Politicizing the Past: Nahua Historiography Under Spanish Rule

by

Donghoon Lee

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Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Daniel Nemser, Chair
Professor Enrique García Santo-Tomás
Professor Kenneth Mills
Associate Professor Gustavo Verdesio

Donghoon Lee

dhoonlee@umich.edu

ORCID iD: 0009-0002-4614-1565

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Abstract

My dissertation, *Politicizing the Past: Nahua Historiography Under Spanish Rule*, investigates how Nahua historians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as political thinkers, conceptualized war and conquest as foundational acts of violence through which new orders of power and law are constituted. They did so by reinterpreting these constitutive events of pre-Hispanic political life outside of, and often in tension with, the normative frameworks invoked by Spaniards to legitimize colonial rule. To date, scholars have largely treated these works of Indigenous knowledge production as tools for negotiating personal or communal interests with colonial authorities or as instances of acculturation to European literary forms. In doing so, they tend to reduce the meaning of the texts to biography—filtering them through factors such as the social position of the authors—or to the presence or absence of "traditional" and "foreign" cultural elements. These approaches, however, obscure the radical potential for alternative forms of political theorization at the core of Nahua historical writing, which, I argue, explores fundamental categories such as sovereignty, law, property, and the justice of war in dialogue with contemporaneous Spanish chroniclers and scholastics. One reason this dimension has received so little attention is that the colonial disruption of Indigenous traditions has obscured lines of continuity that might otherwise link their intellectual legacy to present-day conceptual frameworks. In response, I develop a comparative approach that stages a three-way dialogue among Nahua and Spanish authors and the pictorial and alphabetic sources on which they both drew. By examining how Indigenous writers engaged with European political ideas

that remain central to modern thought as they reimagined the pre-Hispanic past, I read these texts as contributions that challenge and expand our own theoretical foundations.

I begin by showing how Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl's *Historia de la nación chichimeca*, written in the first half of the seventeenth century, constructs a "parallel history" in the pre-Hispanic past—one centered on the occupation and distribution of conquered territories—to dismantle moral and legal justifications for the Spanish conquest of Mexico and the dispossession of Indigenous land beyond the brute fact of military subjugation. Next, I turn to Hernando de Alvarado Tezozomoc's *Crónica mexicáyotl* (1609), which challenges colonial narratives that condemn the Mexica empire for its religious practices while idealizing its political and military excellence as mirroring that of the Spanish Empire. By emphasizing the excess of force at the foundation of the Mexica empire, Alvarado Tezozomoc refuses any romanticized identification with it and reveals that the Spanish Empire was likewise established through sheer violence, collapsing the distinction that frames one empire as more legitimate than the other. Finally, I argue that Cristóbal del Castillo's *Historia de la venida de los mexicanos y de otros pueblos* (1600) poses the question of whether war can be just in the absence of prior injury. Unlike his contemporary Spanish just war theorists, Francisco de Vitoria and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, who cast the conquered as transgressors of a universal law and deserving of retribution, del Castillo offers an alternative ideological construction in which violence appears not as a means of enforcing an existing normative order but as the generative force through which a new imperial order comes into being. Collectively, these authors expose how legitimacy does not precede violence but is produced by it, as the exercise of force founds a social order that retrospectively naturalizes its own normative frameworks.

Introduction

Diego Muñoz Camargo, a historian of mixed descent born to an unidentified Indigenous woman and a Spanish conqueror,[1] wrote the *Historia de Tlaxcala* between 1576 and 1595 as a revised version of the draft for his other work, the *Descripción de la ciudad y provincia de Tlaxcala*, which had been presented to King Philip II of Spain in 1584–1585 (Miller 41). Between Chapters 12 and 13 of the *Historia*, Muñoz Camargo offers a Tlaxcalan version of the origin of the enmity between the two pre-Hispanic polities of Mexico-Tenochtitlan and Tlaxcala. As the Mexica of Tenochtitlan encroached on Tlaxcalan territory, alliances, and trade networks, the inhabitants of Tlaxcala—the Tlaxcalteca—sent emissaries to ask on what grounds war was being waged against them, noting that they had committed no offense to justify such hostility. The Mexica replied:

> The great lord of Mexico was the universal lord of the entire world; that all who were born were his vassals; that he had to subdue all so that they might recognize him as lord; and that those who did not do so willingly and render him obedience would be destroyed, their cities razed to the foundations and repopulated with new peoples. [Que el gran Señor de México era Señor Universal de todo el Mundo, que todos los nacidos eran sus vasallos, que á todos los había de reducir para que le reconociesen por Señor, y que á los que no lo hiciesen por bien y dalle la obediencia, los había de destruir, asolar sus ciudades hasta los cimientos y poblarlas de nuevas gentes.] (109).[2]

[1] For a brief sketch of the activities of Muñoz Camargo's father, Diego Muñoz, following his arrival in Mexico in 1524, see Gibson, "The Identity" 198–199.

[2] All translations of Spanish quotations in the introduction are my own.

The Tlaxcalteca rejected this claim to universal lordship, asserting that they had "never recognized any king or prince of the world through tribute or taxation, for the Tlaxcalteca have always preserved their freedom" [jamás reconocieron con tributo ni pecho á ningún Rey ni Príncipe del Mundo, porque siempre los Tlaxcaltecas han conservado su libertad], declaring their resolve to die rather than obey (110). In the years that followed this exchange, the Mexica subjected Tlaxcala to a protracted siege that lasted more than sixty years and intensified into full-scale offensives along the entire frontier for eighteen years by the time the Spaniards entered the region.

According to Hernán Cortés's second *carta de relación* to Charles V, the Tlaxcalteca initially attempted to repel these new invaders by force, just as they had resisted the Mexica; yet after a series of defeats, they finally surrendered. Before one engagement, the *Requerimiento* was read aloud through an interpreter and in the presence of a notary. Drafted by Juan López de Palacios Rubios, a jurist of the Royal Council, this document was intended to be proclaimed to Indigenous communities before the outbreak of hostilities (Kamen 97). Its message was as follows: God created all human beings and endowed Saint Peter and his successors with supreme authority to govern and judge them. The pope therefore holds jurisdiction not only over Christians but over all peoples of the world. One pontiff granted the islands and mainland across the Atlantic to the Spanish crown—a reference to the bulls of donation issued by Alexander VI in 1493. Those who lived there were thus obliged to acknowledge its sovereignty and to allow the preaching of Christianity. Should they refuse, they would be deemed traitors, war could be waged against them, and they would forfeit their possessions and be enslaved.[3] The authority of

[3] For the Spanish text of the *Requerimiento*, see Morales Padrón 338–340; for an English translation, see Hanke 26–28.

this document, however, soon came under criticism in Spain. Above all, its foundational premise—that the pope possessed secular dominion over non-Christians and could distribute that dominion to other rulers—was repudiated by the Dominican Francisco de Vitoria at the University of Salamanca in the 1530s. Following his intervention, the *Requerimiento* ceased to be regarded as a legitimate title for the conquest of Indigenous peoples.

Consider the parallel between the logic of the *Requerimiento* and Muñoz Camargo's account of the response the Mexica gave the Tlaxcalteca to justify the waging of war that they themselves initiated. In both logics, a supreme ruler to whom all human beings are born as subjects is presupposed. The liberty and property the conquered had enjoyed as their own are recast as having always belonged to the sovereign of the conquerors. Refusal of obedience is thus framed as a usurpation of what was never theirs, and therefore as a punishable offense. This framework collapses what *is* with what *ought to be*: the two are not identical, for to say something ought to be implies that it is not yet so. What unites them is the exercise of force by which an imperative of obligation is put into effect. For the conquered, the authority of the conquerors over them—becoming their lived reality through conquest—is retrospectively accepted not only as actual but also as rightful. They are punished for violating a law that had always existed and that should have been obeyed even before the punishment made it so. This ex post facto naturalization of what *is* and what *ought to be* conceals the fact that both arise from a prior act of forcible imposition. In other words, it is not that objective reality and rightful obligation are established first, with violence then deployed to maintain them; rather, violence precedes and establishes both.

Interestingly, Muñoz Camargo does not mention the delivery of the *Requerimiento*. According to his account of the conquest in the *Historia*, Cortés instead expresses the rationales

for his expedition in a letter to the Tlaxcalan rulers and through dialogue during their first encounters; but nowhere is conquest justified by appeal to a title to dominion of the universe residing in a single sovereign. Yet by reading together the episodes just discussed in the *Historia* and in Cortés's second *carta de relación*—where Tlaxcala confronted two different conquering swords—one may infer that Muñoz Camargo would have regarded the *Requerimiento* critically. His critique, however, does not resemble Vitoria's, which dismantled its underlying premises. Rather, it counters them by setting forth a different line of reasoning. This alternative can be expressed as follows: you claim that we are born already subject to your jurisdiction simply by being in this world; we, however, have never recognized such authority, and thus you are wrong. In other words, the deductive reasoning from the assumption of a universal sovereignty is opposed by inductive reasoning from a historical experience of autonomy. Taking the comparison further, one perceives that the only difference between the Mexica and the Spaniards—or, more specifically, the reason Tlaxcala remained independent of one but submitted to the other—is that the former failed to overcome them by force, whereas the latter succeeded.

This example illustrates the central argument of this dissertation: that Nahua historiography, even while treating the distant past, participates in some of most significant political debates of its colonial present. That narratives of events serve not only to convey historical truth but also to advance arguments and persuade audiences—and that this latter purpose often subordinates the former to its own ends—is hardly a new insight in the study of colonial literature and discourse. In *The Polemics of Possession in Spanish American Narrative* (2007), Rolena Adorno argues that early colonial writings above all debated the legitimacy of conquest and the treatment of Indigenous peoples with "the objective of influencing readers'

perceptions, royal policies, and social practices" (4). As Adorno further observes, at the core of these writings, even when they do not belong strictly to the genre of historiography, narrative serves as their "essential mode," and telling a story is simultaneously an act of providing evidence for a claim (8). Consequently, when analyzing such narratives, the focus should not rest on their historical accuracy but rather on identifying the positions their authors adopt within those debates and understanding their components as deliberately situated within a larger strategic framework. Building on this recognition of the polemical nature of historical writing, I propose the following extension: while Nahua historians did not deny the legality of conquest—in the sense that it was as much a legal as a historical fact that produced differential rights for conquerors and conquered—they nonetheless confronted the normative Spanish discourses through which the domination and dispossession of Indigenous peoples were justified.

When I speak of colonial Nahua historiography, I am of course referring to a subset of the written knowledge and narratives of past events produced during the period. The first task, then, is to define the scope of the term Nahua as a descriptor. As James Lockhart notes, "The southernmost major branch of the Uto-Aztecan family is Nahuatl, which by the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was the language of the majority of the people living in the core regions of central Mexico" (1). Centered in the Basin (or Valley) of Mexico and its adjacent areas, this Nahuatl-speaking people, or the Nahuas, established numerous political units, or *altepetl*, whose scale resembled that of classical Mediterranean city-states. Each *altepetl* had its own sovereign or semi-sovereign ruler and a distinct ethnic identity grounded in ancestral memories of originating from a distant homeland and of having arrived at their present territory as a migrating group. Yet the relationship between ethnicity and *altepetl* became increasingly complex over time. Groups sharing a common origin could diverge into multiple *altepetl* that allied with or

rivaled one another—as in the case of Tlaxcala, a confederation of four *altepetl*, or the twin *altepetl* of the Mexica, Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco. Conversely, groups of different origins might coalesce into a single *altepetl* or into a conglomeration of several *altepetl*, as occurred in Tetzcoco and Chalco.[4] The Mexica of Tenochtitlan subjugated those of Tlatelolco and, through an alliance with two other regional capitals, Tetzcoco and Tlacopan, created a larger political formation commonly called the Aztec Empire.

Each *altepetl* had its own historical tradition, and some of these traditions survived long after the conquest—or, more precisely, survived only in forms refashioned or translated to fit colonial circumstances—whether in pictorial or alphabetic documents, written in Nahuatl or in Spanish. With the exception of a small number of works produced by Spaniards, virtually all of these compositions from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were penned by those of Indigenous ancestry, mixed or not. I use the term Nahua inclusively to denote this complement of a set: all documented historical narratives produced within one or more *altepetl* traditions, excluding those authored by Spaniards. This categorization is analytically meaningful insofar as the writers grouped under it, when contrasted with their Spanish counterparts, display certain shared perspectives or dispositions, and demonstrating this is one of the aims of this dissertation. In this respect, the question of how culturally or racially Indigenous or European a Nahua historian was—the matter of authenticity, a thematic preoccupation that has dominated earlier scholarship, especially in studies of mestizo authors who wrote in Spanish, such as Muñoz Camargo—does not constitute a line of inquiry relevant to the present study.[5] This scholarship

[4] For a detailed discussion of political entities larger than a simple *altepetl*, namely "complex altepetl," see Lockhart 20–26.

[5] Muñoz Camargo exemplifies how central the issue of identity has been in scholarly discussions of colonial writers of Indigenous descent; for a recent overview of such debates in his case, see Espericueta 201.

has treated the language, expressive forms, and cultural categories employed in a text, as well as the social position and ethnic affiliation of its author, as critical criteria for addressing questions of identity.

Rather than delimiting the corpus of Nahua historiography according to such criteria, I define it as broadly as possible. Within this corpus, some source–derivative relationships can be firmly established, while others remain more speculative, inferred from strong similarities that suggest common origins. For this reason, identifying distinct traditions of Nahua historiography through the grouping of related texts is essential. On the one hand, cross-checking evidence to verify historical facts is invalidated if two seemingly independent sources turn out to be a source and its derivative. On the other hand, to interpret a text as discourse in its own right, one must first examine which historical facts it selects and how it arranges them into a coherent narrative, in comparison with its source or with other derivatives from the same source.

This comparative approach also extends beyond the boundaries of Nahua historiography, which were in fact neither clear nor rigid. Some narratives were produced and circulated locally; yet Indigenous elites also established networks across communities, through which documents and oral testimony were gathered, disseminated, and interpreted to reconstruct the pre-Hispanic past, with Spanish missionaries and other lettered figures participating in these networks and incorporating such knowledge into their own works. Conversely, Nahua intellectuals not only supplied sources to Spaniards but also had access to their writings, which they sometimes consulted in composing their own accounts of the conquest and its aftermath. In some cases, as with Muñoz Camargo and Cortés, a Nahua and a Spanish author produced two distinct versions of the same event; in others, their texts represent parallel derivatives of the same source.

A comparative study of colonial Nahua and Spanish historical narratives proves not only possible but inevitable, since their production was already shaped by interactions between people from different cultures. It is further justified by the kinds of questions their common historical experience generated. As the case of the *Requerimiento* and the critiques it provoked among Spaniards such as Vitoria shows, the conquest of the Americas raised doubts about its legitimacy: What gave them just cause to wage war against Indigenous peoples? What rights did victory in such a war confer? For Spanish intellectuals, these questions expanded into an effort to formulate theoretical principles consistent with the European traditions of learning they inherited. But the conquest and its consequences were experienced not only by Spaniards but also by the Nahuas, and this shared experience compelled them to pose similar questions. They did not always answer them explicitly. Yet, as Muñoz Camargo illustrates, their perspectives emerge clearly through analysis of their narratives, especially when read alongside corresponding Spanish frameworks.

This comparison interprets Nahua historical narratives as offering alternative frameworks that challenge the dominant discourses through which colonial power sought to define objective and normative truth in order to subordinate the colonized. At the same time, it reveals a general, cross-cultural pattern of discourse formation: the mechanisms through which ideas of what count as natural, moral, or legal are constructed and manipulated. In this sense, my comparative inquiry offers a critique of the violence that underlies political reality, a reality that retrospectively conceals its foundations behind beliefs in its necessity and inevitability.

From Historical Actors to Political Thinkers

Around the mid-twentieth century, scholarship on colonial encounters between Nahuas and Spaniards shifted its focus from the conquest itself to the subsequent processes of cultural

transformation, viewing them primarily as the introduction of European institutions that rapidly filled the void left by the collapse of their Indigenous counterparts. This interpretive framework, which Lockhart called the "displacement model," was challenged by an opposite perspective that emphasized the persistence of pre-Hispanic cultural forms within Indigenous communities whose segregation from the broader colonial society effectively insulated them from external pressures. It was Charles Gibson, author of *The Aztecs under Spanish Rule* (1964), who broke the impasse between these two irreconcilable conceptions. Gibson argued that the *altepetl* in the Basin of Mexico "survived long into the postconquest period with their territories and many of their internal mechanisms essentially intact, giving the basis for all the structures the Spaniards implanted in the countryside" (Lockhart 3–4). In other words, while accounting for the profound changes brought about by colonial rule, Gibson emphasized the continuity of Indigenous patterns as the very substrate that made those changes possible.

Viewed in this light, the success of early colonial institutions rested equally on the Indigenous capacity to adapt new elements to their own local conditions. This accommodation was facilitated by the familiarity of many such elements: in numerous respects, the two worlds resembled one another more than they differed. Each recognized aspects of itself in the other, a perception that accelerated the broad adoption of foreign models. Although this sense of likeness often exceeded its actual basis, both Nahuas and Spaniards disregarded the discrepancies. They were less concerned with understanding how the other society operated or organized cultural meanings than with interpreting observable similarities as evidence of the same underlying structures. Lockhart termed this process "Double Mistaken Identity" (445). The result was the continued presence of Indigenous forms beneath the surface of Spanish ones. As Lockhart observes, "By the late eighteenth century, almost nothing in the entire indigenous cultural

ensemble was left untouched, yet at the same time almost everything went back in some form or other to a preconquest antecedent" (5).

