him dismissively and rolled her eyes. Then they both burst out laughing. He is funny and sarcastic with almost everyone, and I was not to be an exception. He invited me to sit down next to him in the shade, to turn on my *máquinita* (“you people love to record things,” he said, “so turn it on!”), and then he began to spin his tales. I was barely allowed a word in edgewise, and when I did have the opportunity to ask a question he answered monosyllabically and then returned to whatever topic he found to be more suitable. Maya was happy to talk, but he was clearly going to be in charge. And whether

his tales were facts or fiction one can't be sure. What was immediately clear, however, is that I was in the presence of a master storyteller. He spoke of being a *mozo* for Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera as a youth: "Frida era hooooorrrrible, fea, fea, fea. Su cara, su carácter, su pintura: horrible" (Frida was horrible, ugly, ugly, ugly. Her face, her personality, her painting, all of it horrible); how he was awarded a scholarship that made it possible for him to finish his secondary education, and yet another that sent him to the University of Washington in the United States for undergraduate education; studying at Bellas Artes in Mexico City; acting in movies with María Félix: "nunca tenía roles importantes, pero me reconocieron por morir bien" (I never held important roles, but I was well known for being good at dying); being flown in a helicopter to Los Pinos during José López Portillo's term, and calling the president a "cabrón" for leaving him waiting without offering him food; his large-scale popular theater productions that he insists made grown men cry; his struggles with the Catholic church and his own spirituality; his family, and his language (including his very own symbolic orthography). Some of his stories are so incredible that I began to wonder if he wasn't pulling my leg, or at the very least exaggerating. However, over the course of our meetings, I've decided that if anyone is capable of doing all of these things, it is surely Ildefonso Maya.

He read love poems aloud that he wrote fifty years ago, reminisced about his travels in the Mexican Republic, Europe, and the United States, and discussed working with other indigenous peoples of Mexico when he was initially deployed as a bilingual school teacher. He spent a great deal of time talking about the reason that he has been so prolific (almost 300 plays, mostly unpublished, boxes of poetry, stacks and stacks of drawings,

nearly all of social commentary in nature, and scores of large scale paintings, besides the murals): God gave him the talent and he feels obligated to use it, and he believes that God specifically wanted him to celebrate, revitalize, and propagate Nahua culture. Maya never drinks alcohol, as it is a “childish distraction” from his primary purpose, which he claims is to tell the truth as God has ordered him. And Maya’s truth is heavy with social, political, and cultural criticism. His topics in all mediums critique both mestizo and indigenous cultures, particularly the conflicts between the two; the role of the Catholic Church and their success or failure (according to Maya) in carrying out their duties; traditional indigenous religious life and *costumbre* (ceremonies); social class, ethnicity, gender; urbanization; education and language; economic policy; political parties and government; Mexican *indigenista* policies; and technology, to name a few.

One example stands out as particularly demonstrative of Maya’s brand of social commentary. In 1958, Huejutla was a relatively small agriculture-based town with limited or at least difficult access to larger cities. This changed with the arrival of the highway, which Maya likens to a serpent that eats everything, and regurgitates out only bad things. The highway that connects Huejutla to the larger town of Pachuca (120 kilometers) and Mexico City (230 kilometers) has substantially changed daily life in this once-sleepy town. The conveniences of “modern” living, the rapid exchange of goods and ideas, and also the social ills of the metropolis (drugs, increased crime, and rampant consumerism) are glaringly present in Huejutla today. Maya’s artistic response to the arrival of the highway was a charcoal drawing of the peaceful city center being surrounded by a giant serpent. Several years later, along with dozens of the school



children he taught at the local secondary school, he built a massive serpent (in the fashion of Chinese New Year dragons) including a wooden frame, meter upon meter of green fabric, and a massive papier-mâché serpent's head, mouth, and teeth. The mouth was big enough to allow an adult to pass through it by crouching slightly. As part of a large scale dance performance of the Ballet of Bonampak in the public square (some four hundred performers), Maya brought this mammoth serpent, spanning sixty-five meters and supported by over one hundred people. Spectators watched curiously, murmuring with discomfort as the student/performers entered the mouth of the serpent to take up the skeleton structure of the serpent. After the serpent had "eaten" Huejutla's school-age children, it undulated around the main plaza, a spectacle to behold. Finally, after encircling the plaza and the onlookers, the serpent stopped and was silent for a moment, shook violently, and then opened its fanged mouth to "vomit" out a man dressed as a priest holding hands with a tall, white foreigner. The lesson of the Church and the West's ravenous appetite was hard to miss.

While an avowed Catholic, Maya is open about his criticisms of the Church's activities in the community and he is clearly skeptical of the men that lead it. One of his more provocative drawings portrays a congregation of pious Indians in prayer, a dog on top of the altar eating the host, and a priest with his back to the whole scene, looking out a doorway. Needless to say, there is nothing subtle about Maya's work. He brought this drawing out at the end of our visit in response to yet another one of my questions that he had no intention of answering. He said to me: "You have come here with your list of questions, but you already know the answers. Any human being, regardless of the

language they speak, knows deep down what is right and wrong, and any human being is capable of understanding my work. I don't hide anything; you don't need me to walk you through the meaning of my work. You will see what you are capable of seeing, and that is enough." He paused for a moment and then, always the trickster, said "But seriously... if you can't figure this one out (referring to the drawing), you must be pretty stupid."

In conversation with Maya, he referred often to his fascination as a child with storytellers, as well as an acute awareness from a very young age of the performative nature of both *costumbre* (indigenous religious ceremonies) and Catholic mass. He recalls his first popular theater "production" as being a seven year-old boy leading the village children to the river, carrying a large wooden cross. As the priest in his "play," Maya was a natural director and actor from the very beginning. While his classical theater training at Bellas Artes in Mexico City is occasionally visible with his love of tragedy culled from many readings of the Greeks and Shakespeare, he has intentionally distanced himself from Western and Classical theater in his *teatro masivo Náhuatl*, "open-air group performances put on by the peasants themselves" (Schryer, *Ethnicity* 290). These productions, openly didactic, are exclusively aimed at cultural preservation and revitalization in the face of massive pressures from the dominant culture to assimilate. In his desire to present a faithful reproduction of indigenous quotidian experiences and the problems of their communities, Maya has left behind what he characterized as the "false world" of stage, panels, and scrim, and has instead taken most of his productions to the street (or the water well, or the mud and daub hut). If the setting of the play is at the river,

that is precisely where it will be staged. Besides, Maya reminded me, “it’s a lot cheaper that way.”

Much of the initial funding for these open-air theater productions came from the office of Hidalgo’s governor Guillermo Rossell de la Lama (1981–1987) in exchange for Maya’s work as cultural mediator between Nahuas and mestizo during the violent agrarian struggle of the Huasteca Hidalguense (Schryer, *Ethnicity* 289–91). This role on the political stage has been viewed as suspect and contradictory by many, particularly in that while consistently vocal in his critiques of Western cultural imperialism, Maya has also worked closely with government agencies and leaders as they attempted to “contain peasant unrest or channel it to an officially approved direction” (Schryer, *Ethnicity* 255). Furthermore, while couched in terms of cultural revitalization, the *teatro masivo* plays were often staged in “trouble spots” (Schryer, *Ethnicity* 290). Many wondered if Maya’s productions challenged State policies, as in a “theatre of the oppressed,”<sup>106</sup> or if he promoted the designs of the State by “entertaining” the masses with a spectacle meant to divert attention from the pressing problems of the area. Was he a critic or proponent of the political *status quo*? While it is difficult to ascertain Maya’s motives—he is rather cryptic when asked about these earlier stagings of *Ixtlamatinij*—it is clear that the State has played a rather paradoxical role in the promotion of assimilation to dominant culture’s demands while providing the very means (intellectual training, job access, and

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<sup>106</sup> Brazilian Augusto Boal’s far-reaching “theatre of the oppressed” of the 1960s is a method of theatre wherein the goal is to transform a formerly passive person or class (proletariat/oppressed) into an active participant on the “social stage.” Often the pre-performance activities, and the topics rehearsed and performed, are meant to encourage future action by the participants and/or spectators.

funding) necessary to contest this system.<sup>107</sup> This holds true in the case of the recruitment, training, and employment of indigenous people as bilingual educators during the 1970s and 80s.