If Gibson established a new paradigm for the field, Lockhart supplied it with new sources. In the sixteenth century, Franciscan friars, deeply influenced by the methods of humanist philology, placed great emphasis on the study of Indigenous languages as a crucial means of understanding the people entrusted to their missionary care. They collaborated closely with Nahua individuals, training them in alphabetic writing. This new generation of experts bridged pre- and postconquest traditions, continuing older recordkeeping practices while inaugurating a written culture that produced a vast and diverse corpus throughout the colonial period.

Yet much of modern historiography relied on Spanish accounts to approach the postconquest Nahuas, whereas scholars who worked with Nahuatl-language materials gave little attention to the colonial period, "partly because they turned first to the most spectacular and accessible documents, many of which were devoted to recounting preconquest events or recapturing preconquest culture," such as the Florentine Codex (Lockhart 6). This division left largely untouched the extensive corpus of mundane colonial documents in Nahuatl—for example, wills and land-sale records—that Lockhart and his students began to bring into view in the 1970s. Produced by Nahuas for their own practical purposes and in their own language, these documents reveal the categories by which ordinary people organized their world, defined their positions within it, and understood their actions. Lockhart termed this movement the "New Philology" (7). He also noted that his approach was not confined to everyday writings alone, but that "texts of the kinds traditionally more associated with what some think of as high culture" were increasingly being studied within his school as well (375).

In *Law and the Transformation of Aztec Culture, 1500–1700* (1995), Susan Kellogg summarizes earlier scholarship in terms of a binary between radical Hispanicization and survival, a schema that resembles the displacement-versus-survival opposition through which Lockhart staged Gibson's intervention as well as his own. Interestingly, Kellogg classifies Gibson with the former and Lockhart with the latter, presenting herself as advancing a third alternative. Her central assumption is that Indigenous peoples neither passively adapted to nor resisted colonial changes but instead created "a new cultural synthesis" (xxii) out of both pre-Hispanic traditions and Spanish models.

Kellogg focuses on the role of law in the colonial experience of the Nahuas. The legal cases heard by the Real Audiencia in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Mexico City show that Indigenous litigants actively engaged the Spanish judicial system to defend their land and property rights. In doing so, they also contributed to consolidating the colonial state as an authority capable of mediating internal conflicts and protecting communities from external threats. According to Kellogg, one of the crucial functions of colonial courts was to offer a safer channel through which social tensions that might otherwise have led to rebellion could be expressed and resolved. The courts furnished Indigenous people with tools to contest local hierarchies and cultural constraints within their own communities, as well as intrusive policies imposed by the Spanish administration. Yet by participating in the colonial legal system, they were also compelled to adapt to Spanish notions of property, gender relations, and family organization, which often conflicted with their own traditions. Thus, Kellogg understands colonial law not merely as a political or institutional sphere but as "a catalyst of cultural change and adaptation" and "a key battleground in which indigenous and Hispanic values competed for cultural dominance" (xxii).

In short, whereas for Lockhart cultural syncretism resulted from mutual misunderstanding and ignorance, Kellogg emphasizes more conscious and deliberate forms of adaptation, or "negotiation" (xxi), undertaken by Indigenous actors. These efforts, she argues, made Spanish cultural values and practices increasingly pervasive in everyday Nahua life. Through them, colonial order, initially enforced through coercion, came to be accepted and internalized to the point that it appeared "normal, even natural" (xix). At the same time, the collective consciousness of the Nahuas as a distinct sovereign community, which might have formed the basis for a counterhegemony, gradually weakened, as did the social foundations of the traditional elites who could have led it.

Both frameworks—Double Mistaken Identity and negotiation—begin from a shared premise: that colonization constituted a structural force whose scale and complexity exceeded the capacity of individual actors to fully comprehend or control. In the core regions of colonial Mexico, this force encountered no unified or sustained resistance.[6] Yet this does not mean that the Nahuas were thereby excluded from history as subjects of action or reduced to mere objects. They participated in the formation and development of the new society in which they came to live, and although the colonial transformations that reshaped their lives—if not always radically, then at least pervasively—were largely driven by the colonizers, the Nahuas' role in them, however marginal it may at times appear, was never dispensable. Those transformations could only take effect through the concrete actions of the colonized themselves. It is therefore both possible and necessary to write a history that takes the Nahuas as the subjects of its narrative.

[6] Lockhart states unequivocally that "it is perfectly clear that the Nahuas, after an initial twenty-year period about which we know relatively little, were not for the most part in a mood of active resistance" (443). Kellogg makes a similar point when she notes that "while resistance and rebellions were more common than past historians (or anthropologists studying colonial situations) recognized, these activities punctuate longer periods of time and everyday life in which upheaval is not the norm (though less dramatic forms of resistance may be)" (xix–xxn3).

Such a history does not erase the domination that structured the very historical process it seeks to narrate. Indeed, the opposite is true: it is only by examining colonial power at the point through which it was actually exercised—at the level of the lived experience of the dominated—that we can arrive at a fuller understanding of how it worked in practice. It is in this sense that Lockhart's and Kellogg's projects should be understood, as efforts to approach the world of the Nahuas from within and to conceptualize colonial interaction through their eyes.

I suggest that earlier approaches to the postconquest Nahua experience—including those proposed by Lockhart and Kellogg—can be situated along two analytical axes: resistance versus adaptation, and agency versus structural determination. These axes define a spectrum along which scholarship has tended to cluster and shift. When plotted within this space, the major paradigms fall largely where one would expect. The framework of conflict—primarily focused on the early sixteenth-century conquest—occupies the intersection of resistance and agency. At the diagonally opposite end lies the displacement model, which pairs adaptation with structural determination by treating colonial transformation as a process imposed from without, in which Indigenous societies appear primarily as passive recipients of that process. Survival, by contrast, corresponds to the conjunction of resistance and structural determination, with resistance understood less as intentional opposition than as structural inertia. It describes situations in which Indigenous ways of life persisted simply because external pressures proved insufficient to dislodge established social arrangements and cultural meanings.

What remains is the combination of adaptation and agency. Negotiation, which emphasizes initiative on the part of Nahua actors, represents the most explicit articulation of this position. Double Mistaken Identity falls somewhere between negotiation and survival, though its precise location depends on one's interpretive emphasis. Some may understand it as a form of

unintentional, structurally driven resistance, insofar as traditional elements and patterns endured not by design but unwittingly. This likely explains why Kellogg classifies Lockhart within the camp of survival. From another perspective, however, the same process can be read as a mode of relatively intentional adaptation, for Spaniards succeeded in implanting their models and practices precisely because Nahuas perceived them as familiar and embraced them as their own. Within the current vocabulary of the field, no framework structurally escapes this spectrum. Scholarship continues to move within the conceptual space defined by conflict, survival, displacement, and negotiation.

While Lockhart and Kellogg defined their own approaches through a critical review of those of their predecessors, a survey of the subsequent literature suggests that comparable efforts to move beyond their works have been more limited. In "A History of the New Philology and the New Philology in History," Matthew Restall discusses Kellogg among the non-Lockhartian scholars who contributed to the early development of the New Philology.[7] He detects in her work the influence of the "French school," whose representatives—Claude Lévi-Strauss, Tzvetan Todorov, Christian Duverger, and Serge Gruzinski, as well as associates outside France such as Enrique Florescano and Walter Mignolo—are said to have "modernized" the displacement model (120). According to Restall, their shared emphasis on Indigenous cultural decline is incompatible with the fundamental premise of the New Philology. Lockhart suggests that "the time around 1580–1610 represents an absolute peak in postconquest Nahuatl alphabetic writing in a great many respects—expressiveness, aesthetic quality, range" (434). Kellogg, by contrast,

[7] Restall extends the definition of the New Philology beyond Lockhart and his collaborators to include "those students of the ethnohistory of colonial Mesoamerica whose scholarship is based on native-language sources (the vast majority hitherto unstudied), who emphasize a broadly philological (i.e., historical-linguistic) analysis of those sources, and who subscribe to the view that the study of native-language sources is crucial to understanding indigenous societies" (114).

argues that Nahua participation in the colonial legal system during roughly the same period reinforced Spanish cultural hegemony. As a result, the Indigenous-language documents produced in that context are read "as a window into cultural loss and change, rather than a litmus of cultural florescence," placing Kellogg's interpretation, in Restall's view, at odds with Lockhart's (119).

For Restall, then, the New Philologists and those who adhere to the displacement model—including the so-called French school—occupy two opposite positions. Kellogg appears, in this schema, as a transitional figure: influenced by the latter yet ultimately moving toward the former. I would suggest that this classification results less from a careful and consistent application of analytical criteria than from an impulse to elevate a then relatively new scholarly movement to a position of superiority over competing frameworks. If Kellogg's work bears any point of contact with the displacement model, it lies—when viewed through the two-axis spectrum outlined above—in their shared orientation toward adaptation rather than resistance. This is what Restall gestures toward through his language of "cultural decay": "Kellogg's work succeeds in embracing the spirit of the New Philology even while doubting one of its central tenets (that native-language sources represent cultural vitality), while the French school's working assumption of cultural decay and degenerative compromise runs counter to one of the existential rationales of the New Philology" (120).

Yet adaptation is not the conceptual opposite of cultural vitality, nor is it synonymous with cultural degeneration or extinction. Nahuatl alphabetic writing—which, as Lockhart notes in the passage cited above, reached its peak roughly between 1580 and 1610—offers a particularly instructive example. This new medium, introduced through colonization, was widely taken up by Nahuas, especially as a means of communicating with Spanish authorities,

institutions, and settlers, and thus testifies to a willingness to participate in a broader social order. At the same time, such participation also constituted a form of adaptation to a dominant culture and an expanding colonial system. What Restall presents as an opposition between cultural florescence and cultural loss therefore appears, from within the spectrum proposed here, as a false dichotomy.

In recent decades, negotiation has become a dominant framework for characterizing Indigenous–Spanish interaction in colonial Mexico. The clearest testament to this trend is the title of the 2010 volume edited by Ethelia Ruiz Medrano and Susan Kellogg, *Negotiation within Domination: New Spain's Indian Pueblos Confront the Spanish State*. This framework has proven especially effective in tempering the discomfort generated within scholarship by the opportunistic and even collaborationist—rather than openly resistant—conduct of Indigenous intermediaries such as descendants of local dynasties, or caciques, who linked the two worlds of a racially stratified society. As Yanna Yannakakis notes in *The Art of Being In-between: Native Intermediaries, Indian Identity, and Local Rule in Colonial Oaxaca* (2008), Indigenous leaders who served as political and cultural brokers "betray our expectations" of heroic resistance to colonialism: "At best, scholars have perceived them as enigmatic, but more often they have portrayed them as social climbers, tragic figures, power seekers, and lesser partners in the colonial enterprise" (5).

This disappointing realization—that Indigenous nobles acted more often as collaborators and accomplices than as defenders of their communities—is exemplified by Enrique Florescano's sharp assessment in *Memory, Myth, and Time in Mexico: From the Aztecs to Independence* (1994) of their mestizo descendants and historians: Juan Bautista Pomar, Diego Muñoz Camargo, and Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl. According to Florescano, their identities

and modes of thought were closer to those of Spaniards than to the Indigenous populations among whom they lived. Their principal concern was to preserve the dominance of their lineages within local political structures. Their social and cultural affinity with the colonial rulers bolstered their status above the broader populace, while at the same time they sought validation of their Indigenous and noble descent from those same rulers so that the privileges associated with it would be ratified. In short, their loyalties lay less with the collective interests of their ethnic groups than with the advancement of their own families and class, and they pursued those aims by relying on Spanish power and recognition. Worse still, Florescano argues, their writings contributed to a process of "disindigenization," undermining the categories and values through which the Nahuas had once interpreted their own history and society (127).[8]

In *Indigenous Elites and Creole Identity in Colonial Mexico, 1500–1800* (2016), Peter B. Villella complicates this picture by arguing that even when local hereditary nobility appeared to yield to—and at times reinforce—Spanish hegemony in their representations of the preconquest past, such discourses "were not always (or simply) abject expressions of sympathy for the colonizer" (19). By "preemptively (if largely implicitly) accepting a foreign sovereign," Villella contends, "savvy caciques opened a small space from which to assert another kind of relevance more germane to the colonial order" (20). Within this limited but meaningful space, they sought to align their illustrious heritage with colonial ideologies, refashioning their identities and securing recognition of a status compatible with the new political system. Borrowing the title of the volume discussed earlier, Villella describes this process not as resistance but as "negotiation within domination" (20).

[8] One point that must be noted is that contrary to Florescano's assumption, we cannot connect Muñoz Camargo's lineage to a Tlaxcalan ruling family, as no record of his Indigenous mother has been found. See Gibson, "The Identity" 200.

This raises the question of whether the negotiation model has in fact revealed anything substantively new about Nahua historiographical or literary practices that the earlier, more skeptical view represented by Florescano did not already imply. Even collaborators cannot be reduced to mere puppets without will; they, too, make decisions and pursue their own ends. It may be, then, that there is no fundamental difference between the two interpretations at all, but rather a shift in tone—from a critical posture to a more sympathetic one. Consider, for example, Florescano's and Villella's observations on what caciques or their mestizo descendants sought to achieve through their reconstructions of ancestral memory.[9] Their portraits of Indigenous intermediaries—figures who drew on the social and cultural resources available to them to maintain or enhance their status and privileges—do not differ greatly in substance. In this sense, from the perspective of the two-axis spectrum proposed here, I do not agree with Restall that the French school simply reproduces the displacement model, since at least some of the scholars grouped under that label are better situated toward the agency pole of adaptation.

The continuity that links the work of earlier French school associates to that of scholars who have adopted the language of negotiation points to a persistent limitation in how Nahua intellectual production has been understood. Insofar as a paradigm approaches historical writing as a means through which intermediary figures exercised agency by adapting to colonial rule, it tends to reproduce a familiar narrative. In such accounts, Nahua authors appear as actors whose

[9] If Florescano's assessment is unduly severe, we may turn to the more accommodating view advanced by Serge Gruzinski—whom Restall includes among the French school—in *The Conquest of Mexico: The Incorporation of Indian Societies into the Western World, 16th–18th Centuries* (1993) concerning the Indigenous attempts to collect and record historical knowledge:

> We can detect in these various attempts the tenacious will to reconquer an identity that had been roughly treated . . . while trying to save the essential: the status, goods and privileges of the old ruling groups. . . . To survive socially by reconciling what was no more than a partly forbidden past and the inevitable colonial reality was, it appears, a continuing process that took the form of the interaction of painting and writing among the nobles, defeated but still conscious of being indispensable intermediaries between the conquerors and the native populations. (61–62)

pens are guided by the purposes for which they were taken up: the pursuit of social survival or advancement. They are understood as seeking to secure or promote their position and rights while also sustaining the cultural identities that underwrote them—identities that distinguished them, as hereditary rulers and landholding elites, from the broader Indigenous population and from newly arrived Spanish settlers, yet which were increasingly strained within a social hierarchy that grew ever more racialized and, in the process, degrading to the traditional nobility.

I would argue that attempts to situate Nahua historiography within the framework of negotiation—or, more broadly, within the register of adaptive agency—have largely exhausted their explanatory force. This does not mean, however, that we have reached a definitive understanding of what this historiography was doing in relation to colonial domination. Nor does it suggest that we must simply revisit, once again, the familiar axes of resistance and adaptation, agency and structural determination, recombining their poles in search of a more productive position. Rather, my point is that Nahua historical writing intervenes at another level altogether—one that those axes fail to capture.

My concern lies with the discourses that seek to mediate between the material, physical violence of conquest and the legal order that such violence brought into being. The comparison articulated by Muñoz Camargo between Mexica claims to universal sovereignty and the *Requerimiento* offers a paradigmatic illustration. One might ask whether this political concept in fact served as an imperial ideology for the Mexica in pre-Hispanic times, or whether it was drawn by Muñoz Camargo from the *Requerimiento* itself or from other Spanish sources and retroactively placed in the mouth of the Mexica. For the purposes of my analysis, however, this question is beside the point. What matters is that, regardless of its origin, the concept occupies a central position in both discourses of conquest, producing a structural similarity between them. It

is precisely through this similarity that the critical stance Muñoz Camargo adopts toward Mexica expansionism becomes applicable to its Spanish counterpart as well. His narrative thus intervenes by rendering the logic of a particular ideology of domination visible and available for critique—in other words, by theorizing it. This level of intervention cannot be adequately described within an explanatory range bounded by resistance and adaptation, and by agency and structural determination.

At the same time, my work is deeply indebted to the broader historiographic shift associated with Lockhart and Kellogg, particularly in their effort to displace older views that cast the Nahuas as passive victims, survivors, or mere recipients of Spanish action. Scholars working within the framework of negotiation likewise redirected the field by treating Indigenous elites and their descendants as colonial intermediaries with sympathy rather than suspicion. Yet my analytical aims diverge from these approaches at a crucial point. I am not primarily concerned with how the subjects I examine navigated colonial society or pursued the advantages and opportunities it afforded—that is, with how they functioned socially within structures of domination. Instead, I ask how those structures justified themselves, how they were contested at the level of discourse, and what role Nahua intellectuals played in articulating such contestation. My focus, therefore, is not on their function as intermediaries, but on their role as political thinkers or theorists. Put differently, this dissertation moves from what Nahua historiography was doing *within* domination to what it was doing *about* domination.

In *Stories in Red and Black: Pictorial Histories of the Aztecs and Mixtecs* (2000), Elizabeth Hill Boone defines history as the reconstruction of the past into a narrative whose particular structure determines which elements are included and how they are organized. Such

selection and arrangement are never neutral; they project a perspective onto the past and therefore constitute an act of interpretation. Boone emphasizes the interpretive stakes of historiography through Seymour Chatman's distinction between story and discourse: "the story is the 'what happened,' and the discourse is the telling" (14). She illustrates this distinction through the example of the Spanish conquest of Mexico, a single story that nevertheless takes different discursive forms in the accounts of Hernán Cortés, Francisco López de Gómara, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, and William H. Prescott.

As discussed above, Nahua historiography comprises distinct narrative traditions, identifiable through relations of sources and derivatives among different texts. These relations extend to Spanish writings that drew upon, translated, or reconfigured Indigenous materials. Comparing such closely related texts is therefore indispensable for revealing how a single story is told differently—that is, for uncovering the interpretive perspective embedded in each discourse. When the story in question concerns conquest, interpretation implicitly addresses theoretical problems such as the right to wage war and the grounds on which victorious parties may claim authority over the defeated and their property. To treat Nahua historians as political thinkers, then, is to identify the specificity of how they tell their stories and to derive from those narrative strategies the original forms of political theory articulated in their works.

This study examines colonial Nahua histories of the pre-Hispanic past by focusing on three authors: Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, Hernando de Alvarado Tezozomoc, and Cristóbal del Castillo. The primary reason for this selection is the canonical importance of their works within the field. Among Nahua historians, only Muñoz Camargo and Domingo de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin approach a comparable level of recognition. Other major sources on the subject—such as alphabetic annals and pictorial documents—remain largely

anonymous. Beyond the significance of their works or the weight of their names, another decisive criterion is that the sources consulted by Alva Ixtlilxochitl, Alvarado Tezozomoc, and del Castillo are either known or can be reconstructed with reasonable certainty. This makes it possible to group their texts with closely affiliated histories and to analyze them comparatively at the level of narrative structure and elements.

The dissertation is divided into three chapters, each centered on one of these authors. The sequence is methodological rather than chronological. The chapters move from a paradigmatic case, in which the comparative model—juxtaposing Nahua and Spanish interpretations of shared source materials—applies most directly, to cases that require progressively greater adjustment of it.

Chapter 1 compares two works by Alva Ixtlilxochitl, *Sumaria relación de todas las cosas que han sucedido en la Nueva España* and *Historia de la nación chichimeca*, written in the first half of the seventeenth century, with Juan de Torquemada's *Monarquía indiana* (1615), as well as with the pictorial Codex Xolotl, a common source for both authors. The analysis focuses on the narrative of a crucial moment in the history of the Basin of Mexico: the Chichimeca occupation of former Tolteca territories and the subsequent war between the two groups. I argue that Alva Ixtlilxochitl constructs a parallel history between this pre-Hispanic episode and the sixteenth-century conquest of Mexico, thereby framing the latter as the legal foundation for Spanish sovereignty and collective land ownership. In doing so, his framework dismantles any moral or legal justification for the political subordination of Indigenous peoples and the dispossession of their properties beyond the brute fact of military defeat.

Chapter 2 examines Alvarado Tezozomoc's *Crónica mexicana* (1598) and *Crónica mexicáyotl* (1609) alongside Diego Durán's *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España e islas de*

tierra firme (1581). Scholars widely agree that these accounts draw on a lost source conventionally known as "Chronicle X." All three texts recount the same sequence of the Mexica migration leading up to their settlement in Tenochtitlan. Durán, however, remodels this narrative through a biblical paradigm, equating the Mexica with the Israelites of the Old Testament. This analogy serves a double function: it condemns Mexica religious practices as deviant and legitimizes the conquest as divine retribution, while simultaneously idealizing the political and military excellence of the Mexica as a chosen people, in a manner that mirrors Spanish self-representation. By contrast, Alvarado Tezozomoc, emphasizing the excess of force as the fundamental condition of Mexica imperial success, refuses any romanticized identification with it and exposes Spanish expansionism as likewise grounded in sheer violence, thereby collapsing the distinction that casts one empire as more legitimate than the other.

Chapter 3 turns to del Castillo's *Historia de la venida de los mexicanos y de otros pueblos* (1600), a work that survives only in fragmentary form. Its account of the Mexica migration—especially their departure from Aztlan—cannot be securely situated within any established narrative tradition of Nahua historiography; nor does there exist a parallel Spanish derivative version that would allow for the kind of source-based comparison employed in the previous chapters. I therefore place del Castillo's narrative in direct dialogue with contemporary Spanish debates on the justice of war, particularly the arguments advanced by Francisco de Vitoria and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda. While these thinkers sought to legitimize conquest by appealing to a universal law and portraying the conquered as violators deserving punishment, del Castillo articulates a radically alternative militaristic ideology in which war appears as a historical and cosmic necessity, and violence not as a means of enforcing an existing normative order but as the generative force through which a new imperial order comes into being. Read in

this light, the text brings into sharp relief the underlying logic of Spanish justifications of conquest: that the universal law they presupposed as already binding derived its authority only retroactively from the fact of actual victory.

Taken together, these authors reveal that it is not prior objective grounds that justify the exercise of force; rather, it is the exercise of force itself that founds an order with its own norms and values, which justify the exercise of force ex post facto. This understanding of violence as fundamental rather than merely instrumental resonates with Walter Benjamin's critique of violence, particularly his insight that a new law often emerges through destructive and even morally offensive acts whose legitimacy is established only retrospectively. In his terms, such founding acts, which break out as sheer exercises of excessive force that suspend an existing order at the moment of their performance, represent the "lawmaking" function of violence, whereas violence subsequently employed to subordinate individuals to the law thus instituted serves its "law-preserving" function (Benjamin 241).[10] What appears, within justificatory discourse, as the enforcement of an already valid law thus conceals a moment of transformative and revolutionary violence that any preceding law—indeed, the very legal order against which such violence is directed—can never fully account for. Depoliticization—a recurrent strategy of colonial discourse—operates through appeals to "universal" or "timeless" concepts of morality and legality that legitimize structures of domination, obscuring the disruptive and conflictual historical events through which those structures were established. By contrast, the emphasis Nahua authors place on the non-normative character of such events constitutes not only a refusal

[10] My interpretation of Benjamin's argument is informed by Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority.'"

to naturalize the resulting relations of power but also a gesture toward the recovery of politics as a site of confrontation and as a catalyst for the remaking of the social order.

Chapter 1 Parallel Histories: Conquest, Sovereignty, and Property in Alva Ixtlilxochitl

Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, among contemporary Nahua historians, stands out as the best documented biographically, the most prolific in terms of surviving works, and the most accessible linguistically, owing to his use of orthographically and syntactically conventional Spanish prose. His writings have been understood above all through the prism of his identity: as a *castizo*, born to a mestiza mother and a Spanish father; as an author who wrote in Spanish according to European literary forms and Christian conceptual frameworks; and as an aristocrat whose historical loyalties were aligned with Tetzcoco, an *altepetl* that occupied a secondary hegemonic position vis-à-vis Tenochtitlan within the preconquest political order of the Aztec empire, or the Triple Alliance. This interpretive perspective finds a concise expression in a remark by Ángel María Garibay: "Beneath the apparent modes of Europe—of Spain, more precisely—the spirit of Tetzcoco continues to prevail, not unlike that of Tenochtitlan" (bajo los aparentes modos de Europa, de España, para mayor exactitud, sigue dominando el espíritu de Tetzcoco, no desemejante al de Tenochtitlan) (qtd. in Velazco 47).[1]

Within this framework, scholarly critiques of Alva Ixtlilxochitl's historiography have tended to focus on two issues: first, his adaptation of the Indigenous past to European discursive and ideological models; and second, his willingness to sacrifice historical accuracy in order to promote the prestige of his Tetzcoca ancestors.[2] More recent studies have moved beyond

[1] All translations of Spanish quotations in this chapter are my own.

[2] For an overview of the critique of Alva Ixtlilxochitl's historical works, see Lee and Brokaw 8–15; Townsend 1–2.

questions of authenticity and trustworthiness to situate his writings within the social and political contexts of their production. From this same perspective, his acculturated and often partial interpretations are read as symptomatic of how Indigenous elites negotiated personal and collective interests within a structure of colonial domination.[3] Such approaches have emphasized the extent to which his writing was shaped by his position within the ruling house of San Juan Teotihuacan and by a genealogical claim that traced his lineage, through his great-great-grandfather don Hernando Cortés Ixtlilxochitl, to the Tetzcoca royal dynasty.

Building on these studies, my analysis delves into Alva Ixtlilxochitl's interpretation of the sociohistorical processes faced by his family as local hereditary landowners. His works, written in the early seventeenth century, coincide with a period in which Spanish settlers had significantly extended their control over Indigenous lands in central Mexico (Greer 124). The legitimacy of Indigenous property rights, established before the conquest, continued to be acknowledged under colonial rule. This principle was rooted in the theological and legal discussions of the sixteenth century, which vested the Crown with sovereignty but not outright ownership over newly acquired overseas territories (Peset and Menegus 564–568). This distinction limited the scope of land available to private Spaniards, as the monarch could not distribute to his subjects what did not belong to him (Owensby 92). However, from the late sixteenth century onward, the situation shifted. The colonial government began sending signals that contradicted its previous recognition and protection of Indigenous rights.

Large tracts of land that went uncultivated—as epidemic disease reduced the Indigenous population and as survivors abandoned their communities in response to escalating tribute obligations and labor demands—represented an underutilized resource for the royal treasury.

[3] See, for example, Benton; Lee; and Villella ("The Last Acolhua").

Through the order of *composición* in 1591, the Crown asserted rights over these vacant lands, or *tierras baldías* (Owensby 20). This led to a common practice among Spaniards of arguing that lands in disputes with Indigenous communities were deserted (Greer 137). Additionally, the *congregación* program, which relocated Indigenous populations from their original homes to more compact settlements for enhanced taxation, labor recruitment, and evangelization, created new parcels of land to be allocated to Spaniards. Furthermore, Allan Greer suggests that measures like royal protective orders, or *amparos*, which were meant to safeguard Indigenous properties from Spanish encroachment, actually undermined their theoretical standing: "A colonial state that once assumed that indigenous title took precedence, even over the claims of the Crown, was now edging in the direction of a presumption that Indian lands were somehow a gift of the government" (141). While these changes did not formally revoke the established distinction between sovereignty and property, they resulted in significant confusion surrounding these concepts.

In this chapter, I argue that Alva Ixtlilxochitl offers a unique perspective on the juridical grounds through which the ambitions of Spanish settlers came to practically override the theoretically recognized ancestral rights of Indigenous peoples. His narratives advance an alternative model that seeks to bridge the gap between legal principles and lived reality. According to this model, the historical act of conquest simultaneously established both sovereignty and collective ownership over subjugated territories, thereby laying the foundation for the land claims of private Spaniards.

To develop this argument, I carry out a diachronic analysis of Alva Ixtlilxochitl's texts and sources, produced at different times, to trace the evolution of his perspectives. He was a

prominent collector of oral traditions and written records that illuminated the Indigenous past.[4] He especially held pictorial manuscripts such as the Codex Xolotl, the Quinatzin Map, and the Tlotzin Map in high regard, frequently citing them as his principal materials and referring to them as "original history" or "general history."[5] Jerome A. Offner emphasizes the importance of the Codex Xolotl and advocates examining the connection between this document and its alphabetic derivatives, including not only Alva Ixtlilxochitl's works but also the Franciscan Juan de Torquemada's *Monarquía indiana*.[6] Other scholars, such as Camilla Townsend and Heather Allen, have used comparative methods to explore varying interpretations in these Spanish-language texts, without incorporating the Codex Xolotl into their studies. My analysis centers on a narrative sequence depicting the Chichimeca migration and the occupation of the former Tolteca territory. This sequence appears to mirror the transformative events that shaped Alva Ixtlilxochitl's time, namely the Spanish conquest and the subsequent invasion of Indigenous lands. The task, then, is to determine which parts of the narrative were informed by his understanding of the colonial situation, and which were derived from his sources.

There are five historical writings attributed to Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, and I select two of them for my analysis: the *Sumaria relación de todas las cosas que han sucedido en la Nueva España* and the *Historia de la nación chichimeca*. The *Sumaria relación* is among his

[4] For a comprehensive description of the Indigenous archive amassed by Alva Ixtlilxochitl, see Brian 23–31.

[5] For an index of Alva Ixtlilxochitl's citations, see O'Gorman 49–85, particularly the entry under "historia original, la." Edmundo O'Gorman also identifies other designations used by Alva Ixtlilxochitl to reference the Codex Xolotl, listed under headings such as "Cemilhuitzin," "Crónica de los reyes chichimecas," and "Quauhquéchol."

[6] Offner suggests that the manuscript now referred to as the Codex Xolotl actually comprises separate plates of varying ages (82–83). The exact timeline of their production and assembly into the present form remains elusive. However, it is highly plausible that these plates are adaptations of pre-Hispanic "predecessor documents," composed and regrouped during the early years following the conquest.

earliest works, generally hypothesized to have been written between the 1600s and 1610s.[7] This text offers the most faithful and extensive interpretation of the events covered in the Codex Xolotl. Notably, it presents a framework distinct from that of the *Historia* with respect to the establishment of the initial political relations between the Chichimeca and the Tolteca. I read these two works alongside Plates 1 and 2 of the Codex Xolotl and Book 1 of Torquemada's *Monarquía indiana*.

1.1 Conquest of Land and Conquest of People

In her comparative study of European approaches to acquiring wealth in the Americas, Patricia Seed highlights the distinct strategies of British and Spanish colonization: "The English had conquered property, categorically denying the natives' true ownership of their land. Spaniards, on the other hand, had conquered people, allowing sedentary natives to retain their terrain in exchange for social humiliation" (2). While the English aimed at owning land, Spanish control over people was not achieved primarily through the ownership of their labor. From the earliest years of colonization, the Spanish Crown established that Indigenous peoples were its vassals and therefore free. Instead of claiming ownership over labor outright, colonizers were granted the right to use the labor of Indigenous communities in trust, through the institution of

[7] The only reference with a specific date related to Alva Ixtlilxochitl's historical writings is from 1608, when the manuscript of the *Compendio histórico del reino de Texcoco* was submitted to local authorities in Otumba and San Salvador Cuauhtlatzinco. O'Gorman proposes that the *Sumaria relación* was composed earlier than the *Compendio*, in the first years of the 1600s (230). However, this chronological sequence is not unanimously accepted. In the *Sumaria relación*, Alva Ixtlilxochitl provides biographical details about elderly noblemen who served as his informants (1:285–286). One such source, don Gabriel de Segovia, is recorded with his age in a 1611 legal document as a witness testifying to the genealogical ties of doña Ana Cortés—Alva Ixtlilxochitl's mother—to the royal houses of Tetzcoco and Teotihuacan (2:325–326). This comparison of age references for the same individual in two different documents suggests that the *Sumaria relación* was probably written in 1612, thereby postdating the *Compendio* (Brian 155n22). On the other hand, Gordon Whittaker contends that this evidence is insufficient to definitively challenge O'Gorman's hypothesis (61–63). Whittaker, drawing on other documents that mention don Alonso—another informant described as deceased in the *Sumaria relación*—proposes that the work likely began no earlier than 1601 and was completed by 1607.

the encomienda. The trustees, or encomenderos, were responsible for the Christianization of the Crown's new vassals; in exchange, the Indigenous people were obligated to provide royal service to these representatives of their new sovereign. Although the encomienda was theoretically not a form of labor ownership, its grantees succeeded in making it permanent and even inheritable, thereby rendering it virtually a property right. Their almost "unlimited control" over Indigenous labor drew condemnation even from fellow Spaniards, most notably the Dominican Bartolomé de Las Casas, who denounced the encomienda as "a form of slavery" (Seed 64–65).