### **Bilingual Education in Late Twentieth-Century Mexico**

Since the main theme of *Ixtlamatinij* is a critique of the discourses and practices of bilingual education in indigenous communities, it is pertinent to consider the function of these discourses and practices in society. In the case of Mexico, the public school system is widely recognized as being an agent of socio-cultural integration, with the main goal of creating a consciousness of belonging to the nation (Acevedo 10).<sup>108</sup> This consciousness of belonging, solidified by repetitive behavior deemed appropriate by dominant culture, ensures that the subject recognizes his/her role in the nation (Althusser's interpellation). The subject believes himself to be "Mexican" and therefore will behave in a manner that will benefit his fellow citizens. In a capitalist society, this might be in the form of providing low wage labor, not taking over land or entering into armed conflict with fellow citizens, or by following laws established by the dominant culture. In order to avoid the need for physical force to ensure compliance, the school system is charged with teaching/enforcing the "correct" social behaviors and eradicating those deemed undesirable. What better way to ensure conformity to the State's wishes than to utilize a

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<sup>107</sup> Jorge Hernández-Díaz identifies the paradox of the State educational apparatus as disseminator of both the instruments of assimilation and the tools for resisting it (54) in his excellent essay "The Bilingual Teachers: A New Indigenous Intelligentsia."

<sup>108</sup> Louis Althusser has theorized the educational system as Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) charged with constructing subjects in order to consolidate the nation. While I do not intend to offer a Marxist analysis, my reading takes into consideration Althusser's theories on Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses and interpellation.

national curriculum designed by the dominant culture, indoctrinating young citizens five hours a day, year after year?

In *Proyectos étnicos y proyectos nacionales* (1983), Stefano Varese has outlines how this “creation of a sense of belonging” via the educational system has been especially challenging in Mexico, with devastating effects in indigenous communities. He argues that nationalism as deployed by the State’s educational apparatus is actually contradictory to the economic model (capitalism). The problem lies in that while the educational system aims to culturally and linguistically integrate and assimilate peripheral/marginalized cultures, the maintenance of these communities as subsistent farmers/low salaried laborers is crucial to the capitalist project (Varese 32–7). Varese argues that besides being at odds with the capitalist model, assimilative education has a series of negative outcomes for indigenous communities. This model discredits ethnic cultures, separates school from everyday life, creates a formal opposition of science and “backward” popular knowledge, removes the family and community from the role of legitimate educators, devalues the indigenous language (which impedes the indigenous capacities of thought and creativity), and produces an extreme disconnect in terms of the topics being taught and indigenous experience, implicitly suggesting that indigenous culture has nothing to offer to the nation. Assimilative education inhibits indigenous people’s abilities to think creatively and effectively respond to a changeful world (37–39). Education, in the name of “modernization and progress,” is responsible for decelerating and even impeding the very process it presumes to foster. As such, this

model is damaging to the nation as a whole in that a significant portion of the population is denied the opportunity to develop their full intellectual capacities.

During the final three decades of the twentieth century in Mexico, education for indigenous citizens moved from a model of explicitly hostile eradication to a weak promotion of indigenous knowledge and languages. This is most apparent in the shift from monolingual (Spanish) instruction to a bilingual format, as well as the recruitment and “training” of bilingual (indigenous) teachers. The reception of this transition to a bilingual model of education has been varied.<sup>109</sup> Recognized by some as a tardy recognition of the pluri-cultural makeup of the nation, this model is also criticized as a sinister co-optation of indigenous people themselves in the process of assimilation to dominant culture.

As I discussed in the previous chapter on Doña Luz Jiménez, the overall educational policy from Independence (1810) through the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920) was to emphasize “castilianization” and eliminate signs of otherness such as indigenous languages and dress. The 1930s heralded a renewed interest on the part of government and *indigenistas* in mother-tongue education, yet the underlying goal continued to be the assimilation of the Indian to a “civilized” way of life (Hamel 302–4).<sup>110</sup> It was not until 1978 that the Federal Ministry of Education was to create a specific sub-section dedicated to overseeing the elementary education of indigenous children, the *Dirección General de*

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<sup>109</sup> Regarding bilingual/bicultural/intercultural education in Mexico see the following: María Acevedo-Conde, *Educación interétnica*; Alba Gúzman-Gómez, *Voces indígenas*; Jani Jordá-Hernández, *Ser maestro bilingüe en Suljaa*; and María Vargas D., *Educación e ideología*.

<sup>110</sup> The *Proyecto Tarasco*, while lasting only one year (1939–1940), is a contemporary example of indigenous language instrumentalized in order to “castilianize” (Vargas 118).

*Educación Indígena* (General Department of Indigenous Education [DGEI]). A secondary goal of the DGEI was to implement a bilingual teacher program for which indigenous people would be recruited and trained for service in often monolingual communities (Hamel 304). A hallmark of this program was the instrumentalization of native languages *as long as necessary* to bridge primarily monolingual indigenous students to Spanish. This program, later called the bilingual-bicultural model, went on to develop several pilot projects and textbooks in the major indigenous languages, although none were considered highly successful (Hamel 304).

Since the inception of the bilingual-bicultural model, Indian bilingual teachers have been notoriously under-equipped, both in training and resources (Hamel 309). Most bilingual teachers were recruited from indigenous communities and sent for training to the *Dirección General de Capacitación y Mejoramiento Profesional para el Magisterio* (General Management of Training and Professionalization of Teachers [DGCMPM]) working in tandem with DGEI. This training was supposed to prepare the bilingual teacher not only for “regular service” (for non-indigenous students), but also for “bilingual-bicultural service” (Calvo and Donnadieu 30). Already at a distinct disadvantage from their mestizo counterparts who more than likely had received a higher quality education previous to their enrollment in this program, indigenous bilingual teachers were asked to do twice the amount of work during their training period. They were provided with extra materials (beyond those required for “regular service”) that they were to study on their own. This obligatory material did not include pedagogical training, or additional preparation in the bilingual teacher’s *second* language, Spanish. Rather they

encompassed a broad range of issues: basic legal information to assist communities in questions of the law; general linguistics so as to better understand the properties of the indigenous language; tactics for community development, and anthropology (Calvo and Donnadieu 30–31). After graduating from the program, they were to serve rural indigenous schools as teachers, lawyers, linguists, social workers, and anthropologists. Add to this the fact that more often than not the bilingual teacher was sent to a community that did not utilize his/her indigenous language.

Inadequate pedagogical and Spanish language training of the recruited bilingual teachers ensured “a particularly appropriate form of colonial subjectivity” (Bhabha 127). That is, Indians were afforded the kind of education that ensured that they were *nearly* the same as the dominant other, but not quite (Bhabha 127). This mimicry, or incomplete performance, codified the subordinate role of Indians: assimilation to dominant cultural norms doesn’t mean becoming equal, it means becoming less Indian, more manageable/governable, and yet still positioned in their needed role as a subservient, cheap labor force that is self-sufficient when not needed (subsistence farmers). The educational system, then, can be read as molding Indians into “authorized versions of otherness” (Bhabha 129) in order to ensure continued subordination under the guise of limited inclusion.

There is no complaint against the idea of a truly bilingual or bicultural education (i.e. instruction for *all* Mexicans in more than one language and culture, now termed “intercultural”), or creating jobs for which Indians are uniquely suited. What is problematic, however, is that the training and curriculum was aimed at de-Indianization



and assimilation to dominant cultural norms. Therefore, indigenous people became agents of the State, promoting and participating in their own cultural and epistemological genocide. Whereas the program created desperately needed jobs, Indians were placed in a position to colonize their own people. Of course, there is nothing new about the recruitment of indigenous people to act as agents of assimilation to dominant cultural values. Since the early Colonial Period, Indian children from prominent families were taken from their homes by the religious orders to be instructed in the new religion and European ways of living with the end goal of returning them to their communities as teachers and models of the dominant culture. What is different, however, is that this co-optation was now couched in terms of celebrating multiculturalism. Peter Wade reminds us that “celebrating multiculturalism” should be considered a red-flag in that it is often used as a method to avoid social unrest, as “a tactical manoeuvre for coping with protest” (107). Susan Rippberger echoes Wade in stating that “the rhetoric of pluralism may act as a façade to disguise a continuing inequitable structure or to delay reform” (59). The timing of the bilingual-bicultural model of education of the 1970s and 80s correlates closely with the increase of social unrest in Mexico. In fact, these decades are often referred to as the worst of Mexico’s “Dirty War.”<sup>111</sup> It should not go unnoticed that the Huasteca Hidalguense, where Maya was stationed as a bilingual teacher and then later wrote and staged *Ixtlamatinij*, was known to be one of the most “violent and conflict-ridden parts of Mexico” during that time period (Schryer, “Peasants and the Law” 283).

While the characters, setting, speech, and topics of the play are all startlingly realistic,

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<sup>111</sup> See “The Dawn of Mexico’s Dirty War” by Kate Doyle at [www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB105/index.htm](http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB105/index.htm).

there is no explicit mention of agrarian struggle. Instead *Ixtlamatinij* dealt specifically with intercultural and generational conflicts as represented by the family of an indigenous bilingual school teacher (Epitacio). Maya hoped that the audience would recognize themselves on the stage, since at the time of the initial stagings this particular drama was also playing out in the communities. The presentations of the play, according to Maya, were aimed at fomenting post-performance discussion regarding problems in the community while at the same time discussing the positive aspects of Nahua culture.