What was at issue in debates over the encomienda, then, had nothing to do with land; the central concern was a conflict over Indigenous labor between those seeking to establish public control and those striving for more private access to it. The public character of the encomienda lay not only in the fact that the Crown drew a clear line at private ownership—namely, slavery—but also in the mechanisms through which labor was recruited. Spaniards held rights not over individual laborers but over the collective workforce of local communities, constituted as Indian republics (*repúblicas de indios*). Conquerors deliberately selected pre-Hispanic *altepetl* as the basis for encomienda grants, exploiting existing social structures for labor drafts rather than constructing an entirely new system. Indigenous hereditary rulers, known as *tlatoque* (plural of *tlatoani*), or by the colonial term caciques, retained their position in exchange for fulfilling the labor quotas owed to their encomenderos. As Charles Gibson observes, the indispensable cooperation of the caciques "prolonged" their traditional authority into the postconquest period (*The Aztecs* 196). Just as the persistence of Indigenous communities was fundamental to Spanish control over labor, land ownership was fundamental to Indigenous social life. Corporate land allotments assigned to families provided subsistence for commoners; revenues from communal lands supported local government officials; and caciques and other notables—*principales*,

referring to Indigenous nobles—relied on their private estates to maintain their socioeconomic status.[8]

The control of people in the early stages of Spanish colonization thus rested on three essential features: labor constituted the principal source of wealth for Spaniards; Indigenous property rights continued to be acknowledged; and local hereditary elites retained authority within their communities. By the turn of the seventeenth century, however, this configuration had changed dramatically. As François Chevalier notes, the initial impetus for Spanish land acquisition was the need to provide pasture for rapidly expanding livestock herds, soon followed by the booming sugarcane industry (210). Wheat cultivation, required to sustain the growing Spanish population, likewise demanded extensive tracts of land. Chevalier also observes that the early colonial administration—particularly under the first two viceroys, Antonio de Mendoza and Luis de Velasco, who governed from 1535 to 1550 and from 1550 to 1564, respectively—enacted legal measures intended to safeguard Indigenous properties and communal finances (186–196). These efforts, however, were undermined by the drastic decline of the Indigenous population caused by disease. The catastrophic epidemic of 1576–1577 in particular left vast areas of land uncultivated, creating new opportunities for Spanish encroachment into Indigenous territorial boundaries. By the 1620s, Gibson suggests, more than half of the agricultural and pastoral land in the Basin of Mexico was owned by Spaniards (*The Aztecs* 277).

The declining Indigenous population and the expansion of Spanish land acquisition were reflected in a new public institution known as the repartimiento. Under this system, the colonial government exercised centralized control over increasingly scarce labor resources and distributed

[8] For the traditional categories of land tenure according to different titles and purposes of use, as well as postconquest transformations, see Gibson, *The Aztecs* 257–270 and Lockhart 141–176.

predetermined quotas from each community not only for mining and public works but also for farms and ranches owned by Spaniards. Like its predecessor, the new draft mechanism continued to rely heavily on the capacity of local ruling elites to facilitate recruitment. Indian republics and their leaders, however, were not in the same condition as they had been immediately after the conquest. One of the most significant transformations experienced by these communities during the sixteenth century was what Gibson terms "political Hispanization," that is, the restructuring of local government according to the Spanish model of the town council, or cabildo (*The Aztecs* 166). As James Lockhart observes, the cabildo was adapted to preexisting local political structures, allowing many Indigenous features to persist under a Hispanic guise (30–40). A prime example of this mixed outcome was the institution of governorship. Whereas the chief office of a Spanish municipality, the *gobernador*, was subject to annual elections, in many Indigenous communities of colonial Mexico hereditary rulers of pre-Hispanic lineage simply held for life the dual position of cacique and *gobernador*.

From the mid-sixteenth century onward, however, it became increasingly common for the offices of cacique and *gobernador* to be held by separate individuals. This division effectively stripped the cacique of traditional political power. The role of the *gobernador* was confined to tax collection, labor recruitment, and other minor administrative duties. When a community failed to meet its tax obligations or labor quotas, the *gobernador* was held personally accountable for the deficit. This responsibility often drove Indigenous notables into debt, forcing them to lease or sell portions of their private estates or community lands to Spaniards. Some settlers consolidated these parcels into haciendas. As Chevalier notes, "Many haciendas owe their origin to the ruin and pressing needs of the local notables" (214).

While the landholdings of the Indigenous nobility were gradually eroded and absorbed into Spanish haciendas, a few caciques succeeded in preserving their ancestral estates, or *cacicazgos*. One such case is that of Alva Ixtlilxochitl's family. After don Francisco Verdugo Quetzalmamalitzin, the last cacique and *gobernador* of San Juan Teotihuacan, died in 1563 without a male heir, only the title of cacique and its associated lands passed to his widow, doña Ana Cortés Ixtlilxochitl; then to his daughter, Francisca Verdugo Ixtlilxochitl; and subsequently to his granddaughter, doña Ana Cortés Ixtlilxochitl, Alva Ixtlilxochitl's mother. Because these three female caciques, or *cacicas*, were excluded from the office of governorship, the family lost its hold on local politics. Following don Francisco's death, and again in 1580, several Teotihuacan nobles brought suit against doña Ana and later doña Francisca. The plaintiffs argued that the lands of the *cacicazgo*—some of which were traditionally linked to the governorship—should be shared between them and the *cacica*. These claims were rejected by the Real Audiencia (Lee 125–126).

In 1610–1611, Juan Pérez de Peraleda, the husband of doña Ana, petitioned for an *amparo* to protect her patrimony, upon which Spaniards had encroached by establishing farms and ranches within the boundaries of the *cacicazgo* and subsequently seeking official grants for the occupied lands (Alva Ixtlilxochitl 2:294). By 1643, the dispute escalated when five Spanish neighbors challenged the family's right to the estate by raising the issue of their ethnicity (2:354–355, 357–358).[9] They argued that doña Ana and her children—being of Spanish descent through her father, Juan Grande, and her Spanish husband—should not retain the title of cacique, which was legally reserved for Indians. In exchange for a contribution of five hundred pesos toward the

[9] I agree with Brian regarding the Spanish ethnicity of the petitioners in the 1643 disputes (52, 61). Although the legal records do not explicitly identify them as Spaniards, the term used to describe them, *labrador* (farmer), was typically applied to Spanish agriculturalists (Gibson, *The Aztecs* 602).

expenses of the Armada de Barlovento (Windward Fleet), the petitioners requested that the surplus lands held by the family under the *cacicazgo* be measured and redistributed among the nearest neighbors.[10] Although no surviving records document the final outcome of the litigation, it is known that don Francisco de Navas y Peraleda, doña Ana Cortés's eldest son, succeeded her as cacique.

As Amber Brian points out, the legal battles over the Teotihuacan *cacicazgo* centered on "the land itself rather than the labor of its inhabitants" (56), a shift that coincided with a broader transition from the conquest of people to that of land. In this process, colonial legal authorities did more than passively recognize Indigenous properties; they actively engaged in verifying ancestral titles and protecting them from Spanish encroachment. In the 1643 case, this expanded role of the colonial state appears to have blurred, in the minds of the Spanish plaintiffs, the theoretical distinction between the Crown's sovereignty and ownership. Alternatively, this conflation may have been deliberate, deployed to their advantage in order to challenge the established precedence of Indigenous rights over Spanish claims. The petitioners asserted that "all the lands and waters of this New Spain belong to His Majesty, by his royal prerogative" [a su majestad, por su regalía real, pertenecen todas las tierras y aguas de esta Nueva España], with no exceptions for cacicazgos (Alva Ixtlilxochitl 2:354). According to these litigants, since the king's territorial rights were inseparable from his person as the "sovereign lord" [soberano señor], any legal protection extended to doña Ana's estate in his name could be withdrawn at his discretion (2:367).

[10] From 1636 onward, the Spanish Crown levied funds from the viceroyalty of New Spain to build a defensive flotilla known as the Armada de Barlovento, intended to protect the Caribbean from rival European powers and piracy. By the 1640s, the need for naval defense had become acute, while the process of financing and assembling new squadrons remained slow (Lang 576–579). The Spanish settlers who offered financial support in exchange for access to the Teotihuacan *cacicazgo* lands were therefore likely aware of the Crown's pressing fiscal needs.

Whether Alva Ixtlilxochitl would have endorsed these arguments remains uncertain. One point, however, would likely have been evident to him: The portrayal of depopulated lands as vacant "surplus" ran directly counter to his family's interests. The strategy pursued by the Spanish petitioners nonetheless reveals that the original principle—restricting Spanish private claims to lands not under Indigenous control—remained formally intact. Over time, as the distinction between occupied and unoccupied lands became increasingly ambiguous in the wake of demographic collapse, the authority to adjudicate such matters shifted decisively to colonial courts. In the case of Alva Ixtlilxochitl's family, this meant that ancestral land ownership had to be legally demonstrated, and documentary evidence—such as the *amparo* requested by Juan Pérez de Peraleda in 1610–1611—became central to these proceedings.

In early seventeenth-century New Spain, the dynamics of land tenure between Spaniards and Indigenous peoples can be summarized as follows: First, the Crown's claims to ownership served as a necessary precondition for any property rights held by private Spaniards. Second, in disputes over lands previously controlled by Indigenous communities, decision-making authority no longer resided with those communities but within the Spanish judicial system. Colonial courts thus played a dual role: they protected Indigenous rights while simultaneously enabling the expansion of Spanish estates. Finally, the ultimate source of this jurisdiction lay with the Spanish sovereign. Together, these dynamics suggest that both political domination and the formation of property in colonial society were legally grounded in the sovereignty established by the conquest in the early sixteenth century.

1.2 The Chichimeca Claim to Territory and Policía

The analysis in the following sections focuses on the descriptions of Tolteca communities and their initial interactions with the Chichimeca arrivals. There are notable interpretive

differences between the *Sumaria relación* and the *Historia* concerning these themes. This juxtaposition sheds light on the author's evolving perspectives on the legal basis for the Chichimeca land occupation and their justification for waging war against the Tolteca for territorial authority. The *Historia* presents a framework that highlights conflicting positions between the Chichimeca and the Tolteca. I suggest that this framework reveals Alva Ixtlilxochitl's interpretation of the legal dynamics underlying Spanish and Indigenous claims to the colonial soil. Specifically, the Chichimeca legitimacy for territorial control parallels that of the Spanish colonizers, while the Tolteca grounds for resistance correspond to those of the traditional Indigenous landowning elites.

Plate 1 of the Codex Xolotl tells an almost twenty-year history, from the resettlement of Tolteca refugees to the migration of Chichimeca groups (see figure 1.1 and table 1.1).[11] A comparison between this page and the *Sumaria relación* shows that Alva Ixtlilxochitl based his account faithfully on the Codex Xolotl. Both record that the destruction of the Tolteca was completed in the year 1 Flint. Those who escaped the calamity scattered as far south as Guatemala ("Huatimala") and as far east as Campeche ("Campech") (Alva Ixtlilxochitl 1:283). Some refugees remained within or around the Basin of Mexico. Alva Ixtlilxochitl names a total of seven Tolteca places: Chapultepec (1Aa), Culhuacan (1Ab), Tlazalan (1Ac), Totoltepec (1Ad), Tepoxomaco (1Ae), Quecholan (1Af), and Cholula (1Ag) (1:284–285). Close to the sign of each place are depicted a settler couple and their child, represented as an infant held by its mother. It is noteworthy that the painters of the Codex Xolotl selectively illustrated key figures, even when it is implied that more people were involved in the depicted events.

[11] My interpretation of the Codex Xolotl is based on Charles E. Dibble's description of each plate included in the 1996 edition.

Not long after the Tolteca refugees reestablished themselves, Xolotl led his Chichimeca vassals into the Basin of Mexico. The migration portion of Plate 1 can be summarized as follows: the journey from a faraway home, exploration into the former Tolteca lands, settlement in Tenayuca, and demarcation of territory. The narrative ends with the arrival of six other Chichimeca groups. The trail of footprints starting from the lower left corner represents the path of Xolotl and his people (1B). The journey pauses at a place where Xolotl stands on a hill (1C). He proceeds with his son, Prince Nopaltzin (1D), to a point where they are seated and conversing (1E). They then part ways, with Xolotl reaching a Tolteca ruin depicted with two pyramids before retracing his steps (1F). Meanwhile, Nopaltzin crosses the middle of the page between the mountain range and the lake system (1G). He is last seen on a mountain, looking downward, before his trail leads back toward the first stopover, where the prince speaks with his father (1H).

According to the *Sumaria relación*, after hearing that the Tolteca empire had been completely ruined and deserted, Xolotl summoned his six vassals, rulers of six provinces, and then announced his decision to colonize the unclaimed territory. His rationale is clearly expressed: "He wanted to come to populate this land anew, because it was so good and of good climate, and because it was depopulated and without any opposition" [él quería venir a poblar esta tierra de nuevo por ser tan buena y de buen temple, y estar despoblada y sin contradicción ninguna] (1:292). On their way down, Xolotl and his people ran into the city of Tula, seat of the Tolteca empire, destroyed and abandoned. The first place settled by the Chichimeca was that named after Xolotl himself: Xoloc. Nopaltzin was sent on a mission to discover more lands and see if any Tolteca remained. In his journey along the mountain range to the east of the lakes, the prince located good places to live with caves and, after spotting three Tolteca settlements—Tlazalan, Culhuacan, and Chapultepec—from a mountaintop, returned to Xoloc.

In the *Sumaria relación*, Alva Ixtlilxochitl incorporates narratives whose equivalents are not identified in Plate 1. After his settlement in Xoloc, the Chichimeca lord dispatched some of his vassals to reconnoiter the area, instructing them not to initiate hostilities against any remaining Tolteca: "If the scouts encountered any town or city that had people in it, they also should not do them any harm, unless the inhabitants of that town or city, of their own free will, wanted to wage war, in which case the scouts should conquer and subjugate them by force of arms" [si llegasen en algún pueblo o ciudad que hubiese gentes en él, no le hiciesen también ningún daño, si no fuera cuando ellos de su propia voluntad le quisieran hacer guerra, que entonces los conquistaran y sujetaran a fuerza de armas] (1:293). The scouts encountered a few Tolteca "nobles" [caballeros] with their "vassals" [vasallos] in five distinct places (1:294). Interestingly, Alva Ixtlilxochitl makes a clear distinction between nobles and their subordinates. He interprets the Tolteca individuals depicted in Plate 1 as representatives of larger settler groups, small in number but differentiated socially.

In their exploration, the same scouts also discovered an ideal location for their new home, Tenayuca, where Xolotl established his base and began to occupy the former Tolteca territories. Plate 1 shows Xolotl seated in Tenayuca with his son, Nopaltzin, and six vassals (1I). In front of them are three squares containing glyphs of the Tolteca, a rabbit, and a deer (1J). The *Sumaria relación* describes this scene as a historical moment in which Xolotl declared his intent to take possession of the land. He repeated the same rationale for his expedition, now to justify his ownership of the territory: "since, without any opposition, he took it as his own, taking it from no one . . . because all the Tolteca had already perished" [pues sin contradicción ninguna la tomaba por suya, no quitándosela a nadie . . . pues ya todos los tultecas se habían acabado] (1:295).

Enclosed hunting grounds were built, and the areas where the remaining Tolteca had sought refuge were left for their use.

Following this, Xolotl delineated his territory. In Plate 1, a trail of footprints departing from Tenayuca weaves through the place signs along the outer edges of the page (1K). According to the *Sumaria relación*, Xolotl himself visited these locations, performing rituals of possession at each mountaintop. Alva Ixtlilxochitl refers to this act, or the limits thus defined, as the "first demarcation" [primera demarcación] since it was only the beginning of the Chichimeca land occupation (1:296). Xolotl sent four of his vassals to claim all the land formerly owned by the last Tolteca emperor, Topiltzin, whose domain had encompassed the entire area between the two coasts of the "Sea of the South and North" [Mar del Sur y Norte], respectively the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. This account of the Chichimeca expansion beyond the first demarcation does not appear to be based on the Codex Xolotl, as Plate 1 lacks corresponding narrative segments.

Five years later, these vassals reported back to Xolotl that all the remaining Tolteca had peacefully become vassals of Xolotl and acknowledged his ownership of their lands, which were granted back to them in return for their fealty. However, the specific duties and services that the Chichimeca lord required from his new Tolteca subjects are not detailed in the *Sumaria relación*, leaving the substance of the contract unknown. In contrast, the precise terms of the relationship with the new Chichimeca arrivals are explicitly outlined. Their leaders used to be vassals of Xolotl and his wife, Queen Tomiyauh, back in their home country. A few years after Xolotl and his people settled down, they arrived one after another every year for six years in a row. Xolotl allocated land to them in Tepetlaoztoc, Oztoticpac, Tesayucan, and other areas, ordering each

group to construct an enclosed hunting ground from which they would pay tribute with various kinds of animals (1:297).

The *Historia* presents a more condensed version of the narratives found in Plate 1 compared to the *Sumaria relación*. Both follow a similar structure, covering the migration of Xolotl, the establishment in Tenayuca, the demarcation of territory, and the granting of land to the incoming Chichimeca. However, the *Historia* differs from its predecessor by omitting a significant portion of the narrative segments from Plate 1. Instead of enumerating all the locations on the migratory route, it solely names Tula. While it is mentioned that Xolotl dispatched scouts to search for remaining Tolteca and a suitable settlement site, the exact role of these scouts in discovering Tenayuca and the Tolteca settlements remains unclear, as the *Historia* does not provide any account of Xolotl learning about these places from them. The journey of Nopaltzin is also entirely omitted in the *Historia*. Although the sites marking the boundaries of the new territory are listed, Alva Ixtlilxochitl is silent about the fact that Xolotl himself traveled to perform possession rituals.

The above comparison between the *Sumaria relación* and the *Historia* reveals two notable tendencies. First, the *Historia* consistently ignores the narrative segments describing the wandering of Xolotl and his vassals from one place to another, instead creating the impression that they went straight to their final destination, Tenayuca. Second, with a significant part of the expedition left out, the *Historia* erases the important role played by the remaining Tolteca. In the *Sumaria relación*, the migratory journey concluded only after Xolotl learned about the Tolteca settlements, at which point he settled down and claimed possession of the land. However, in the *Historia*, the existence and whereabouts of Tolteca people are completely irrelevant.

A key event to consider in a comparison between Alva Ixtlilxochitl's early writings and the *Historia* is the 1615 publication of Torquemada's *Monarquía indiana*.[12] This work is cited several times in the *Historia*, where Alva Ixtlilxochitl praised Torquemada as the "most diligent and first discoverer of the explanation of the paintings and songs" [diligentísimo y primer descubridor de la declaración de las pinturas y cantos] (2:137). Like Alva Ixtlilxochitl, Torquemada derived substantial information from the Codex Xolotl, yet their interpretations show notable differences. He offers a depiction of the Chichimeca migration, supplementing the narrative with his explanation for the constant movement of the group: "As they sustained themselves by hunting, they sought mountainous and rugged lands, where more game was to be found" [como se sustentaban de caza, buscaban las tierras montuosas y ásperas, donde más se cría] (63). Alva Ixtlilxochitl also recognizes that the Chichimeca relied on hunting for their sustenance and resided in caves. However, Torquemada employs this widely accepted fact to assert that the Chichimeca were devoid of any political existence. He juxtaposes their lifestyle with that of the Tolteca, a society regarded as more civilized, or a "people of more *policía*" [gente de más policía]:

> As a people of more *policía*, they had their residence in settlements, living in houses made of stone and other similar materials, interacting with one another and communicating among themselves, and enjoying neighborhood and companionship; but Xolotl and his people were quite the opposite, for just as they knew nothing of clothing, so too they knew nothing of conversation or social interaction; and thus all their life consisted in living and enjoying themselves naked in body, clothed in animal skins. They wandered over the land without plowing or digging, because they did not know how to cultivate it; and all their maintenance and sustenance was hunting and the pursuit of deer

[12] Scholars have noted a potential collaboration between Alva Ixtlilxochitl and Torquemada during the period from 1603, when Torquemada was appointed guardian of the convent in Tlatelolco, until 1612, the year he departed for Spain to publish the *Monarquía indiana* (Townsend 6–7; Brian 94–95).

> or stags, rabbits, hares, and other animals and snakes. [. . . como gente de más policía, tenían su asistencia en poblado, morando en casas hechas de piedra y otros materiales semejantes, tratando unos con otros y comunicando entre sí y gozando de vecindad y compañía; pero Xolotl y su gente muy al contrario, porque como no sabían de vestidos, tampoco de pláticas ni conversaciones; y así era toda su vida, gozarla y vivirla, desnudamente en los cuerpos, vistiendo pieles de animales. Andaban vagueando por la tierra, sin arar, ni cabar, porque no sabían cultivarla; y todo su mantenimiento y sustento era la caza y montería de venados o ciervos, conejos, liebres y otros animales y culebras.] (67)

The word *policía*—as well as its derivative, *político*—signified, first and foremost, "sociable life" [Vida Sociable] to Torquemada (51). He viewed the Tolteca as political, given their ability to live communally and enjoy the company of each other. In contrast, the Chichimeca were not political due to their isolated lifestyle. In the early seventeenth century, *policía* encapsulated a broader, more complex idea. It spanned a range of aspects, from urban planning to laws and government, all related to social order, which separated civilized and barbaric nations.[13] Many colonial discourses and policies hinged on the notion of *policía* to ideologically validate Spanish rule, positioning it as an order-bringing force to the colonized populations. Torquemada was aware of this multifaceted nature of the concept, defining a barbaric life as "living separated and solitarily, without any form of *policía*, without laws, houses, or social congregation" [vivir apartada y solitariamente, sin género de policía, sin leyes, ni casas, ni en congregación social] (69).

[13] Nemser examines sixteenth-century intellectual and policy-making endeavors to reconfigure Indigenous life into regularized urban spaces—from Vasco de Quiroga's "hospital-towns" to the program of *congregación*—which materialized a new social order, or *policía* (35–38). His observation shows how the concentration of Indigenous bodies and the architectonic infrastructure were tied to the colonial idea of governance.

Torquemada presents a society's lifestyle as a coherent system where one aspect logically leads to another. According to this model, it is possible to deduce the political nature of a society from seemingly unrelated habits or customs. The Chichimeca subsisted on hunting; they wore animal hides; they moved nomadically in pursuit of game, which prevented them from settling in one place; they dwelled in caves instead of stone houses; they lived apart from each other rather than in concentrated towns; they never learned to live harmoniously with neighbors and thus had no need for laws or their enforcement. For Torquemada, they were not political but barbaric.

In contrast, Alva Ixtlilxochitl did not regard the Chichimeca lifestyle as necessarily indicative of an absence of political community. According to the *Sumaria relación*, Xolotl was the lord of his subjects in his home country and, upon arriving in Tenayuca, quickly established a seat of government to rule his new territory. The construction of enclosed hunting grounds is mentioned as evidence that the Chichimeca, although not agriculturalists, did not need to roam incessantly for food and were capable of settling within defined territories around these installations. Their identification as Chichimeca does not suggest a nonpolitical nature. The shift from their nomadic to sedentary lives was not as extreme as the dichotomy between "barbaric" and "civilized" might imply. Alva Ixtlilxochitl views the Chichimeca existence as hunters and their political organization as easily compatible.

The problem is that the Codex Xolotl describes a long migratory journey undertaken by the Chichimeca in search of a better place to live. This seems to indicate that, given their subsistence lifestyle, it was driven by the necessity to find game to hunt, the same assumption that led Torquemada to conclude that the Chichimeca were nomadic. We can imagine that Alva Ixtlilxochitl was troubled by the implication of any narrative segments depicting Xolotl and his people as wanderers, as it would risk corroborating that the Chichimeca were not a political

entity but a barbaric band of nomads. I suggest that this explains his decision to overlook a significant portion of Plate 1 in the *Historia*.

Torquemada also departs from Alva Ixtlilxochitl in his accounts related to the remaining Tolteca. Both the *Sumaria relación* and the *Monarquía indiana* agree that Xolotl sent out his vassals, who subsequently discovered Tenayuca. The difference lies in the fact that according to the *Sumaria relación*, it was the same scouts who also located Tolteca settlements. Through their reports, Xolotl already knew, prior to his move to Tenayuca, that there were only a few Tolteca survivors and that his claim to the land would not face any opposition from them. In contrast, the *Monarquía indiana* suggests that the Chichimeca only learned about the Tolteca presence after they had established themselves in Tenayuca.

According to Torquemada, Xolotl "had left his homeland with the intention to locate his enemies and take over their lands by force of arms" [había salido de su tierra con ánimo de buscar a sus enemigos y quitarles por fuerza de armas las que poseían] (68). Now that the area appeared vacant and open for occupation, Xolotl grew concerned that the Tolteca might return to reclaim their land and wage war against him. He dispatched one of his six vassals to locate them. However, the scouts found only small, isolated families—the same individuals depicted in Plate 1, whom Alva Ixtlilxochitl perceives as the Tolteca nobles leading their vassals in the previously mentioned settlements. Torquemada also provides a different account of what Xolotl did with the rest of the Tolteca territory. In the *Sumaria relación*, Xolotl occupied all the land beyond the first demarcation and had the remaining Tolteca located outside those lines submit themselves to his lordship. In the *Monarquía indiana*, when at last assured that the area was actually deserted and that no one would challenge his ownership, Xolotl set the boundaries of the territory and distributed it to his people. Having learned that other Tolteca survivors had moved far to the

south, Xolotl decided not to chase them but rather to enjoy what was already obtained without bloodshed.

Torquemada's interpretation of the remaining Tolteca not as larger bodies of settlers, but as families comprised of couples with children, has an explanatory advantage. If we follow the suggestion of the *Sumaria relación* that the Tolteca survivors established communities, each ruled by their own lords, then it makes sense to view the area as not entirely unoccupied. On the other hand, if the remaining Tolteca are assumed to be small families living solitarily, the land would appear much "emptier," not only due to their insignificant number but also because they were mere individuals detached from society. There are two key factors in determining the "emptiness" of land: an area may not be considered quantitatively empty as long as any number of individuals live there; on the other hand, unless it is settled by people with *policía*, even an inhabited parcel of land could be considered empty, unclaimed. The underlying idea is that any claim to land ownership presupposes a political community. Despite being survivors of a more civilized nation, the Tolteca in the *Monarquía indiana* were no more political than their Chichimeca neighbors due to their socially isolated life; thus, they had no right to the land.

As seen above, the *Monarquía indiana* provides a more straightforward version of the narrative than the *Sumaria relación*. The Chichimeca were clearly determined to seize the Tolteca territory by force, only to discover that it was already unoccupied. Subsequently, Xolotl simply declared himself lord and owner of the area without encountering any challenges. Thus, when the Chichimeca left their home country, there were two alternative possibilities: either to conquer the land or to freely take possession of it. Even though peaceful acquisition of a free space and forceful acquisition from a recognized owner seem to be mutually exclusive choices, historical evidence shows that they often appeared in combination.

In colonial Mexico, this combination can be observed in policies like the *congregación*, whose project of "restructuring of colonial space," as Daniel Nemser points out, "was justified on the basis that colonial space was already empty and simultaneously produced colonial space as empty" (26). The *congregación* program served a dual purpose: on one hand, it was intended to facilitate civilizing missions and the extraction of resources by gathering Indigenous people into ordered urban spaces; on the other hand, it aimed to create vacant terrains, thus available for Spanish occupation. These two seemingly separate goals of the policy converged on the same conceptual ground of *policía*. The removals proposed by the program were a clear breach of Indigenous land ownership. As Gibson indicates, despite the demographic catastrophe after several epidemic outbreaks, local communities still had access to legal procedures to preserve depopulated lands (*The Aztecs* 282). Nevertheless, outright dispossession became possible under the pretext of bringing *policía* to those who lacked it. The rationale implies that, if a certain area shows settlement patterns that are "too scattered" by Spanish standards and thus fails to meet the model of *policía*, Indigenous rights to the land could be legally overridden.

The ideological ground for the *congregación* found its parallel in the Chichimeca claim to the former Tolteca territory as reported in the *Monarquía indiana*. In the wake of several calamities that befell the Tolteca empire, the survivors scattered, and only small, isolated families remained in and around the Basin of Mexico. Their solitary existence made the area appear free of any recognized ownership. However, it was not as simple to apply the same logic in the *Sumaria relación*, as it depicts the Tolteca more as societies than as individuals. Instead, Alva Ixtlilxochitl adopted a different approach to establish the legitimacy of the Chichimeca land acquisition: the vassalage contract between Xolotl and the Tolteca lords.

During the initial phases of colonization, the legal dynamics surrounding the colonial soil were defined by the contractual relationship between the Spanish crown and its Indigenous subjects. As previously mentioned, this vassalage arrangement provided the framework for recognizing Indigenous property. In colonial Mexico, certain local communities secured a higher degree of autonomy and additional rights by proving their contribution to monarchical interests in the region. It was a common strategy for hereditary elites to remind colonial authorities of the support offered by their ancestors during the conquest and the privileges promised to them in return. Alva Ixtlilxochitl was well acquainted with such tactics. In the *Compendio histórico del reino de Texcoco* (1608), his great-great-grandfather, Cortés Ixtlilxochitl, is portrayed as having embraced Christianity at an early stage and as having become an indispensable ally to Hernán Cortés during the expedition to Honduras. In the concluding section of the *Sumaria relación*, Alva Ixtlilxochitl also mentions additional military campaigns supported by the "nobles and people of Tetzcoco" [principales y naturales de Tezcuco] (1:392). He emphasizes that the Tetzcoca never resisted the Spaniards with arms; instead, they accepted Spanish sovereignty from the outset of the conquest and remained loyal ever since.

The inserted account of the peaceful surrender by the Tolteca survivors outside the first demarcation is thus a reminder of the framework of colonial rule and its rhetorical tool, which allowed the colonized to retain their land ownership while enabling Alva Ixtlilxochitl himself to promote his family legacy. Conversely, the *Historia* leaves out all this and simply provides a concise summary of the event: "He [Xolotl] allowed the few Tolteca who had escaped their destruction to live in the refuges and places where they had regrouped and settled, each with their family" [los pocos tultecas que habían escapado de su destrucción, les dejó vivir en los puertos y lugares en donde estaban reformados y poblados cada uno con su familia] (2:15). There

is no mention of any vassalage agreement. It is also noticeable that the Tolteca refugees are depicted as familial groups, not as lords and their vassals.

Alva Ixtlilxochitl thus changed his view, presenting the encounter with the Tolteca as an interaction with individuals rather than societies. The idea of a contract with Tolteca leaders has been discarded as well. As long as the survivors of the former empire remained nonpolitical, private entities, they were no longer in a position to recognize Xolotl as the supreme owner of the land. Consequently, there was no need to establish a formal relationship of subjugation with them. This perspective aligns closely with Torquemada's—that the Tolteca survivors held no claim to the domain due to their lack of a "political" life. However, the story does not end here. What follows is the historical event that Alva Ixtlilxochitl presents as the most definitive and indisputable title for Chichimeca land ownership: the defeat of the Tolteca sovereign in war.

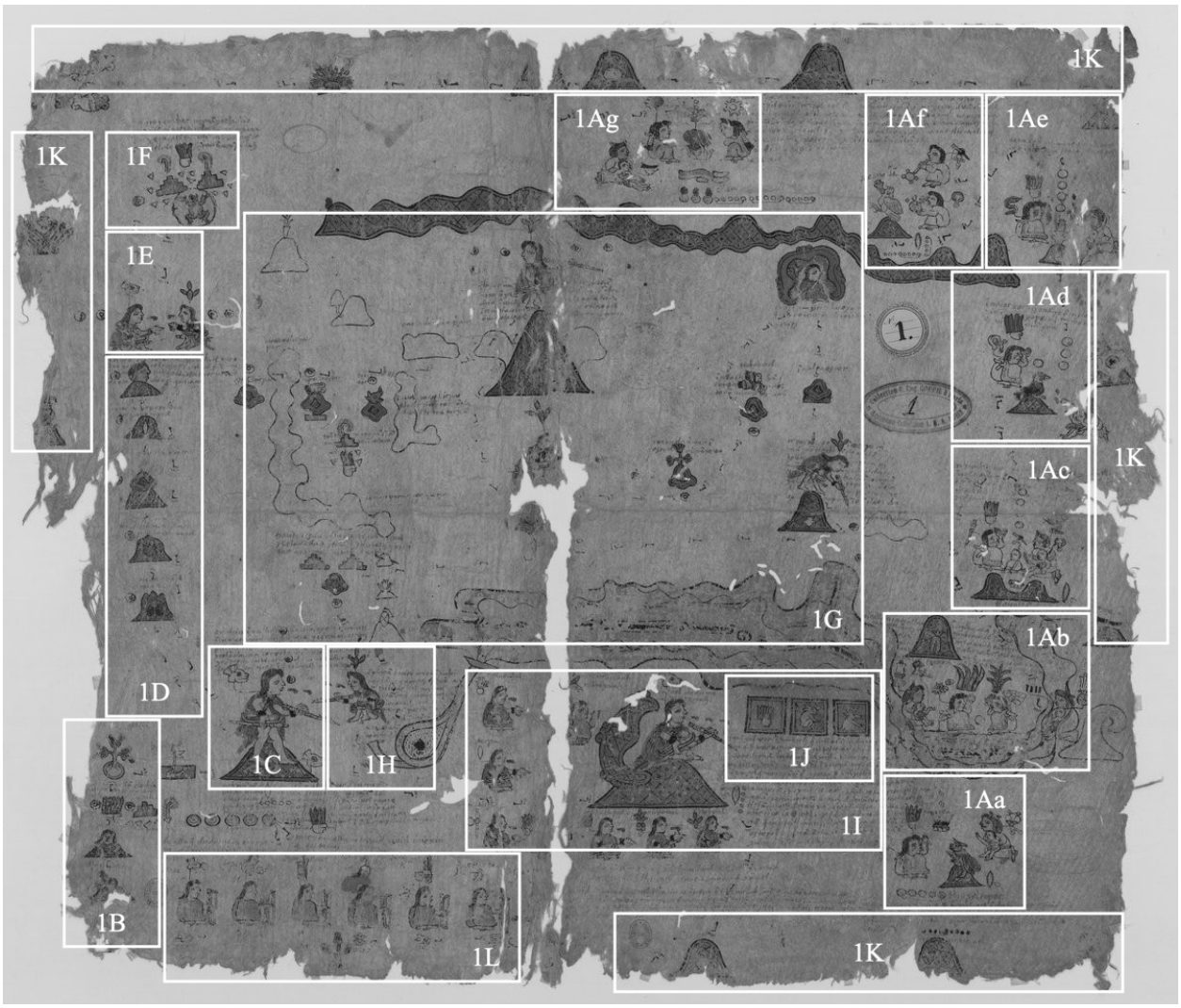


Figure 1.1. Codex Xolotl, Plate 1. Photo courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Table 1.1. Narrative Segments of Codex Xolotl, Plate 1

CODE	NARRATIVE SEGMENTS
1Aa–g	Tolteca refugees resettle.
1B	Xolotl journeys into the Basin of Mexico.
1C	Xolotl stops at a place named after himself.
1D	Xolotl and Nopaltzin proceed northwest to explore the area.
1E	Xolotl and Nopaltzin speak and part ways.
1F	Xolotl observes the ruins of a Tolteca city and returns.
1G	Nopaltzin proceeds south and locates Tolteca settlements.
1H	Nopaltzin returns and speaks with Xolotl.
1I	Xolotl settles in Tenayuca with Nopaltzin and his vassals.
1J	Xolotl declares possession of the territory.
1K	Xolotl demarcates the territory.
1L	Six Chichimeca groups arrive in the Basin of Mexico.