### **Popular Theater and Indigenous Experience**

Since theater is inherently linked to orality, the backbone of indigenous knowledge, theatrical or performative expressions are an accepted and expected mode of transmission of ideas in Nahua communities, providing a powerful tool for contesting and shaping ideologies (Taylor, *Theatre of Crisis* 42). Moreover, the polyphonic nature of theater provides an optimal forum for presenting indigenous experience, allowing for the presentation of a rich multi-layered cacophony of messages (Barthes 262). Everyday speech that is sometimes polished away in poetry and prose can be readily reproduced on the stage. Costumes, sideways and knowing glances, ceremonial activity, dance, music, and even food, all of which Diana Taylor has conceived of in terms of embodied performances, provide the spectator with simultaneous signs of performed culture (*The Archive* 18).

These performances can be interpreted as personal or communal, quotidian or for specific situations, they can reinforce or undo, and create something new. They can be

associated with particular verbal discourses and embodied behaviors that we deploy (consciously or unconsciously) to mark ourselves as part of (or not) of a given culture or ethnic community (Roach 10). Since Colonial times, the performance of indigenous cultural identity has been vigorously interrogated and legislated, in order to ensure that Indians were identifiable and visually codified as different and inferior to Euro-mestizos. Now, with the advent of nation-building, the bilingual-bicultural educational model required a different performance (ranging from religious activity to language to dress) from Indians, that of “Mexican” that at the very least translated to “not-Indian.” While the script has changed, this is but a sequel to Colonial practices of domination and coercion.

Of course, Indians in Mexico have historically both contested these imposed ideals, and strategically performed ethnic identities. For example, anthropologist Alan Sandstrom, who has worked extensively in Nahua communities in the Huasteca, tells of two separate events that demonstrate the strategic performance of indigeneity: 1) On the way to the market in Ixhuatlán his indigenous friends joked and bantered with him, but as they approached the town a silence overcame the group. Each Nahua replaced his grin with a mask-like passive and serious look, began moving more slowly, and distanced themselves from their “outsider” friend. After leaving town, the Indians returned to their usual, animated selves. Sandstrom read this as “impression management”: playing “dumb Indians” to avoid any attention from mestizos who are understood to be powerful and dangerous (338–9). The second example that Sandstrom offers is the case of Nahua men walking nearly one hundred miles to meet with government officials in an effort to

recover land that was unlawfully taken from the village. When the anthropologist asked why the men did not take the very inexpensive bus to their destination, the men explained that they had “opted to arrive exhausted and dirty and thus fulfill their role as downtrodden Indians in order to get a more favorable ruling on their case” (Sandstrom 329). This strategy was successful. I include these vignettes in order to highlight the fact that whether consciously deployed or not, our day-to-day performances of cultural/ethnic identities serve a purpose. In *Ixtlamatinij*, Maya critiques the bilingual-bicultural educational model’s insistence on a revised performance of indigenous identity while highlighting non-hegemonic loci of indigenous knowledges found, for example, in ceremony, in landscape, and in language.

### **Zazanilli (Story)**

*Ixtlamatinij* is a play in two acts, the first consisting of seven scenes, the second, five. The entire play is comprised of twelve scenes, a balanced number respecting the traditional Nahua affinity for equanimity that is evident in nearly all organized structures of the Nahua world.<sup>112</sup> Originally written and performed in Nahuatl, the play was recently published in an anthology of Mexican indigenous theatre (*Words of the True People / Palabras de los seres verdaderos* [2007]) with a Spanish translation by Maya, and an

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<sup>112</sup> Example of equanimity in Nahua cosmovision range from *Ometeotl* (the supreme god that literally translates into “two god” and is masculine and feminine, mother and father at the same time), to the *altepetl* (the organizational structure of the city-states which were generally divided in even numbers with rotating complementary power).

English translation by the editors of the volume, Carlos Montemayor and Donald Frischmann.<sup>113</sup>

The play opens with a Nahua family preparing to reunite in order to celebrate the annual *Xantolo* ceremony in a Huastecan village. The elders have remained in the village, as has the eldest son, Nicolás, who tends the family parcel of land. Since there is not sufficient land to support all members of the family, the other two sons have left the village. Eпитacio works in another community as a bilingual teacher, and his brother Cirilo has joined the military. Eпитacio, having been indoctrinated in the “civilizing” discourse of “progress” through his State-sponsored training as a bilingual educator, wants his parents to don mestizo clothing. He convinces his brother Nicolás to deliver the clothes and instructions to his parents, and goes off to drink beer. Cirilo arrives home to find his parents in these ill-fitting costumes and when Eпитacio arrives at the home drunk, they argue. Cirilo defends his and his parents’ traditional indigenous ways (particularly language and dress) while Eпитacio insists that the only way to escape the poverty and discrimination that mark indigenous life in Mexico is to assimilate to the dominant culture. As the argument escalates, Eпитacio draws a knife intended for his brother and accidentally cuts his mother, Nichaj, who had tried to break up the fight. Eпитacio is taken away to a jail overnight. In the morning, hung over and awaiting his punishment from the local judge, he realizes the gravity of his errors. He returns to the family home on his knees, wearing a *cotón*, begging forgiveness in Nahuatl. All is forgiven, and promised to be forgotten: balance in the family is restored as the errant son resists assimilation and

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<sup>113</sup> See Donald Frischmann’s excellent introduction to Mexican indigenous theater and the work of Ildefonso Maya in the third volume of *Words of the True Peoples / Palabras de los Seres Verdaderos*, 19–47.

returns to traditional ways. The play ends with the united family continuing the *Xantolo* ceremony.

*Xantolo*, closely associated with “Todos Santos” or “Day of the Dead,” is a ceremony that takes place each year in late October and early November. During this time, Nahua families come together to welcome the *ánimas* (souls) of their deceased ancestors to feast, as well as to renew and solidify kinship relationships in the living community by exchange of gifts. Families build altars in their homes including an arc made of *limonario* leaves strung with *cempoalxochitl* flowers, providing a gateway between the spirit world and the present material world. While preparing to receive the *ánimas*, one is drawn to remember the individual, the family, and the community. The audience members will recognize this preparation and remember their own *Xantolo* celebrations, their own departed loved ones and living relatives that return to the community, and all of the stories that go into the narration of their lives. If it is our stories that remind us who we are and where we are going, one could say that *Xantolo* is one of the keys to the continuity of indigenous cultural memory, in that the act of remembering is ritualized. The context of *Xantolo* in this play is highly relevant in that this ceremony inherently reminds the individual of that which the discourses and practices of the bilingual education program are trying to eliminate, the past.

In the opening scene of *Ixtlamatinij*, the grandfather, Juantsi<sup>114</sup> lights beeswax candles and places good ears of corn and tamales on the altar. Nichaj, the mother, brings

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<sup>114</sup> Note the “tsi” attached to the grandfather’s name. In Nahuatl (and often in Mexican Spanish) the “tsi” of “tzin” indicates reverence to the receiver of the “tzin.” It can also elevate the entire discourse to a higher degree of respect by eliminating space between the speaker and the receiver. This is in contrast to the Spanish “usted” which connotes respect, but also creates and maintains distance.

the incense that will carry the offerings and prayers in its smoke to the spirit world, leading the *ánimas* home. Tachoj, the mute brother of Kosej (Nichaj's husband), offers a song from his *kokouilotl* whistle. As with most Nahua ceremonies, each person offers something: prayers, flowers, incense, animals, foodstuff, or if one has nothing material to offer, work (such as tying together strings of flowers), dance, or a song from a homemade whistle, are all acceptable.

Soon the candles begin to flicker, announcing the arrival of the *ánimas*.<sup>115</sup> Akostij, the elderly *curandero* and brother of Juantsi enters and offers incense to all corners of the room, inviting the souls of the deceased to join them by saying: “nikaj tij tlaliya to yolo, to tlanamikilis uan to chikualis. Xij selikajya tlen timech tenkauiliya [...] xitlakuakaj, xikajkokuikaj ni tlauli, ni popochtili, ni sempoal xochitl tlen san telmach amechpaktia” (234) (“Here we give our hearts, our integrity, and our strength; receive what we are offering to you [...] feel worthy and eat beneath these candles, this incense, these flowers that please you so...[250]). Not only the *ánimas*, but the grown children that have migrated from the community for work will return home for this ceremony.<sup>116</sup>

The return of both the living and the dead for *Xantolo* to a specific geographical space is important in that land, especially for indigenous peoples that maintain a connection

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<sup>115</sup> In Nahua communities, a flicker of a candle or of the cooking fire portends the arrival of a loved one or a messenger. On one of my first visits to Tepoxteco, an elderly woman told me that she knew to expect me; she had seen the sign in the flickering fire.