1.3 The Tolteca Claim to Territory and Justice of War

Plate 2 of the Codex Xolotl continues from Plate 1, depicting the increasing complexity of the ethnic and political landscape in the Basin of Mexico after the Chichimeca occupation (see figure 1.2 and table 1.2). This plate includes more narrative segments than the previous one, among which the most pivotal are the distribution of land following the arrival of the Acolhua and the war with the Tolteca of Culhuacan.

Culhuacan, a settlement located south of Lake Texcoco, emerged as the political center of the Tolteca population. According to the *Sumaria relación*, Nauhyotl, upon becoming ruler of Culhuacan, summoned the nobility from other Tolteca communities to demand their allegiance. From that point on, with Culhuacan as their capital, all descendants of the Tolteca were collectively known as the Culhua (Alva Ixtlilxochitl 1:297). Nauhyotl ensured the legitimacy of his lineage by arranging the marriage of his daughter to Pochotl, the only surviving son of the last Tolteca emperor, Topiltzin (2Aa). Subsequently, female members of this family entered matrimonial alliances with other royal houses in the region. One notable example is Nopaltzin, who married a daughter of Pochotl and had three children with her (2B).

Plate 2 illustrates emerging ruling clans, besides those of Xolotl and Nauhyotl, with their domains marked by individual place glyphs. This political landscape was created as Xolotl distributed the territory, first among his Acolhua and Chichimeca vassals, and second among the sons of Nopaltzin. In the year 1 Flint—fifty-two years after the destruction of the Tolteca—a people called the Acolhua arrived in the Basin of Mexico (2C). According to the *Historia*, despite their shared ethnic origin, they were divided into three subgroups: the Tepaneca, the Acolhua, and the Otomi. The *Sumaria relación* offers more detailed information about them, including their physique, clothing, and weaponry. They resembled the Chichimeca of Xolotl in

almost every respect, with the primary distinction being their idolatrous religion. These newcomers requested lands from Xolotl and swore fealty in return. The Chichimeca lord, impressed by their being "political people of good governance" [gente política y de buen gobierno], not only bestowed upon each group a portion of his territory but also married two of their leaders to his daughters (1:299). As a result, the Tepaneca leader and Princess Cuetlaxochitl established their seat in Azcapotzalco (2Da), the Otomi leader and Princess Tzihuacxochitzin in Xaltocan (2Db), and the Acolhua leader—married to a Tolteca noblewoman from the Chalco region—in Coatlichan (2Dc).

According to the *Sumaria relación*, Xolotl had already awarded estates to his Chichimeca vassals before the arrival of the Acolhua. However, the *Historia* reports these events in reverse order: the Acolhua had received their domains first and only afterward the Chichimeca lords. At first glance, it may appear odd that new arrivals took precedence over those who served and followed Xolotl from their homeland. Plate 2 designates the establishment of both the Acolhua and Chichimeca territories under the same year sign of 1 Flint, without any discernible indicators to determine the chronological sequence (2Ea–d). One possible explanation for this change is that Alva Ixtlilxochitl came to view the Acolhua holdings not merely as grants to foreign leaders but also as gifts from Xolotl to his daughters and grandchildren. In other words, Xolotl apportioned land to his descendants first and then to his subjects. The author, whose link to the Tetzcoca royal house was matrilineal, had reason to emphasize the importance of genealogy traced through women.

The *Sumaria relación* dates the second land distribution to fifty-two years after the first. Nopaltzin had three sons with his Tolteca wife. The first, Tlotzin Pochotl, next in the line of succession, was granted Tlazalan as his seat; the other two sons were sent to Zacatlan and

Tenamitec, located outside the aforementioned first demarcation (2H). Alva Ixtlilxochitl specifies the duties owed to the imperial house by those who received lands. According to the *Historia*, unlike his six Chichimeca vassals, the children—including those married to the Acolhua leaders—and grandchildren of Xolotl had no obligation of vassalage and thus paid no tribute to the emperor. Their only responsibilities were to appear in the imperial court at its summons and to support the empire with reinforcements in times of war.

The *Sumaria relación* reports that Nopaltzin personally searched the area of Zacatlan for suitable holdings for his two younger sons and then proceeded to Xolotl, who was then building a hunting ground near Tetzcoco. Plate 2 depicts this enclosed area flanked by both figures shedding tears (2G), and the three sons of Nopaltzin connected to the places assigned for their estates (2H). In the *Sumaria relación*, Alva Ixtlilxochitl interpreted this scene as an emotional farewell, as the emperor and the prince sent the children off with the heavy responsibility of governing their own territories. Conversely, the *Historia* omits the visit of Nopaltzin to Tetzcoco and the departure of his sons. It instead adds that Xolotl, Nopaltzin, and Tlotzin Pochotl used the fenced-off forest as a place of worship for their deities, the sun and Mother Earth, without knowing any other idols.

While the *Monarquía indiana* largely aligns with the accounts given in the *Sumaria relación* and the *Historia* concerning the land distribution to the Acolhua and Chichimeca lords, the author devotes an additional chapter to express strong doubts about its veracity:

> According to this account that we have given, it already appears that the Chichimeca peoples made their habitation and dwelling in settled communities, enjoying neighborhood and companionship, since, as we shall see shortly, he [Xolotl] distributed estates and domains to the nobles and lords who had come and remained with him; and it is certain that wherever there is a division of estates, there is a recognition of proper

> lands. But I do not believe that, as a whole and in general, these barbarous nations were settled, but rather that, while some gathered and were reduced into towns and cities, others remained dispersed and scattered across the countryside, following their natural inclination. . . . [Según esta relación que tenemos dada, ya parece que las gentes chichimecas hacían su habitación y morada en poblado, gozando de vecindad y compañía pues, como luego veremos, repartió estados y señoríos a los grandes y señores que con él habían venido y estado; y es cosa cierta que donde hay partición de estados hay reconocimiento de propias tierras; pero no creo que en común y en general se poblaron estas bárbaras naciones, sino que si unos se recogieron y redujeron a pueblos y ciudades, otros se quedaron distraídos y desparramados por los campos, siguiendo su natural inclinación. . . .] (78)

The reasoning presented in the quotation above consists of two general observations as its premises: first, land ownership belongs to a "political" people who reside in settlements and lead social life; and second, a division of "estates and domains" [estados y señoríos] only occurs where land ownership is recognized. Accordingly, as the Chichimeca remained nomadic "as a whole and in general," they had no recognized land ownership and the land distributions reported to have occurred by or among them should not be taken as entirely true.

According to the *Sumaria relación*, as the Tolteca population grew and their settlements expanded into cities and provinces, Nauhyotl began to consolidate power, becoming a potential threat to Chichimeca dominance. In the year 13 House, Nopaltzin was sent on a mission to demand tribute from Nauhyotl and his vassals as a recognition of Xolotl as "lord and monarch of all the land" [señor y monarca de toda la tierra]. However, Nauhyotl refused to comply, asserting that "he recognized no lord in the world as superior, except their gods and false idols" [él no conocía a ningún señor en el mundo por superior si no era a sus dioses y falsos ídolos] (1:300). Enraged by his "insolent" [descomedida] response, Nopaltzin declared war on him. The ensuing battle culminated in a victory for the Chichimeca, with Nopaltzin personally killing Nauhyotl. In

the following year, 1 Rabbit, Xolotl appointed Achitometl, the son of Nauhyotl, as the new ruler of Culhuacan.

In Plate 2, the combat between Nopaltzin and Nauhyotl is depicted in the middle of Lake Texcoco, with the year sign of 13 House between the two figures (2J). To the right are Xolotl and Achitometl seated face to face, the first pointing at the second portrayed on the *icpalli*, a mat with a low backrest (2K). In the Codex Xolotl, the object symbolizes the authority of a ruler. Underneath Achitometl, the year sign of 1 Rabbit and the number seventy-eight are marked. This information coincides with the *Sumaria relación*, where Alva Ixtlilxochitl reports that the war with the Culhua broke out in the year 13 House, or 1089, almost seventy-eight years after the destruction of the Tolteca, and that the following year 1 Rabbit, or 1090, was when Xolotl instated Achitometl to the throne. Therefore, it was twenty-five years after the arrival of the Acolhua in the year 1 Flint, or 1063, that the Chichimeca and the Culhua fought the battle.

As the same year sign recurs every fifty-two years in the Nahua calendar, the Codex Xolotl uses the destruction of the Tolteca, which occurred in 1 Flint, as a reference point to prevent confusion. By counting the seventy-eight years that had elapsed between that event and the appointment of Achitometl as ruler of Culhuacan, it expressly rules out the possibility that the military clash between the Chichimeca and the Culhua would fall fifty-two years earlier, in the previous recurrence of the year sign 13 House, and thus before the arrival of the Acolhua.

In the *Historia*, Alva Ixtlilxochitl moved the corresponding Gregorian date of the destruction of the Tolteca from 1011 to 959 and the arrival of the Acolhua from 1063 to 1011. In other words, compared to *the Sumaria relación*, both events—which took place in consecutive recurrences of the year 1 Flint—are displaced by one full fifty-two-year cycle. With respect to the war alone, however, the *Historia* advances the date by two cycles, or 104 years, placing it in

984 and thus between the destruction of the Tolteca and the arrival of the Acolhua. By reversing the chronological order in this way, Alva Ixtlilxochitl concludes Chapter 4, which recounts the Chichimeca migration and territorial acquisition, with the defeat of the Culhua.

An apparent benefit of this alteration is narrative coherence. According to the *Historia*, Acolhua leaders were obligated to send reinforcements to the emperor during wartime. Therefore, if—as in the *Sumaria relación*—their participation in the conflict with the Culhua were not mentioned, this would introduce an inconsistency. Rather than adding new details, however, Alva Ixtlilxochitl effectively avoided this inconsistency by rearranging the timeline of events. Another explanation concerns the implications of the war for the Chichimeca territorial claim. As the king of all Tolteca, Nauhyotl represents their collective voice. His refusal to recognize Xolotl as his superior implies that the vassalage agreements allegedly established with each group of Tolteca refugees were essentially annulled. Consequently, it appears as though Xolotl merely usurped the right of the former owner and that his title as "lord and monarch of all the land" never received proper recognition. This also undermines the legitimacy of the land distributions that had occurred up to that point, since it is problematic to parcel disputed property to a third party. Presumably, Alva Ixtlilxochitl circumvented these complexities by persuading the reader that the question of ownership had been thoroughly and definitively resolved prior to the arrival of the Acolhua through victory in war.

The Chichimeca–Culhua war not only created a challenge but also provided a resolution to the longstanding tension between the two ethnic groups and the lingering uncertainty over the Chichimeca claim to regional hegemony. The defeat of the Culhua effectively amounted to a hypothetical conquest of the Tolteca empire, a scenario that could not be realized at the time of the Chichimeca land occupation. The scattered Tolteca had reunited into a kingdom under

Nauhyotl, who legitimized his lineage through the marriage of his daughter to the heir of Topiltzin. In the *Historia*, Alva Ixtlilxochitl underscores that the Tolteca had Nauhyotl as their "main head" [cabeza principal], and that his response to the Chichimeca demand for tribute was made "in the name of all the rest of his nation" [en nombre de todos los demás de su nación] (2:15). Therefore, by overcoming Nauhyotl, Xolotl conquered the entire Tolteca world.

This event represents the definitive surrender of any potential or actual rights the Tolteca, as the former owners of the territory, might have still possessed. However, this alone could not ensure the legitimacy of the claim the Chichimeca laid to such a right; rather, it still called for an examination of whether the grounds on which they waged war on the Culhua were justifiable. In the *Sumaria relación*, Alva Ixtlilxochitl attempts to provide such grounds, and the old vassalage contract between Xolotl and the Tolteca refugees played a key role in this justification. The description of Nauhyotl's response as "insolent" implies a transgression committed through his words. Accordingly, the defeat of the Culhua assumes a punitive nature. This suggests that Nopaltzin and Nauhyotl were not on equal footing; rather, the former occupied a superior juridical position that allowed him to penalize the latter for his offense. The inclusion of the phrase "false idols" in Nauhyotl's remark further underscores such a punitive framework. According to Alva Ixtlilxochitl, the Chichimeca worshipped only the sun and Mother Earth (2:19), thus being less idolatrous than the Acolhua or the Tolteca. The implicit link between the sin of idolatry and war as punishment serves a rhetorical purpose. By mentioning "false idols," Alva Ixtlilxochitl aims to cast the Culhua in a negative light and to tip the scale of justice toward the Chichimeca.

Regarding the viewpoint on the justice of war, the *Historia* departs significantly from the *Sumaria relación*. It is important to recall that in the *Historia*, Xolotl did not attempt to establish

any contractual relationship with Tolteca "families" but merely allowed them to remain within his territory. Consequently, the juridical inequality between the Chichimeca and the Tolteca—which the *Sumaria relación* presupposes on the basis of vassalage agreements—is not present in the *Historia*. Instead, it adopts a more impartial, and even relativistic, approach.

Most notably, Alva Ixtlilxochitl modifies Nauhyotl's speech, portraying his resistance as rooted in reason and sound judgment. When required to pay tribute to Xolotl as the "supreme and universal lord of this land" [supremo y universal señor que era de esta tierra], the Tolteca king claimed that the land had belonged to his ancestors, who had never recognized any foreign authority (2:15). The legacy thus inherited by the Culhua is encapsulated in the word "freedom" [libertad]: "They, though few and almost extinct, intended to maintain their freedom and to recognize only the sun and their other gods" [ellos, aunque eran pocos y estaban acabados, pretendían guardar su libertad y no reconocer a nadie, sino tan solamente al sol y a los demás sus dioses] (2:16). At first glance, this may appear to be a rhetorically expanded version of the same attitude expressed in the *Sumaria relación*. However, Nauhyotl's words now come across as reasonable and even righteous, rather than "insolent." The *Sumaria relación* insinuates that Nauhyotl became rebellious due to his conceited confidence in the growing strength of the Tolteca. In the *Historia*, by contrast, the same figure admits modestly that the Tolteca had already been destroyed and that only a few of them remained. Despite being aware that the Chichimeca would easily overpower them, the Culhua nonetheless decided to exercise their right to autonomy.

The potential for religious censure against the Culhua is also diminished in the *Historia*. Besides the omission of the phrase "false idols," it is noteworthy that Alva Ixtlilxochitl specifies the sun among the gods revered by the Culhua. As mentioned earlier, it is stated elsewhere in the

Historia that the Chichimeca also worshipped the sun, alongside Mother Earth. Given that the two ethnic groups shared the same principal deity, religious differences between them are reduced. These changes likely did not occur because Alva Ixtlilxochitl obtained new information after completing the *Sumaria relación*; rather, they reflect a shift in his perspective. The *Sumaria relación* provides a detailed account of Tolteca religion. Among the major "idols" the Tolteca worshipped—including Tlaloc, Tezcatlipoca, and Huitzilopochtli—the first mentioned is "Tonacateuhtli," described as the "god of sustenance" [dios del sustento], with his wife also revered as a goddess (1:272–273). Alva Ixtlilxochitl notes that this divine couple was represented as the sun and the moon, and that atop the highest pyramid dedicated to the sun in Teotihuacan—referred to by him as "this town" [este pueblo]—stood a figure of "Tonacateuhtli." This preeminent position of a deity closely linked to the sun among all other Tolteca "idols" was thus already familiar to Alva Ixtlilxochitl during the writing of the *Sumaria relación*. The *Historia* offers the same essential information but in a much more condensed form: "They [the Tolteca] considered the sun and the moon as their particular gods" [Tenían por particulares dioses al sol y a la luna] (2:13). Therefore, when rewriting Nauhyotl's response in the *Historia*, Alva Ixtlilxochitl shifted the emphasis from portraying the Culhua as merely "idolaters" to highlighting that they, like the Chichimeca of Xolotl, deified the sun as their most important divinity.

Similarly, the unfolding of subsequent events in the *Historia* appears more free from a punitive framework. The *Sumaria relación* reports that Nopaltzin declared war on Nauhyotl, obviously offended upon hearing his response, while the *Historia* presents Xolotl as the one who, after thoughtful deliberation, decided to turn to armed conflict as a last measure, sending a "reasonable" [razonable] force, only enough to subdue the enemy:

> And when Xolotl saw his determination, and that by peaceful means they had not wished to yield, he resorted to arms; and thus he dispatched his son, Prince Nopaltzin, with a reasonable army, for little force was needed, since their adversaries, although they gathered as many as they could, were not as advanced in military matters as the Chichimeca. [Y vista por Xólotl su determinación y que por medios de paz no habían querido allanarse, lo remitió a las armas; y así despachó al príncipe Nopaltzin su hijo con razonable ejército, que fue menester poca gente, porque sus contrarios, aunque juntaron toda las más que pudieron, no eran tan aventajados en la milicia como los chichimecas.] (2:16)

There is a notable difference in the terms used to describe Nauhyotl's reaction in the *Sumaria relación* ("insolent response") and in the *Historia* ("determination"). The *Historia* presents his resistance not as arrogance or discourtesy but as a deliberate resolve made on behalf of the Tolteca kingdom. His resolution to defend its autonomy is framed as a rightful exercise of his power as the independent and supreme arbiter of the destiny of his people. In contrast, according to the *Sumaria relación*, as a subordinate to Xolotl, Nauhyotl lacked such authority, and his refusal to pay tribute amounted only to the offense of disobedience.

The question arises as to why Alva Ixtlilxochitl chose to present the same historical event differently. In the *Sumaria relación*, the war waged by the Chichimeca against the Culhua is justified on the basis of previous vassalage contracts between Xolotl and the remaining Tolteca communities. Had Alva Ixtlilxochitl intended primarily to advocate the Chichimeca cause, this punitive approach would have aptly served his purpose. However, in the *Historia*, this war marked the very beginning of such political relations between the two groups. One plausible interpretation is that in the *Historia*, Alva Ixtlilxochitl draws parallels between this event and his own time. In this context, the way the Chichimeca and Tolteca land claims are contrasted mirrors the colonial conflict between Indigenous ancestral rights and Spanish territorial claims.

It is evident that Alva Ixtlilxochitl adopted in the *Historia* a more sympathetic view toward the Culhua than in the *Sumaria relación*. This shift in perspective was likely informed by his recognition of a correspondence between the circumstances faced by Nauhyotl and those confronting local hereditary elites under colonial rule. Spaniards came to view thinly populated areas with isolated households as freely available for appropriation. However, such claims to "empty space" were contested by those whose properties were at stake, including the Ixtlilxochitl family. In the *Historia*, Alva Ixtlilxochitl portrays the Tolteca survivors as private individuals, implying that the territory lacked recognized ownership at the time of the Chichimeca arrival. Yet through the character of Nauhyotl, the author articulates the Tolteca standpoint: although a significant portion of their former domain had been temporarily left unoccupied due to demographic decline, this did not nullify their original claims, which they had never relinquished. The legitimate authority of the former empire was now restored through the king of Culhuacan, and all its rights passed to him. The Chichimeca occupation of Tolteca territory thus appears as an unlawful infringement, comparable to Spanish encroachments upon Indigenous lands after the conquest.

For the Chichimeca who migrated into the former Tolteca territory, the first condition for legitimately settling the area was the elevation of their leader, Xolotl, as "supreme and universal lord of this land." What was crucial about this title was the superior jurisdiction it asserted over the Chichimeca and all other groups, especially the surviving heirs of the Tolteca empire. Inseparable from such a declaration of political authority was the demarcation of territory. These two dimensions were, in fact, logically inseparable aspects of a single act: to claim lordship over a land necessarily entailed defining the land over which that lordship extended. Once this territorial boundary was established, land within it could be apportioned and held collectively

and individually. In other words, the geographical extent of the Chichimeca ruler's dominion coincided with the area that could be accessed and controlled by the Chichimeca as a collective. The establishment of sovereignty thus constituted the precondition for collective ownership, or, more precisely, sovereignty may be understood as the political–juridical expression of that collective ownership. Nauhyotl, however, speaking in the name of all the Tolteca, refused to recognize Xolotl's supremacy, a refusal that made armed conflict inevitable. It was therefore through their victory over the Culhua that the Chichimeca secured not only sovereignty over the Tolteca territory but also legitimate claims of ownership. This event, in which both public authority and property rights emerged simultaneously, serves as a mirror reflecting the Spanish conquest of Mexico.

In Alva Ixtlilxochitl's own time, private Spanish estates continued to expand with the backing of a colonial state that formally recognized Indigenous rights and presented itself as their protector. Policies such as *congregación* displaced Indigenous communities from their ancestral settlements and reassigned the vacated lands to Spanish settlers. Although Indigenous land titles were acknowledged to predate colonization—and thus, in principle, to take precedence even over the Crown's claims—they were repeatedly subjected to verification and litigation in colonial courts, a process that steadily eroded their theoretical priority. The authority of this judicial system rested on Spanish sovereignty, which itself was established through the military subjugation of pre-Hispanic societies. To Alva Ixtlilxochitl, the conquest must therefore have appeared as the ultimate legal foundation for Spanish property rights over Indigenous lands. His interpretation in the *Historia* of the Chichimeca territorial occupation should thus be understood both as a product of changing social conditions and as an intellectual effort to make sense of those transformations.



Figure 1.2. Codex Xolotl, Plate 2. Photo courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Table 1.2. Narrative Segments of Codex Xolotl, Plate 2

CODE	NARRATIVE SEGMENTS
2Aa–d	Genealogies of the Tolteca rulers.
2B	Nopaltzin marries a daughter of Pochotl and has three sons.
2C	Three Acolhua groups arrive in the Basin of Mexico.
2Da–c	Settlements and genealogies of the Acolhua rulers.
2Ea–d	Settlements and genealogies of the Chichimeca rulers.
2F	Nopaltzin returns to Tetzcoco from an expedition to speak with Xolotl.
2G	An enclosed hunting ground is built near Tetzcoco.
2H	Nopaltzin's three sons depart to settle in their assigned territories.
2I	Settlement and genealogy of Tlotzin, a son of Nopaltzin.
2J	Nopaltzin and Nauhyotl engage in battle.
2K	Xolotl appoints Achitometl as ruler of Culhuacan.
2L	Tlacotzin, the son of the Acolhua ruler in Coatlichan (2Dc), speaks with Xolotl.
2M	Chichimeca groups in Tepetlaoztoc pay tribute to Huetzin, Tlacotzin's son.

1.4 Conclusion

In colonial Mexico, Indigenous land titles established before the conquest were recognized as legitimate. However, in the late sixteenth century, especially after the great epidemic of 1567–1577, Spaniards portrayed areas left uncultivated due to the decline in the Indigenous population as unclaimed and newly available for occupation. This was because, in theory, such deserted lands fell under the Crown's ownership and thus could be legally allocated to settlers. Alva Ixtlilxochitl engaged with this discourse through his interpretations of pre-Hispanic events depicted in the first two plates of the Codex Xolotl, specifically the Chichimeca occupation of the Tolteca territory and the war with the Culhua.

In the *Historia*, the author frames this conflict between the two ethnic groups as a clash between claims to free space and claims to ancestral titles. This approach allows for a parallel to be drawn with disputes over Indigenous property. When viewed in the context of the legal dynamics of his time, the narrative of the Chichimeca–Culhua war reveals that the Spanish dispossession of Indigenous lands was not founded in their purported emptiness, as often claimed in colonial discourse. Instead, Alva Ixtlilxochitl presents the conquest of Mexico as the

foundational event that established both Spanish sovereignty and the collective ownership of all Spaniards over its territories.

Chapter 2 Mirroring Empires: Narratives of Identity and Violence in Alvarado Tezozomoc

Hernando de Alvarado Tezozomoc, author of the *Crónica mexicana* (1598) in Spanish and the *Crónica mexicáyotl* (1609) in Nahuatl, occupies a distinctive position in Mexican historiography. As Germán Vázquez Chamorro observes, although Alvarado Tezozomoc is frequently mentioned in scholarly literature—often briefly and almost as a matter of obligation—sustained studies of his work remain remarkably scarce (27, 27n24). This neglect, Vázquez Chamorro suggests, is largely due to the textual complexity of his writings as well as the paucity of reliable information about his life.

The limited biographical details known about Alvarado Tezozomoc derive from three principal sources. First, the *Crónica mexicáyotl* identifies him as the fourth child of doña Francisca de Moteuczoma, the youngest daughter of Moteuczoma Xocoyotl, and don Diego de Alvarado Huanitzin, a member of the same royal lineage who had served as *tlatoani* of Ecatepec at the time of the Spanish invasion and was later elected *tlatoani* of Tenochtitlan (Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, *Codex* 164, 168). Second, Domingo de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin records a dance procession held at the viceregal palace on February 15, 1600, during which Alvarado Tezozomoc impersonated Moteuczoma Xocoyotl (*Annals* 66). Third, Alvarado Tezozomoc appears as one of three witnesses in a genealogical document concerning doña Francisca de Guzmán dated 1610 (Reyes García 35).

Vázquez Chamorro further argues that the complexity of the language employed in the *Crónica mexicana* has hindered its scholarly reception (44). He links this complexity to the

challenges Alvarado Tezozomoc faced in adapting Nahuatl oral traditions to Spanish linguistic and discursive conventions. According to Vázquez Chamorro, the text underwent a "double process of translation" [doble proceso de traducción]—first from orality to writing, and then from Nahuatl to Spanish—which resulted in a partial loss of original meanings and cultural values embedded in the source traditions (41).[1]

By contrast, Salvador Velazco emphasizes the resilience and adaptability of colonized culture, rather than its loss, and highlights Alvarado Tezozomoc's active role in the rearticulation of Mexica identity. While acknowledging the same "double process of translation," Velazco argues that Indigenous elements persist beneath Western forms of representation: "Nahua orality is what drives the narrative machine" [la oralidad nahua es la que mueve la máquina narrativa] (266). This underlying orality sustains the ethnic pride of the Mexica that Alvarado Tezozomoc sought to preserve through historical writing. Central to this pride was the imperial ideology of sacred war, which fused military expansion with devotion to the Mexica tutelary deity, Huitzilopochtli (Velazco 200). Although Alvarado Tezozomoc consistently condemns pre-Hispanic religious practices from an orthodox Christian standpoint—a posture that Manuel Orozco y Berra attributes to fear of colonial censorship (159)—Velazco contends that this adoption of the dominant perspective exceeded mere self-protection. Instead, it constituted an exploration of a new colonial identity, one in which Alvarado Tezozomoc negotiated Christian belief with his pride as a Mexica descendant committed to recovering and revaluing his cultural inheritance (Velazco 204–205).

In studying a colonial text such as the *Crónica mexicana*, which emerged from the synthesis of heterogeneous cultural traditions, it is crucial to identify the influence of each. Yet

[1] All translations of Spanish quotations in this chapter are my own.

simply distinguishing Indigenous from European elements is insufficient to engage fully with the central concern of the *Crónica mexicana* as framed by Salvador Velazco: the cultivation of ethnic pride and the exploration of identity. What remains to be explained is why ethnic pride was demanded at this specific historical moment. What function did this demand serve within the political landscape of the Mexica community? And why did this particular construction of identity, rather than another, generate pride? The issue, in other words, is not the cultural components themselves but what this constructed identity communicated to community members about their distinctiveness and perceived superiority. As Velazco rightly notes, at the core of Mexica ethnic pride lay devotion to Huitzilopochtli and a commitment to militaristic expansion. Mexica cultural identity was therefore inseparable from a political identity grounded in imperial ambition.

In the nineteenth century, Orozco y Berra alluded to the theoretical existence of a Nahuatl written history used by Alvarado Tezozomoc (162–163). This anonymous manuscript, likely authored by a Mexica writer, is thought to have served as the basis not only for the *Crónica mexicana* but also for two other Spanish-language adaptations. The first is the Jesuit Juan de Tovar's *Relación del origen de los indios que habitan esta Nueva España según sus historias*, commonly known as the Codex Ramírez after its discoverer, José Fernando Ramírez. The date of its composition remains uncertain. The second is the Dominican Diego Durán's *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España e islas de tierra firme* (1581). These observations were refined in the twentieth century by Robert H. Barlow, who argued that only Durán's *Historia* and the *Crónica mexicana* are direct derivatives of this lost source, which he famously designated "Chronicle X." Since then, scholars have attempted to reconstruct Chronicle X through comparative analysis of these Spanish adaptations. More recently, it has been suggested that portions of the *Crónica*

mexicáyotl—also attributed to Alvarado Tezozomoc—belong to the same narrative tradition and may constitute the closest surviving equivalent, or even a verbatim transcription, of Chronicle X, given its composition in Nahuatl.

This chapter therefore expands the scope beyond the *Crónica mexicana* to examine the two other texts associated with Chronicle X—the *Historia* and the *Crónica mexicáyotl*—and to explore how each version articulates different demands for identity through distinct interpretive frameworks. Durán writes from a position of external authority, producing ostensibly "truthful" knowledge about the colonized while simultaneously constructing the Indigenous Other through stereotypical representations. By contrast, in the *Crónica mexicáyotl*, Alvarado Tezozomoc asserts the internal authority of his community to interpret its own past, with the aim of preserving cultural identity and reaffirming claims to the ancestral territory of Tenochtitlan. Durán relies heavily on biblical paradigms, portraying the Mexica as analogous to the Israelites of the Exodus—a framework readily legible to a European readership. This depiction of the Mexica as a people both cursed and chosen by God functioned ambiguously: it not only legitimized colonial violence but also enabled identification with the Spaniards as builders of a Christian empire. A close reading of the *Crónica mexicáyotl* reveals a distinctive emphasis on ethnic agency and pride, dimensions that Durán's adaptations tend to obscure or dilute. At the same time, this comparison underscores a shared logic in Mexica and Spanish self-understanding: both imagined themselves as empires whose power inspired fear through the morally unrestrained exercise of violence.

2.1 Chronicle X and Philological Considerations

In 1945, Barlow proposed that five sixteenth-century historical writings derive from a single, now-lost common source, which he termed Chronicle X: José de Acosta's *Historia*

natural y moral de las Indias (Book 7), the Tovar Manuscript, the Codex Ramírez, Durán's *Historia*, and Alvarado Tezozomoc's *Crónica mexicana*. While affinities among these texts had been noted by Mexican scholars since the nineteenth century, it was Barlow who simplified the problem by reducing the number of works under consideration. The Tovar Manuscript—first brought to scholarly attention by the English collector Thomas Phillipps—and the Codex Ramírez are essentially identical texts attributed to Tovar. Tovar drew on Durán, and Acosta in turn relied on Tovar. Thus, only two texts—Durán's *Historia* and Alvarado Tezozomoc's *Crónica mexicana*—can be considered direct derivatives of the original source, neither dependent on the other. Barlow concludes that Chronicle X was composed by an Indigenous author, written in Nahuatl using Latin characters, and originally accompanied by pictorial elements that later inspired the illustrations in both the Codex Ramírez and Durán's manuscript.

The Tovar Manuscript preserves two letters exchanged between Tovar and Acosta that shed light on how Chronicle X entered the possession of Spanish clerics. Martín Enríquez de Almanza, viceroy of New Spain from 1568 to 1580, ordered the collection of Indigenous historical records concerning the antiquity of Mexico, Tetzcoco, and Tula, and entrusted Tovar both with custody of this archive and with the task of composing an account for the king. Confronted with the difficulty of interpreting these materials—especially their hieroglyphs—Tovar consulted learned individuals from the three communities and, with their assistance, composed his chronicle. The original manuscript was subsequently lost by the person charged with its duplication. Undeterred, Tovar managed to fulfill his commission by relying on his memory and on a book written by "a Dominican friar" [un frayle Dominico], whose version was "the most consistent with the old archive" [el mas conforme a la libreria antigua] (qtd. in Barlow 26). Barlow argues that the "Dominican friar" whose work served as the foundation for Tovar's

second project—preserved today in the Tovar Manuscript and the Codex Ramírez—was in fact Durán. Durán's *Historia* is divided into three treatises: the first, devoted to Mexica history, was completed in 1581, while the remaining two—on the pre-Hispanic calendar and religious rituals—were finalized in 1578. It was this first treatise that Tovar used in his recomposition and that corresponds to the source material shared with Alvarado Tezozomoc. Chronicle X, therefore, must have been accessible to Spanish historians sometime after Enríquez's arrival in New Spain and no later than 1581.

The near-unanimous consensus that Alvarado Tezozomoc authored the *Crónica mexicana* in 1598 rests on annotations by Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora and Lorenzo Boturini Benaduci.[2] The oldest surviving copy—aside from the lost original—surfaced in 1969, when the American bookseller Hans Peter Kraus donated it to the Library of Congress (Manuscript 117). This document had formed part of Sigüenza y Góngora's archive, later bequeathed to the Jesuits at the Colegio de San Pedro y San Pablo in Mexico City, before passing into Boturini's possession. His arrest in 1743 led to the confiscation of his collection, known as the *Museo histórico indiano*. A copy produced in 1755 by Mariano Fernández de Echeverría y Veytia, now preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Manuscript 207), served as the basis for all subsequent transcriptions made at the end of the eighteenth century.[3]

The most noticeable difference between the Kraus manuscript and its subsequent replicas lies in the numbering of chapters and folios. The *Crónica mexicana* originally comprised a total of 112 chapters spread across 160 leaves. In the Kraus manuscript, however, folios 4 and 5 are

[2] For detailed evidence concerning the authorship and the date of composition of the *Crónica mexicana*, see Kruell, "La *Crónica mexicáyotl*" 213–214.