<sup>116</sup> As with other Mexican indigenous communities, outward migration in Nahua communities has resulted in a curious revitalization and even retrenching of indigenous *costumbre*. Indians working outside the community are able to finance more elaborate celebrations. Many Nahuas are anxious to prove that while they do not regularly reside in the community or carry out the traditional (if not sacred) duties such as tending *milpa*, they are still members of the community. Financing, and participating actively in community ceremonial life is one such way of strengthening and reinforcing ties to the community.

with sacred landscape, evokes a barrage of learned lessons and cultural memory. Keith Basso's work with the Apache (*Wisdom Sits in a Place* [1996]) describes how land and the stories associated with geography teach and re-teach indigenous knowledge. My own travels in the back of a pickup truck in the Huasteca have been some of the most instructive experiences in terms of learning about Nahua culture; my companions always had stories for every river, flower, and valley. Even the mountains had their own distinct song that the ceremonial Huastecan guitar and violin musicians (*tlatzotzonanih*) performed to call to the mountain's spiritual dwellers during ritual celebrations. The landscape not only serves as coordinate for getting to and from different places, but it literally coordinates the people: the stories inscribed in the land, and the retelling of these stories (either verbally, or simply remembering them silently in passing) continually invoke indigenous memories and knowledge. As with language and ceremonial life that "represent the archives of knowledge and wisdom of indigenous peoples" (Hernández-Ávila), geography is not as easily erased as other forms of knowledge: you can't burn down a mountain. In Mexico, Nahuatl place names are everywhere, and in this sense one could even say that "the land teaches the language" (Hernández-Ávila 61). Even if one has been removed from his/her original language, these place names are firm reminders of the past. Bonfil-Batalla has called these indigenous language toponyms "stubborn reserve[s] of knowledge and testimony" (13).

Both the annual celebration of *Xantolo* and the actual return to a geographic place are two practices that complicate the project of indigenous assimilation to dominant culture. Since *Xantolo's* proximity to Todos Santos has made the ceremony appear benign enough



to be accepted by the Catholic Church, and a certain amount of the population needs to remain in the countryside as farmers/low-wage workers, it is neither desirable nor practical to completely eradicate either practice. That is not to say that ceremonial practices are viewed with approval by the State and its agents. Instead indigenous ceremonial practices are often belittled as “folkloric,” and perceived as “uncivilized” behavior.

### **Discourses of Civilization and Progress**

Much of Mexico’s twentieth-century policies regarding Indian education was geared toward what the SEP (Secretaría de Educación Pública [Secretariat of Public Education]) has characterized as “overcoming the evolutionary distance which separates the Indians from the present era” (cf Hamel 303). It was not uncommon to attempt to bridge this “evolutionary distance” with material signs of the so-called civilized culture. Having been recruited as a bilingual teacher and trained to teach this brand of “progress,” Epitacio arrives home ready to instruct his family on the proper and authorized version of Mexican identity. One of the principal lessons is that in order to improve their quality of life Indians must change, adopting the outward signs of dominant culture. As the bearer of this message, Epitacio (standing for the State) is highly critical of his family’s ceremonial activity (“fanaticisms”), language, and manner of dress.

Oftentimes, as is the case of Epitacio, those placed in a position to promote the assimilation of their own people exhibit self-hatred (Memmi 104–123). Diana Taylor has described this in terms of an internalization of the colonizer’s definition of other as

inferior, a debilitating byproduct of exclusion and domination (*Theatre* 37). In his introduction to the play, Maya identifies the phenomenon and results of indigenous self-hatred:

Ni ti maseualmanj timo pinauaj pamap tij matij axti piay tlanmamikilistli kej kaxtiltekamej. Tij tlamielkajkejya to maseualtlalnamikilis, yejeka timoluiya ayok tij pia chikaualistli tlen ika tech xayax nextia, timo uuiipolojkejya; yon ayok tij piay topatij; pampa kaxtiltekamej tech tlami ixpolojtiauijya, kejuak ayok tleno tinesij; yejek uajkema ti kalakij tlamaxtiloyaj uan ti peuj timochtiaj ti tlapouaj uan ti tlajkuiloa, timoluij, ti peujya timotsontlananj, pampa tij knonanj ti ixtlamatij kej kastiltekamej; ijkinaj ti peuj timo ueyi nekij, pampa kejuak tij kajtiauijya maseualistli; uakinoj tij knonanj tikin pinajtia uuiimaseualmej, pampa tojuantij tij kajtiauiya maseualiatli uan ayok tij telpanitaj yon tleno, timo koyonekij uan ti peuj timo sisiniya. (232)

(We Indians are *ashamed* of being Indians because we think we lack the wisdom and culture of the Spaniards. We have already *forgotten* our traditional Indian culture and wisdom. Thus, we have lost the strength of the culture that represented us; we have lost it through our own *ignorance*; we have lost our values. Since the Spaniards and now the mestizos have defeated us, we feel we no longer count for anything. Therefore, when we begin to *learn to read and write in school*, we feel superior because we think we are being liberated; we become uppity because we feel we are

shedding our Indianness. We then begin to make fun of Indians as being dumb; having shed our ignorance, *we no longer have respect for anything*; we begin to believe that we are mestizos or Spaniards, and *we transform ourselves into violent individuals.*) (248 [emphasis added])

In the play, the character of Epitacio carries this learned self-hatred and demonstrates how the assimilative discourses (and practices) of the bilingual education model that he now repeats can create conflict in indigenous families. Some of his dialogue is quite startling:

**Epitacio:** Now you see where study can get you. That's how you better yourself. That's how you stop being an Indian—ignorant and dumb like an animal. [...] I swear, brother, being the son of an Indian is the worst thing. My face burns from the shame of having been born to some ignorant nobodies; I feel terrible when my friends 'of reason' see that I'm the offspring of Indians. (253)

In *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957), Albert Memmi states that “memory is not purely a mental phenomenon. Just as the memory of an individual is the fruit of his history and physiology, that of a people rests upon its institutions. [...] [The colonized] often becomes ashamed of these institutions, as of a ridiculous and overaged monument” (103). Epitacio's disdain for the institution of religious ceremonial life in the indigenous community is apparent when he arrives home and ridicules the abundance on the altar left

for the *ánimas* when the family is so impoverished (“Bread dolls for those dying of hunger” [257]). Here Epitacio parrots the very common mestizo discourse blaming Indian poverty on the excesses of their religious ceremonies (as opposed to the social, political, or economic structures). I’ve often heard “if they spent the amount of time working that they do preparing for their fiestas, they wouldn’t be in that situation” or “Mexico can’t compete in the globalized world because nobody works half the year, every day is some sort of religious celebration” or “if they just ate the food they offer to their gods, they wouldn’t be hungry, and wouldn’t have to pray for food.” There is no question that an enormous amount of time, energy, material goods, and money are dedicated to religious ceremonies in indigenous communities. Admittedly, my first experience with a Nahua ceremony in the Huasteca was confusing. The poverty was overwhelming and the abundance of offerings—store bought soda pop, crackers, cookies, breads, live chickens and turkeys, cases of beer, and more—was startling. However, this is all extremely logical if one understands first that Nahuas believe that those residing in the spiritual realm have similar tastes as those here in the earthly plane; and second, that the concept of balance is a highly desirable social character in Nahua culture. This includes maintaining a reciprocal relationship with the spiritual world. Therefore, one offers to the spirit world that which is sought. Epitacio’s disgust stems from his acceptance of mestizo cultural values, in fact states that “[...] we’ve got to fight all of this to put an end to fanaticism, as the mestizos say” (253). He makes fun of Juantsi dancing with his Cuanegro mask on, to which the elder responds “You know it’s our custom to use masks

for Xantolo, our Day of the Dead feast” (252). Epitacio is enraged and launches a tirade against all things he associates with Indianness:

**Epitacio:** Don't talk to me about customs! The old ways are history now, they're worthless. These days a man has to have fun: music, beer, and buddies. What would be the point of coming here if we couldn't make fun of these damned Indians? We must educate them; teach them to speak Spanish. We must believe we are “people of reason,” friend. That's why we roll up a wad of bills every payday: to spend on a good time. That's why I'm a bilingual teacher: to do away with everything that's Indian so we're no longer screwed. Damn, brother, we've got a long way to go (252).

Here Epitacio describes the *correct* identity performance, that of mestizo culture (a certain kind of music, beer, money earned as a wage laborer). However he is not clear as to how a different kind of behavior or language will change the situation of “getting screwed” which he later equates to working in the fields as a farmer (253). He simply insists that de-Indianization is the necessary route to a change for the better, implying that it was actually the fault of the Indian community for choosing the incorrect cultural model that led to the difficult living conditions in which they find themselves. He goes on to criticize the ceremonial dances taking place in the community, such as the “Danza de los viejos” (*Ueuejme*), and the “Cuanegros”:

**Epitacio:** Bilingual education is going to save us from the old people's foolish ways. What good are these masks and these dances? There are much better things than flute and violin music; sure, we have to dance, but to a band and with a girl until the body gives out—not moving our rears to that damned music that goes *concacaj, concacaj, concacaj, concacaj concaj, concacaj, concacaj...* (253).

Both cultures employ and enjoy dance and music, but according to what Epitacio has learned only the mestizo performances of culture are deemed appropriate. By asking “what good are these masks and these dances,” Epitacio demonstrates that he has been trained to diminish the value of indigenous embodied practices that serve as public performances of resistance and memory (James Scott). The “Cuanegros,” for example, is a reminder of racial and social struggles in Mexico, in that indigenous men disguise themselves as a Spaniard, a black man, and an indigenous woman and play out a conquest/courtship ritual.<sup>117</sup> The Spaniard is portrayed as inept, offering a moment, if only brief, of freedom from the role of the oppressed. Herein lays the problem: ceremonies such as *Xantolo*, and dances such as the Cuanegros, encapsulate memories that challenge dominant culture's vision and designs. Like ceremonial rituals and dance, language also holds memory and cosmovision. As such, language (chosen or imposed) can be read as a performance of cultural/ethnic identity, subject to promotion or censorship to mark in membership in, or exclusion from, a particular segment of society.

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<sup>117</sup>Regarding ceremonial dance in the Hidalgo region of the Huasteca,, see Refugio Miranda's essay “‘Cuanegros.’ Yahualica”; Nydia Ramos Castañeda, *El Xantolo de Huautla: Rituales de vida y muerte en la Huasteca hidalguense*, 39–57; and the Consejo Estatal para la Cultura y las Artes del Estado de Hidalgo at [http://cultura.hidalgo.gob.mx/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=668&Itemid=125](http://cultura.hidalgo.gob.mx/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=668&Itemid=125).

In twentieth-century Mexico, language homogeneity was often seen as a necessary requisite for a unified nation. Therefore the castilianization of indigenous language speakers was part and parcel of the bilingual education program.

### **Language and the Performance of Indigenous Identity**

**Epitacio:** Brother, don't forget that I'm a teacher and you must respect me.  
I'm no longer equal to you Indians;  
I'm a teacher now and I teach the damned kids to become civilized,  
to learn new things about our national culture;  
to read in Spanish, to speak like those "of reason." (254)

Epitacio's lines above spell out his understanding of his job description. His training has fostered an antagonistic relationship with his own identity as an Indian, as well as with the children he teaches. As a conduit of national culture that is clearly devoid of indigeneity, Epitacio's idea of progress is tantamount to de-Indianization, especially in terms of language. Today in Mexico, as in the past, indigenous languages are generally stigmatized and their use in public invites discrimination. The use of Spanish, on the other hand, is a performance of power. With this in mind, one of more striking accomplishments of *Ixtlamatinij* is Maya's representation of the linguistic reality of the Huasteca in Mexico.<sup>118</sup> The women in the play, Nichaj and Tilaj, are primarily

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<sup>118</sup> Both the Nahuatl version and the Spanish version of the play (translated by Maya from the Nahuatl) present an extraordinary example of language use and language-in-contact in the Huasteca Hidalguense that reads like a transcription of actual recorded speech. The modern Nahuatl orthography in the Veracruz Huasteca consists of a, c, ch, cu/uc, e, hu, hu/uh, I, l, m, n, o, p, qu, t, tl, tz, x, y, z (Sullivan). There are several consonants and digraphs that are not present in the Spanish language, and equally Nahuatl does not utilize some of the consonants and vowels of Spanish. I am noting this because it helps explain Maya's truly marvelous representation of Huastecan Nahuatl—a hybrid mix of Nahuatl and Spanish in contact. Throughout the text one finds the substitution of consonants that don't exist in Nahuatl (for example, *b* for the nonexistent *f*: "el banatismo" [242] and the use of *t* instead of *d*: "ofrenta" [235]), overcompensation for known errors (such as an overuse of *f* in words that really should be the *b/v*: "festido" [235]; "cerfeza" [236]), incorrect vowel pronunciation ("Tó ansina respetas tudo, tiveras bueno

monolingual (Nahuatl), and the men are bilingual to varying degrees. The level of education that indigenous girls were expected to complete and were offered, especially in the 70s and 80s, was minimal and resulted oftentimes in monolingualism (indigenous language only) in the female population. While this is changing (and dramatically), girls and women rarely left the communities in search of work and therefore had little contact with Spanish speakers.<sup>119</sup> Indigenous men have tended to have more educational opportunities and are more bilingual since they leave the communities more often. They might need to speak to officials in the municipalities to carry out pertinent business, perhaps they have hired themselves out as *peones* in a regional hacienda owned by mestizos, or maybe they have traveled to urban centers for work.<sup>120</sup> In both the Nahuatl and Spanish versions of *Ixtlamatinij*, the linguistic landscape is reflected in the mono- to limited bilingualism of the women, and more clearly bilingual speech from the men. The

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genti mi muchacho [Tú así respetas todo. De veras es buena gente mi muchacho] [272]) and new words that are adapted from heard Spanish words (i.e. *liveras* instead of *de veras* [truthfully, really]; *fiero* instead of *feo* [ugly]). Characters code-switch fluidly, and the text is also scattered with Spanish loan words that have been “nahuatized” with the “oa” suffix of Nahuatl verbs, an example being *emborracharoa*>*emborracharose* (to get drunk) [236]).

<sup>119</sup> The changing reality of Nahua women in terms of work, migration, and education has not, to my knowledge, been analyzed in detail. An analysis of this type dealing with Maya communities in Yucatan has however been carried out by M. Bianet Castellanos.

<sup>120</sup> According to Victoriano de la Cruz, a native speaker of Nahuatl and researcher at CIESAS in Mexico City, demonstrating a strong command of Spanish is a marker in his own community of being able to take care of oneself and his family (the discourse of “poder defenderse” as reported in Jacqueline Messing’s essay). Victoriano has commented that you need Spanish to be able to sell your crop, to be sure that someone doesn’t “dupe” you, and to be able to secure work outside of the community if the crop fails or is not enough to provide for the family. While visiting his family in Tepoxteco during the summer of 2008, I watched Victoriano move between Nahuatl and Spanish fluidly. Generally, his mother, grandmother, and aunts spoke to him in Nahuatl, which was to be expected as they are mostly monolingual. However, while his father, grandfather, and uncles spoke to him in both Nahuatl and Spanish, Victoriano nearly always responded in Spanish. When I asked him about this, he very matter-of-factly stated that he needed to remind his family that he was capable of taking care of himself when he left the community.



level of Spanish fluency exhibited in the men correlates directly with their level of interaction with the mestizo population, and, tellingly, their educational experience.

Nicolás and the elder men who live in the community speak either Nahuatl or a hybrid Nahuatl that suggests limited education and infrequent use of Spanish; Cirilo speaks impeccable Spanish (although prefers Nahuatl) that he learned in his military service. Epitacio, the teacher, has a tragically weak command of Spanish that contrasts sharply with the military brother's linguistic abilities. One is left to wonder: why would the Mexican government ensure that military personnel have a better education than public school teachers? Earlier I spoke of the educational system in Mexico set up in a way that ensured that Indians were *nearly* mestizo, but not quite. This is evident in the mastery (or not) of the Spanish language by the play's characters, particularly Epitacio's very limited fluency, which he will pass on to other Indians.

Beyond affording the spectator the opportunity to "read" experience and performances of social identities through language usage in this play, Maya also tells us something about the perceived cache and power status of Spanish, and how this has been internalized by Nahuas. In the context of the Huasteca and reflected in *Ixtlamatinij*, it is more the *form* (the act of speaking Spanish, the linguistic performance) than the actual accuracy of the language that matters. The use of Spanish communicates something, but it isn't necessarily the content of the words but instead a sign of superiority in the social power structure. Epitacio speaks a nearly incomprehensible Spanish riddled with grammatical errors, and it doesn't really matter. Although this reflects the poor quality of the education he was given and will therefore impart, he is a bearer of the cultural sign of

superiority. Nicolás, the brother that has stayed in the community conflates language form with intelligence: “You really are smart! What beautiful Spanish you speak!” (253); “You as a bilingual teacher, as they call you, should teach me everything you know, so I can talk just like you” (252). Maya deftly demonstrates this use of the Spanish language as *form* to demonstrate performances of power in the indigenous community.

### **Costume**

Besides a change of language, authorized versions of Indians also include a costume change. Epitacio has taken to wearing boots (although he complains that they are painful to wear), and wants his parents to wear shoes as well, insisting that this will somehow miraculously change them into mestizos. While at first glance illogical, Sandstrom reminds us that “(i)n the past, officials needed a quick measure of ‘Indianness,’ and they settled on the criterion of footwear as one distinguishing feature. People who wear shoes are mestizos; those who don’t are Indians” (*Corn is Our Blood* 65). Besides shoes, Epitacio brings a plastic bag full of clothes that he asks Nicolás to take to his parents. In the same way that the State has co-opted Epitacio to carry the message of Indian inferiority, he goes on to recruit his brother to do the dirty-work of telling their parents that they need to change:

**Nicolás:** [...] Papá, and you, mamá, put on what I’ve brought you, because my brother Pitacio doesn’t want to see you looking like Indians; that Indian clothing you wear is really ugly. You know that our Pitacio is a bilingual teacher, and it

embarrasses him for you to go around barefoot and wearing breeches. So he says you should change into this nice pair of pants, this dress, and these shoes. Then, when our Cirilo arrives, you'll look like a lawyer and you'll look like a schoolteacher" (251).

Epitacio's conflation of a certain kind of dress with "civilization" is reminiscent of Chiapas Governor Vistórico Grajales 1930s "Campaign to Civilize through Dress," a policy that forbade indigenous languages and burned traditional clothing in the name of civilization (Hernández-Castillo 91). The logic of Epitacio's arguments (when we quit wearing these clothes we'll be different) reflects the preparation that the bilingual teacher program offered its recruits, but Epitacio's internalization of this message is the result of the colonial condition. On the receiving end of a message about Indian backwardness and inferiority for centuries, the self-hatred that Maya spoke of in his introduction has become naturalized for Epitacio. But not all Indians have learned to view their own culture negatively. In fact Nichaj, upon appraisal of the contents of the bag, is disappointed that her son wants her to dress in a fashion that she considers unpalatable: "He wants me to dress like a mestizo woman, as ugly as they look. These no-good stockings just tickle my legs" (256). Cirilo, one of the brothers, is not impressed either.

Cirilo arrives to find his parents uncomfortably costumed in Western clothing, and wonders aloud if they will be "playing" non-indigenous people in the "Cuanegros" dance. He sees his own parents' traditional clothing as "better and much prettier" (256). He demonstrates his solidarity with the indigenous community's traditional ways by stating that he wants to look like his parents and will wear the traditional *cotón* shirt for his visit.

He leaves briefly to go visit other community members, at which time Eпитacio arrives home, drunk. Juantsi disapproves of the change clothing, telling the family “[t]hat guy ‘of reason’ is really making fools of you; he doesn’t respect you. Now you’re going to go around limping like turkeys [in the shoes]. My poor grandson, he wants to turn you into a lawyer, and you into a schoolteacher. This is really serious; he’s gone overboard” (256). When Eпитacio arrives and demands that everyone put on the clothes, Juantsi calls a halt to the process, saying: “[b]ut wait a minute, that’s how we dress; we Indians always dress that way” (257). The tension builds as Eпитacio breaks with prescribed Nahua social behavior that insists upon respect for all elders:

**Eпитacio:** You shut up, old man! There’s no hope for you, grandfather, you’re worn out, you’re worthless now, you bastard. But these sons of bitches are my parents and I’m not going to let them go on like backward Indians. They have to better themselves; they have to give up their damned breeches and skirts and dress like people of reason, put on shoes, and speak Spanish [...] You must change; you must dress like people of reason and quit going around like a couple of Indians if you want me to respect you and call you parents (257).

Cirilo returns home to witness Eпитacio’s threat, and the brothers begin to argue:

**Cirilo:** All I know is that this isn’t the way to better our parents—by changing them, making them put on someone else’s clothes, making them speak a language that’s not

theirs and pressuring them with the threat of disowning them; that's not the proper way to treat our parents. You're showing a huge lack of respect toward them

In this brief exchange one witnesses two very different versions of what is considered appropriate behavior. If Epitacio stands for the State, Cirilo, although a military-man, stands for traditional Nahua culture. This is especially true in their deployment of the concept of "respect." Throughout the play Epitacio demands respect based on what he perceives to be his higher class position as a teacher and representative of mestizo culture. He conceives of commanding the respect of other community members by being "better than" others, codified in outward appearance and money. On the other hand, Cirilo discusses respect in terms of (again, culturally dictated) deference to elders and adherence to traditional Nahua cultural ways. The argument escalates:

**Cirilo:** Are you crazy? Look, I want you to know that I feel very proud of having been born to them, and that they still wear the same clothing and speak our grandparents' tongue. I also want you to know that I don't like what you're trying to do to them at all; it's stupid, it's crazy. You're either an idiot or you're just plain crazy, humiliating and mistreating our parents like this (258)

**Epitacio:** I'm not an idiot; I'm a teacher who teaches Indians in order to pull them out of their backwardness and open their eyes so they don't continue in their

ignorance and fanaticism. I'm here to civilize them. And you know that if anyone is respectful and knows something, it's me. (258)

At this point Eпитacio draws his knife and lunges toward his brother. Nichaj attempts to stop the fight and Eпитacio accidentally cuts his mother, symbolizing the violence (epistemological and physical) that these discourses and practices can cause on the ground level. The local police are called to take Eпитacio away until he sobers up and the community authorities can decide what to do with this turn of events. By morning he has had time to reflect on what has transpired and is ashamed and repentant. Maya, as we may recall, disapproves of the consumption of alcohol and is highly critical of its negative effects in indigenous communities. This particular scene of Eпитacio's drunken madness and extreme remorse provides a platform for discussion of alcohol use in the community.

Before Eпитacio is returned to his family home by the local authorities, Cirilo gathers the family together and asks that the family forgive and forget what happened the night before:

**Cirilo:** [...] I want to ask a favor: I would like for all of us to forget what happened last Friday. Please. May my brother Pitacio not feel guilty or ashamed of what happened, for the good of all; that is, if he's as sorry as he says he is, and recognizes that what he tried to do was wrong, let's give him the chance to feel at ease. Let's make him feel good so we can be together again as we were before (262)

Through Cirilo, Nahua families are asked to not let this experience completely destroy their communities. Indeed, for the sake of the integrity of the family and the community, at times one must forget instead of remember.

Epitacio returns to the family home on his knees, wearing his traditional *cotón* shirt and begs forgiveness in Nahuatl. His Nahua dress and language are symbolic of his return to the indigenous community. Balance in the family is restored as the errant son returns to traditional ways, and the play concludes with the united family continuing the *Xantolo* ceremony. Although the family claims that “all is forgotten,” every time the arc is erected to welcome home the living and the dead, this story will be remembered. Epitacio’s family will remember that particular year at *Xantolo* when their binds were nearly broken, yet in the end solidified. Memory, while strategically selective, is also pernicious.

### **The Performance after the Performance**

*Ixtlamatinij* has been performed dozens of times in Veracruz and Hidalgo Huastecan municipalities and smaller outlying indigenous communities for mestizo, indigenous, and mixed audiences. Generally, the actors have been both secondary school children and community members without professional training, and occasionally semi-professional actors. If the participants have been paid, it has generally been in foodstuff or other items needed by the community. Over the years, Maya has recruited both native speakers of Nahuatl and non-native speakers to perform in both Nahuatl and Spanish. Some of the non-native speaker actors, as Adam Versenyi reports, have been encouraged by their

participation in the play to return to a Nahuatl linguistic proficiency that was lost to them. By performing in Nahuatl, the student-actors “become capable of crossing the cultural boundaries erected to cut them off from their heritage” (446). Thus, participation in and of itself is a resistive or recuperative move orchestrated by *el profesor*. Versényi tells of his experience attending a staging of the play in 2005, and the striking performance that came afterwards:

After the play concluded, the school’s vice-principal introduced each of the twenty by name, delivering a brief description of our titles and backgrounds. Each of us was then invited up to the podium to give commentary or critique upon the work we had just seen. It quickly became clear that, with exception of Don [Frischmann] and myself, everyone else so honored was a former student of Maya. Each person now held a position of importance at either the municipal, state, or national level in areas ranging from politics to labor to culture. Each person who spoke had, as a child, acted in one of Maya’s plays or performed traditional dances he had been taught by Maya, and all of them credited Maya for inspiring their pride in traditional Huasteca cultural forms and for providing them with the self-confidence and dignity necessary to have achieved their current positions. By their very presence, these men and women belied the path taken by those described in Maya’s introduction to the play more than anything present in *Ixtlamatinij* itself (445).



The staging of these plays and the discussion after the performances are very public displays of indigenous survival and rejection of the forces of assimilation, demonstrating that it isn't necessary to give up one's own identity to survive and prosper. In fact, recourse to their own traditions, via their participation in Maya's productions, has provided the personal motivation and strength for many to successfully maintain their own culture while participating actively in dominant culture as well. In my readings of the play with five native speakers in focus groups, this was precisely what the participants discussed after the play. They had seen these same scenes played out in their own communities, and frankly they were tired of it. What they wanted to see on the stage was what happened *after* Epitacio returned home, in his *cotón*, speaking his language. What did he do with this new-found knowledge? What happened in the school room after the *Xantolo* celebration was over? Did Epitacio continue to honor his own culture in the face of constant discrimination? These, after all, are the very questions which that these young Nahua intellectuals are grappling with on a daily basis. What this sequel looks like is up to them, and just as Maya hoped, the reading of this play has given them food for thought.

I close this chapter by noting that *Ixtlamatinij* could be summed up by a few of the choice words and phrases from Maya's introduction: *Ashamed. Forgotten. Ignorance. Learn to Read and Write in School. We No Longer Have Respect for Anything. We Transform Ourselves into Violent Individuals.* If his lament is clear in the introduction, the path to cultural recovery is also evident at the end of the play, as well as this "performance after the performance": *Pride. Remembered. Knowledge. Learn to Know at*

*Home. Respect Everything. Be Who We Really Are, Indians.* It is only after this painful experience that this family, particularly Epitacio, learns this. But that is the way to wisdom in Nahua culture, since to be a “learned one,” an intellectual, implies knowledge acquired through personal experience.

## **Conclusion**

In this dissertation I have attempted to reframe a variety of Nahuatl-authored texts over a broad temporal plane as examples of Nahuatl post-conquest intellectual engagement. One of my goals was to assert a trajectory that did not relegate indigenous intellectual production strictly to the realm of the oral. While not privileging the written word over oral traditions, or embodied knowledges and other indigenous ways of knowing, my aim was to provide examples of how Nahuas have continually availed themselves of the technology of alphabetic writing, arguing that it should be taken into consideration as an important, yet often overlooked, branch of post-conquest Nahuatl intellectual work. Additionally I attempted to highlight, as in the case of Nahuatl priest and grammarian Antonio del Rincón, that as opposed to being passive receivers of an imposed European technology, Nahuas appropriated and adapted alphabetic writing for their own purposes.

Historical and ethnographic studies have made great headway in research on other Nahuatl intellectuals from the Colonial period. Of the latter one might mention Tlatelolco alumnus don Antonio Valeriano, annalists such as Chimalpahin, don Hernando de Alvarado Tezozomoc, Juan Buenaventura de Zapata, Diego Muñoz-Camargo and Juan Baustista Pomar, and the brothers de Alva-Ixtlilxochitl, Fernando and Bartolomé, all representative of this written branch of Colonial period Nahuatl intellectual work. Adding

Antonio del Rincón to these ranks offers a new dimension to the profile of the Colonial period Nahua intellectual.

I have also suggested the criteria for inclusion in this narrative should not be solely tied to the individual working in his/her native language. As I argued in Chapter Two, while writing in the Nahuatl language certainly diminished during the nineteenth century, Nahua intellectuals such as Faustino Chimalpopoca forged ahead, oftentimes in the Spanish language, as well as Nahuatl, Latin, and Otomí. Working in several languages, including the language of the colonizer, did not inhibit Chimalpopoca from advocating in favor of indigenous rights and promoting the value of the Nahuatl language. Opening to the possibility that Nahuas worked as indigenous intellectuals in Spanish reveals a relatively untapped source for further research on Nahua intellectuals. For example, one might consider the career and writings of Juan Rodríguez-Puebla, childhood classmate of Chimalpopoca, rector of San Gregorio, and author of a series of newspaper pamphlets in Spanish entitled “El indio constitucional.” As much a liberal as Chimalpopoca was conservative, Rodríguez-Puebla’s writings show yet another side of Nahua intellectualism.

Tracing the contours of this tradition has provided a deeper look at previously neglected or undervalued Nahua figures whose work and personal experience can be reconnected to Mexican cultural history, more accurately reflecting the cultural makeup of the nation. For example, the national narrative of the Mexican Revolution is enriched by the perspective of Doña Luz Jiménez, providing an indigenous-language testimonial of these tumultuous years. Closer attention to Luz’s work promises to expand our

understanding the Revolution, and gives insight into topics such as whether or not the revolutionary Emiliano Zapata spoke the Nahuatl language (Dávila), and how indigenous people participated in Zapata's ranks. Furthermore, Luz's stories highlight the human dimension of high-level public policy with her retellings of her educational experience. These narratives also connect Mexican indigenous experience to other indigenous peoples around the world who share a similar history of assimilative education. Reading Luz Jiménez has also pointed to other Nahua intellectuals in her circle. Translations and analysis of the short-lived Nahuatl newspaper in which Luz published several essays, *Mexicahtl Itonalama*, have yet to be carried out, and a closer look at Miguel Barrios-Espinosa, co-editor of the paper, is sure to offer new insight as to Nahua intellectual work during the first half of the twentieth century.

As the saying goes, "nadie es profeta en su tierra" (No one is a prophet in his own land). A pioneer in the indigenous literary renaissance, and one of the founding members of ELIAC (Escritores en Lenguas Indígenas A.C.), Ildefonso Maya-Hernández has received little critical attention. With an uncanny ability to capture and portray the legacy of colonialism and colonality as it has played out in the Huasteca Hidalguense, and an extraordinary sensitivity to the linguistic reality of this area, Maya's work promises to be a rich source for anyone interested in issues of Mexican indigeneity, agrarian struggles, or languages in contact. The fact that the play treated in this dissertation, *Ixtlamatinij*, is but one text in a very large corpus that includes paintings, plays, short stories, and codexes promises a rich vein for future research.

Maya-Hernández' stories belong to the national consciousness of Mexico, as well as to Nahua communities today. Part of my project has been to share these texts with native speakers of Nahuatl. I purposefully have not included every detail of these exchanges, for much like the experience of Fred Murdock in Jorge Luis Borges' short story "El etnógrafo," it was the process of sharing these texts that was important, not necessarily that which was divulged: In agreement with Borges' character Fred, "el secreto, por lo demás, no vale lo que valen los caminos que me condujeron a él. Esos caminos hay que andarlos" (The secret, in other words, is worth less than the path that led me to the secret. These paths, they must be traveled).

As I mentioned in the introduction, I did not specifically choose these protagonists to demonstrate diversity within this particular ethno-linguistic group. However, their respective life stories, the issues they concerned themselves with, and the genres they employed to express themselves all point to the heterogeneous nature of Nahua interests and intellectual activities. If one were to ask what it has meant to be Indian in post-conquest Mexico, their accounts defy stereotypes: it has meant being royal and impoverished, living in the city and the countryside, working in politics, being a priest, a teacher, a model, and a theater director. It has meant collaborating with grammarians, collectors of antiquities, academics, artists, rebels, and politicians. It has meant being a conservative Catholic, practicing indigenous customs from long before the Spaniards arrived, and melding the two together. It has meant knowing how to read the intricacies of law, and those of the natural world. Nahua experience over the centuries, as read in these pages, disrupts any notion of Indians in Mexico as a monolithic or singular entity.

The heterogeneous nature of Nahua intellectual experience does not mean, however, that these intellectuals do not display commonalities. In the texts and personal trajectories treated in this project, one witnesses the continued presence of colonial structures and relationships of inequality long after the end of the Colonial period. As evident in these writings, being Indian in post-conquest Mexico has consistently meant being socially, politically, and economically marginalized. Yet the example of these intellectuals show how challenging social environments were met with creativity and ingenuity; they show that Indians were not exactly vanquished on an intellectual level.

What were the factors that led to the continuity of Nahua intellectual work in the face of discrimination and oppression of indigenous knowledge? None of these protagonists had especially unique educational opportunities or upbringing that separated them from other Nahuas. In some cases, such as those of Rincón and Chimalpopoca, their hereditary rights and obligations as nobility perhaps played a small part in shepherding them toward intellectual work. A life of relative privilege along with an education that included regular contact with their native language and cultural patrimony (recall San Gregorio's extraordinary library) surely inspired these kinds of interests. However, Antonio del Rincón was not the only Nahua in that first group of Jesuit recruits, and Chimalpopoca was only one of many at El Colegio de San Gregorio. On the other end of the spectrum in terms of wealth and privilege, Doña Luz attended the same rural school as scores of other milpalteña children. For his part, Ildefonso Maya's bilingual teacher training placed him with a cohort of other indigenous students that had similar backgrounds, yet few if any had the kind of intellectual career that Maya did. These observations speak to the fact that

just like gifted musicians, artists, mathematicians, and the like, these Nahua intellectuals also had innate skills and interests that predisposed them to this line of work. While it is perhaps impossible to create gifted individuals with a genuine interest in the life of the mind, these talents can be drawn out and cultivated. What then, were the objective factors in their personal trajectories that led them to, or allowed for, their vocation as intellectuals?

It was not necessarily the length, type, or general quality of education that made possible Nahua intellectual work. Rincón's education was in a highly formal religious setting where knowledge of the indigenous language was at a premium. Chimalpopoca benefited from an elite education at San Gregorio, but to be fair, the school was not at its height during that time, and Nahuatl Studies were quite peripheral. Luz Jiménez's brief formal education focused on indoctrinating Indians to Euro-mestizo cultural habits and included overt elimination of the indigenous language. Ildefonso Maya's education ranged from a small rural school, the seminary, *Bellas Artes* in Mexico City, undergraduate studies at the University of Washington in the United States, and bilingual teacher training with the DGEI. While their educational experiences were varied, what all of these intellectuals share is extended exposure to their native language and culture in an environment that conceived of these in a positive light. Since Rincón and Chimalpopoca lived in Mexico City there was a much higher rate of contact with Euro-mestizo culture and the privileging of non-Indian knowledges and ways of being. However they both enjoyed a high level of contact with their own cultural patrimony at the institutional level, and were immersed in indigenist sub-cultures. The priests of Rincón's time were



fascinated by the complexities of the language, and the Emperor Maximilian himself fawned over Chimalpopoca. Unlike Rincón and Chimalpopoca, Luz and Maya's formative years were in rural settings with substantially less contact with the mestizo world. The bulk of their exposure to their own culture's knowledge, therefore, came from lived experience in their communities. Yet Luz was later the center of a large group of artists and anthropologists that hung on her every word, and Maya was to meet and work regularly with other bilingual teachers and non-Indian *indigenistas* with whom he could discuss his concerns for the communities he worked in. All of these intellectuals benefited from their inherent abilities, exposure and access to their own cultural patrimony (textual and oral), and extended contact with others (indigenous and non-indigenous) that valued their language and culture. But crucial to this combination is that each intellectual was able to, for the most part, earn a living through work in his/her own language and culture. Oftentimes today one hears from Nahuas that they must leave behind their language and culture to "get ahead" (Messing). Getting ahead in these cases means escaping poverty. In Mexico today the hierarchical political, economic, and social structures are situated in a manner that indigenous languages and culture are often impediments to economic survival. Financially rewarding work in and on indigenous cultures in Mexico is for the most part unheard of, with only rare exceptions such as the case of IDIEZ where Nahua researchers earn stipends and scholarships. It is bittersweet commentary that one colleague at IDIEZ said to me that he could not imagine many other places in the nation where "mi lengua me daría de comer" (my language could feed me [provide me with a living]).

Reading the experiences of Rincón, Chimalpopoca, Luz, and Maya, it seems that besides the subjective factor of individual talent and inclination, the combination of three objective factors has been, and will continue to be, crucial in the development of the Nahua intellectual tradition:

**1. Extended exposure to native language and culture in an environment that promotes and values these knowledges.** As migration away from rural indigenous communities escalates, it will be increasingly important to bolster institutional support of indigenous language and culture to combat widespread discrimination, particularly in urban settings.<sup>121</sup> The impact of global movements in support of indigenous people, such as the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, is yet to be determined.<sup>122</sup> The same holds true for legal measures at the national level. For example, the 2003 passage of the *Ley General de Derechos Lingüísticos de los Pueblos Indígenas*<sup>123</sup> included legislation specifically recognizing and promoting the pluricultural and multilingual makeup of Mexico, and mandated the creation of INALI (Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas) to support the directives outlined in this law. Specifically, INALI has been charged with promoting the revitalization, preservation, and development of indigenous languages; improving the general public's knowledge of

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<sup>121</sup> Almandina Cárdenas-Demay's *Ideología y poder en la minorización de las lenguas indígenas* offers a compelling outline of how ideological change at the institutional level, in the case of her study the federal government, is crucial in creating a shift in public opinion in regards to indigenous languages and customs.

<sup>122</sup> Full text of the Declaration in English, Spanish, and Nahuatl (among other languages) can be found at [www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/declaration.html](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/declaration.html).

<sup>123</sup> Full text of the *Ley General de Derechos Lingüísticos de los Pueblos Indígenas* at [www.cddhcu.gob.mx/LeyesBiblio/pdf/257.pdf](http://www.cddhcu.gob.mx/LeyesBiblio/pdf/257.pdf).

indigenous cultures and languages; and assisting with the implementation of public policy at the federal, state, and local levels.<sup>124</sup> A future study that analyzes the impact of these global and national directives by taking into consideration local-level practice and indigenous experience, promises a clearer picture of the results of efforts.

## **2. Access to a collaborative intellectual community, indigenous or non-indigenous.**

Nahua intellectual activity over the centuries has flourished in group settings. Whereas all of the intellectuals in this study availed themselves of at least a general education, it appears that educational level or even ideological slant (promoting or eliminating indigenous culture) of the education was not the most important factor.<sup>125</sup> It was instead the fact that they were surrounded by others either like themselves (Nahua intellectuals), or highly interested parties such as priests, politicians, non-Indian academics, and other government officials. These group collaborations often stemmed from or were solidified at organized institutional settings. With this in mind, future research should look more closely at institutions such as the Colonial period schools, nineteenth-century literary circles and academic associations, and early twentieth-century government programs such as *La Casa del Estudiante Indígena*: it is within these institutional spheres that many Nahua intellectuals will show themselves. Regarding Nahua intellectual activity in the present day, one might consider CIESAS in Mexico City whose program in Indoamerican

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<sup>124</sup> INALI: [www.inali.gob.mx](http://www.inali.gob.mx).

<sup>125</sup> I do not mean to imply that the (pro- or anti-indigenous) ideology of the institution is inconsequential. However, vigorous assimilative practices have the potential to spark heated intellectual responses equal to, or even greater than, those that promote and protect indigenous knowledge. For example, further research on the members of the so-called indigenous literary renaissance may give insight to this phenomenon. The majority of these writers suffered extraordinarily hostile educational experiences and later became some of the system's more vocal critics.

Linguistics attracts native speakers of a wide variety of Mexican indigenous language, and IDIEZ in Zacatecas. One Nahuatl affiliate of IDIEZ, Eliazar Hernández, has gone on to work for INALI. As a bilingual attorney, he has worked on translating Mexican laws into the Nahuatl language (incidentally, his is the voice of the Nahuatl recording of the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People). Victoriano de la Cruz, another IDIEZ intellectual, completed a Master's degree at CIESAS has taught seminars at the University of California at Berkeley. A comparative study of projects at CIESAS and IDIEZ would give insight not only into the institutional profiles, but also to the variety of Nahuatl intellectual work being carried out today.

**3. Increased professionalization opportunities, financial remuneration.** While some might whimsically follow their dreams regardless of whether they will earn a living or not, like most Mexican citizens, Nahuas have day-to-day expenses and obligations that need to be attended to. However, viable employment in his/her own language and culture is limited. One possible solution to this problem is to hold the 2003 *Ley General de Derechos Lingüísticos* to its word. Article Seven of the law promises that “las lenguas indígenas serán válidas, al igual que el español, para cualquier asunto o trámite de carácter público, así como para acceder plenamente a la gestión, servicios e información pública” (indigenous languages will be valid, in the same manner as Spanish, for any matter or proceeding of a public nature, in order [for the citizen] to have complete access to the formalities and services of public information). Along these same lines, Article Ten guarantees the right to legal representation and courtroom proceedings in the indigenous

language. However, what appears to be an excellent idea has been relatively impossible to put into practice since monolingual mestizos (Spanish only) tend to dominate social service positions, and attorneys and judges who are fluent in one of Mexico's sixty-eight languages or 364 regional variations are a rarity. The creation of positions that insisted on bilingualism as a condition of public service in predominantly indigenous areas would perhaps be a start. Program design to support and encourage education for indigenous students in preparation for these bilingual positions in local, state, and federal government, or in the field of law, would be one manner of increasing professional opportunities for Nahuas in their language. Such programs and curriculum would require the integration of Nahuatl language and culture at the level of higher education, a substantial shift of educational ideology and infrastructure. For example, in 1999 Inés Hernández-Ávila and Stefano Varese stated that "there is no single academic department or institute of higher education throughout Latin America that is dedicated to indigenous studies. There are a handful of courses, a few language 'academies' and seminars, but otherwise a vast desert of disregard for indigenous intellectuality" (85). Ten years later it appears that such is still the case. If Mexican universities were to rescind their long-standing policy of Spanish as the language of the academy, this shift would also create employment opportunities for a Nahuas as teachers and scholars. An added benefit would also be that native people might begin to see themselves in the curriculum (as opposed to feeling alienated by their education), while the perceived status of indigenous languages and culture—worthy of university-level study—would increase.

In the previous pages I have offered but a glimpse into the rich and varied trajectory of the Nahua intellectual tradition over the past five centuries, suggesting the kinds of protagonists and intellectual works that might be considered a part of this narrative. Reestablishing a comprehensive trajectory of a post-conquest Nahua intellectual tradition implies an ambitious transhistorical and multi-disciplinary undertaking that has only just begun. My hope is that this study will be considered a worthy contribution to that project.

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