[3] For an overview of the textual tradition of the *Crónica mexicana* and the history of the Kraus manuscript, see Díaz Migoyo 11–21.

missing, resulting in the loss of the latter part of Chapter 3, all of Chapter 4, and the beginning of Chapter 5. The descendants of the Kraus manuscript exhibit the same textual gap without acknowledging the omission, transforming the end of Chapter 5 into the conclusion of Chapter 3. The following chapters were renumbered accordingly—Chapter 6 became Chapter 4, Chapter 7 became Chapter 5, and so forth (Díaz Migoyo 16).[4] Additionally, Rocío Cortés identifies another narrative gap within Chapter 3, specifically between the twelfth and thirteenth lines of folio 3 verso in the Kraus manuscript (150).

The unconventional Spanish of the *Crónica mexicana* complicates the question of its authorship. Some scholars attribute this linguistic peculiarity to the Nahuatl origin of the text. Mario Mariscal suggests that it was initially written by Alvarado Tezozomoc in Nahuatl and later translated, either by the author himself or, more plausibly, by another contemporary figure (qtd. in Díaz Migoyo 23). Gonzalo Díaz Migoyo proposes an alternative scenario in which Alvarado Tezozomoc dictated his Spanish version to a scribe (24). Both hypotheses posit the involvement of a second individual to account for the orthographic errors found in Nahuatl terms.[5] Given the author's impeccable command of Nahuatl in his other work, the *Crónica mexicáyotl*, such irregularities appear unlikely and are better explained by the intervention of someone with limited proficiency in the language.[6]

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[4] In contrast, Cortés maintains that the reassignment of chapters occurred during the copying of Veytia's version, which preserved the original numbering (150).

[5] Kruell observes that linguistic inaccuracies in the *Crónica mexicana* are not limited to Nahuatl vocabulary or orthography but also include misinterpretations of Nahuatl phrases ("La *Crónica mexicáyotl*" 222–223).

[6] Extending this line of argument, Kruell contends that Tezozomoc's role in the production of the *Crónica mexicana* was confined to the composition of its source, Chronicle X, while another individual—bilingual and possibly of Spanish origin—served not only as its translator but also as its annotator ("La *Crónica mexicáyotl*" 215–216, 222, 224). According to this hypothesis, the divergences between the *Crónica mexicana* and the *Crónica mexicáyotl* result from the interventions of this unidentified contributor, who both enriched the narrative with supplementary material and introduced inaccuracies stemming from limited Nahuatl competence. I argue, however, that the *Crónica mexicana* also exhibits nuanced differences in interpretive perspective when compared to the *Crónica*

However, the authorship of the *Crónica mexicáyotl* remains contested. Alternative views recognize only a partial contribution from Alvarado Tezozomoc or even attribute the entire work to another Indigenous historian, Chimalpahin. The root of this debate lies in the fact that the sole extant version of the text is an annotated transcription produced by Chimalpahin. Initially held by Sigüenza y Góngora, the document later passed to Boturini, whose copy—now lost—served as the basis for the manuscript preserved at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Manuscript 311). Chimalpahin's original transcription, apparently separated from the rest of Boturini's archive, entered the collection of the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1827, before being transferred to the Cambridge University Library. In 1983, Wayne Ruwet identified three volumes of manuscripts (Manuscript 374), the third of which consists largely of Chimalpahin's materials, including the *Crónica mexicáyotl*. This volume was published in 1997 by Arthur J. O. Anderson and Susan Schroeder under the title *Codex Chimalpahin*.[7]

The text of the *Crónica mexicáyotl* is primarily structured into three sections. The first part (folios 18 and 19) serves as an introduction, in which Alvarado Tezozomoc provides his name, the year of composition, and his sources. Marking the end of this introductory section, a cross precedes the Nahuatl phrase, "Beginning of the Account" [tlatolpeuhcayotl]. This is followed by the Spanish line, "Here Begins the Chronicle of Mexica Antiquity" [Aqui comiença La chronica, y Antiguedad De los Mexicanos]. The chronicle then opens with the sentence: "Behold, here begins the Chronicle of the Mexica altepetl" [Ycatqui Nican ompehua yn chronica Mexicáyotl] (Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, *Codex* 64–65). Following a summary of

mexicáyotl, and that its distinctive insights are not the work of an external mediator but rather originate from someone deeply embedded in Mexica culture, such as Alvarado Tezozomoc.

[7] For the textual tradition of the *Crónica mexicáyotl*, see León xxvii; Schroeder 238–239; Peperstraete and Kruell 315–317.

Mexica history from a Christian perspective (folios 20 recto to 20 verso), the text transitions into the second part (folios 20 verso to 24 recto). This section contains a Nahuatl account collected from a mestizo named Alonso Franco, who died in 1602, narrating the events spanning twelve years after the departure of the Mexica from their place of origin, Aztlan. The narrative then continues into the third and most substantial part (folios 24 recto to 63 recto), which recounts the Mexica migration, the founding of Tenochtitlan, the establishment of the dynasty, and the genealogy of the royal house, together with other historical events leading up to the year 1579.

Several passages are inserted throughout this final section in order to modify information presented in the original text or to supplement it with additional details (Peperstraete and Kruell 333–334). Notably, on folios 29 verso and 30 verso, Chimalpahin records his own name, attributing such interventions to himself. In her introduction to *Codex Chimalpahin* (1997), Schroeder acknowledges that Chimalpahin incorporated "Tezozomoc's eloquent personal history" so extensively that large portions of the work consist of verbatim excerpts from it (10). In a later study published in 2011, however, Schroeder argues that by inscribing his name in the aforementioned passages, Chimalpahin was not merely identifying himself as an annotator but asserting authorship over the entire text. She further contends that folios 18 and 19, previously understood as the introduction to the *Crónica mexicáyotl*, in fact belong to the preceding Spanish text contained in the third volume of the Bible Society manuscript, "Historia o crónica mexicana," and thus that Alvarado Tezozomoc authored not the former but the latter.

Sylvie Peperstraete and Gabriel Kenrick Kruell, however, reject this argument as "untenable" (321). First, it is more reasonable to assume that an introductory section would precede, rather than follow, the main body of the text. Moreover, because the "Historia o crónica mexicana" is written in Spanish and separated from the subsequent Nahuatl text by a completely

blank leaf (folio 17), it is more plausible to interpret folios 18 and 19—written by Alvarado Tezozomoc—as the preface to the *Crónica mexicáyotl*. Peperstraete and Kruell maintain that the author of the "Historia o crónica mexicana" was Chimalpahin. The text was composed in 1621, as indicated by the author himself on folio 6 recto (Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, *Codex* 36), a date that, according to Peperstraete and Kruell, is "too late for Tezozomoc" (321–322). Even if Alvarado Tezozomoc were born as late as 1542—a year after the death of his father, don Diego Huanitzin—he would have been approaching his eightieth year by 1621. Peperstraete and Kruell further identify several direct quotations embedded in the text, drawn unmistakably from other sixteenth- and seventeenth-century works to which Chimalpahin is known to have had access.

Further evidence in support of Alvarado Tezozomoc as the author of the *Crónica mexicáyotl* lies in its striking resemblance to the *Crónica mexicana*. The narrative of the *Crónica mexicáyotl*, spanning folios 24 recto to 40 verso, recounts the early history of the Mexica up to the election of the first Tenochca ruler, Acamapichtli, and closely parallels the corresponding accounts in Durán's *Historia* and the *Crónica mexicana* (Peperstraete and Kruell 328). This close correspondence suggests that the *Crónica mexicáyotl* derives from the same source as these two Spanish adaptations of Chronicle X.[8] Given that the *Crónica mexicáyotl* is written in Nahuatl—the language in which Barlow argued that Chronicle X was composed—Peperstraete and Kruell propose that these folios may constitute a verbatim transcription of Chronicle X (329). In "La *Crónica mexicáyotl*," Kruell further contends that Alvarado Tezozomoc was not merely a copyist of Chronicle X but its original author, having completed it no later than 1581, the year in which

[8] Kruell acknowledges earlier scholarship noting the close relationship between the *Crónica mexicáyotl* and Chronicle X, including Riese 214, Cortés 152–153, Peperstraete 50–51, and Castañeda de la Paz, "El Códice X" 193–195 ("Resucitando la *Crónica X*" 303–304).

Durán finished his work, and that in 1609, for reasons that remain unclear, he recreated Chronicle X by adding a new introduction.[9]

However, as noted by Cortés, the *Crónica mexicáyotl* diverges from the Chronicle X tradition after folio 40, shifting toward genealogical accounts of the Tenochca rulers (157). This stylistic and thematic shift coincides with a textual lacuna. An exhortation addressed by the Mexica to Acamapichtli during his installation breaks off abruptly at the end of folio 40 verso and is followed immediately, on folio 41 recto, by an account of Acamapichtli's grandsons. One would normally expect information about Acamapichtli's children and their spouses to precede any mention of his grandchildren. On this basis, the third part of the *Crónica mexicáyotl* can be divided into two subsections: folios 24 recto to 40 verso and folios 41 recto to 63 recto (Peperstraete and Kruell 331). Paul Kirchhoff already observed this abrupt transition and attributed it to a change in authorship, assigning the first subsection to Alvarado Tezozomoc and the second to Chimalpahin.[10] Echoing this position, Kruell argues that Chimalpahin transcribed only part of the original *Crónica mexicáyotl* and subsequently integrated the second subsection as a composition of his own ("Resucitando la *Crónica X*" 304–305).

Peperstraete and Kruell's hypothesis makes it possible to reconstruct Chronicle X for the portion corresponding to the first subsection of the *Crónica mexicáyotl*. Kruell undertakes such a reconstruction in "Resucitando la *Crónica X*" by excising Chimalpahin's interventions. This approach would allow us to identify and contrast the interpretive variations present in Durán's *Historia* and the *Crónica mexicana*, using the *Crónica mexicáyotl* as a baseline for comparison.

[9] The hypothesis that Alvarado Tezozomoc authored Chronicle X was first advanced by José Rubén Romero Galván, as noted by Kruell (Romero Galván 105; Kruell, "La *Crónica mexicáyotl*" 203). Vázquez Chamorro likewise argues that the parallelism between the *Crónica mexicana* and the *Crónica mexicáyotl* supports Alvarado Tezozomoc's authorship of Chronicle X (47).
[10] For a counterargument to Kirchhoff's conclusion, see Romero Galván 146–147.

However, there is no conclusive evidence to establish textual identity between the *Crónica mexicáyotl* and *Chronicle X*. It therefore remains possible that Alvarado Tezozomoc altered Chronicle X in the process of composing the *Crónica mexicáyotl* in 1609. If this is the case, we are left comparing three distinct versions of Chronicle X.

In this chapter, I argue that the *Crónica mexicáyotl* constitutes a reinterpretation of Chronicle X in its own right, regardless of whether the former preserves the latter verbatim. Even if one assumes complete identity between the two, a central question remains: what prompted Alvarado Tezozomoc to reproduce the text while adding an explicit statement of authorship? Beyond any deliberate intention, it is also necessary to consider the shifting social and intellectual context in which the work was produced. Within this context, and from the perspective introduced in the 1609 introduction, the same text acquires meanings that differ from those of the original. Accordingly, my analysis treats the *Crónica mexicáyotl* not only as the source from which the two Spanish adaptations derive but also as the latest reworking of Chronicle X.

2.2 The Question of Identity and Historiography

Both the *Historia* and the *Crónica mexicáyotl* feature introductory sections that shed light on their respective processes of creation. Durán offers detailed insights into his engagement with Indigenous sources and the distinct viewpoint that informed his composition. This is particularly observable in Chapter 1, which the author begins by articulating the goal of his account:

> In order to deal with the certain and true account of the origin and beginning of these Indian nations . . . it will be necessary to approach suspicions and conjectures, given the excessive occasion that these people provide us through their very base way and manner of communicating, and through their discourse so low, so proper to that of the Jews, that we could ultimately affirm that they are naturally Jews and Hebrew people, and I believe

> that whoever affirmed it would not incur a capital error, if one considers their way of living, their ceremonies, their rites and superstitions, their auguries and hypocrisies, so closely related and proper to those of the Jews; to prove this, Sacred Scripture will bear witness, from which we will draw that this opinion is true, along with some sufficient reasons that we will provide. [Para tratar de la cierta y verdadera relacion del origen y principio destas naciones indianas . . . será necesario llegarnos á las sospechas y conjeturas, á la demasiada ocasion que esta gente nos da con su bajísimo modo y manera de tratar, y de su conversacion tan baja, tan propia á la de los judíos, que podriamos ultimamente afirmar ser naturalmente judíos y gente hebrea, y creo no incurriria en capital error el que lo afirmase, si considerado su modo de vivir, sus cerimonias, sus ritos y supersticiones, sus agüeros y hipocresías, tan emparentadas y propias de las de los judíos, para probacion de lo cual será testigo la Sagrada Escriptura, donde sacaremos ser verdadera esta opinion, y algunas razones bastantes que para ello daremos.] (1)

Durán reveals two guiding principles for his approach. The first hinges on the assumption that Indigenous peoples may not be best positioned to provide an accurate account of their ancestry, due to their rudimentary discourse and conversational skills. Such perceived limitations underscore the need for a speculative method used by an outsider, like Durán, whose Christianity and rational thinking make him more suited for the task. The second principle posits that the true origins of Indigenous populations become clearer when integrated into a biblical framework, suggesting that their lineage traces back to the Jews—specifically the ten lost tribes of Israel taken captive by the Assyrians (2). To support this theory, parallels are drawn between the two groups, not only in the primitive manners of recounting their pasts but also in their shared customs, with an emphasis on religious practices.

Durán exhibits a clear double standard when filtering his Indigenous sources through a biblical lens. While certain origin stories, such as their emergence from seven caves, are readily dismissed as mere fabrications, other narratives are eagerly embraced as decisive proof that

Indigenous people preserve memories of their Jewish ancestors. In particular, narratives of the Mexica migration are understood as retellings of events from the Exodus. Durán seeks further evidence to reinforce his theory in the prophecies that God made to the tribes of Israel. The prophecy that they would be numerous as the "sands of the sea" [arenas de la mar] was fulfilled in the New World, which had been densely populated until conquest and disease drastically reduced the number of its inhabitants (2). Durán interprets this demographic collapse as the predestined punishment for their recurring descent into idolatry and wicked deeds. In his view, the Spaniards were guided to these lands to mete out divine justice. Furthermore, God instilled a deep-seated cowardice in Indigenous people, which caused them to flee before a small troop led by Cortés—a pusillanimity that still evidences itself in their mistrust of the Spaniards and that, in Durán's view, explains their adamant adherence to their old religious practices. From this perspective, all afflictions suffered by Indigenous populations are attributed to their own transgressions.

Durán indicates that his understanding of the distant origins of the Mexica stems from a collection of paintings and oral accounts shared by some elders (2). He laments the challenge of uncovering such a remote past, an already overwhelming task further hindered by the destruction of historical records by early missionaries and the loss of the elders who might have authored these sources (17). Durán positions himself as the one to fill the void left by potential historians of Mexica descent, assuming the responsibility of not only reviving but also enriching the memory of their ancestors through eloquent language.[11] His aim is to counter the misguided

[11] "This blessed homeland has produced sons who, with greater competence, could have revived it and given it life with their clear and refined intellects, so that the ancient praises might endure forever in perpetual memory, adorning them with the beauty of reasoning." [Esta dichosa patria ha procreado hijos que con mas suficiencia lo pudiera auer resucitado y dado vida con sus claros y delicados ingenios, para que las antiguas alabanças turasen para siempre con perpetua memoria, adornándolas con hermosura de raçones] (Durán 18).

perception of the Mexica as savages held by outsiders and instead inspire admiration for their remarkable qualities that contributed to the building of a potent empire, encapsulated as "governance and *policía*, subjection and reverence, grandeur and authority, spirit and strength" [gobierno y policía, sujeción y reverencia, grandeza y autoridad, ánimo y fuerzas] (18).[12]

In "The Other Question," Homi K. Bhabha examines the strategy of colonial discourse used to fix the identity of its Indigenous subjects. Central to this is the stereotype, which "produces the colonized as a social reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible" (70–71). The differences in race and culture are replaced or masked with more familiar categories or objects of knowledge (77). Durán employs the strategy of imposing a fixed position of the Other upon the colonized, establishing an identity inherently split between contradictory beliefs. His stereotypical discourse hinges on the idea that Indigenous populations originated from the lost tribes of Israel. Their alleged Jewish origins serve a dual purpose: acting as a recognizable substitute for racial and cultural differences while simultaneously representing them as a depraved people. The characteristics Durán assigns to both Jews and Indigenous peoples—such as idolatry, superstitions, obstinacy, timidity, and linguistic primitiveness—provide justifications for sustained control and outright colonial violence.

Yet, this stereotype not only places the colonized on the other side of the truth but also demands that they embody the colonizer's idealized self-image. This becomes clear when Durán juxtaposes the Mexica migration and the Exodus. Although the people of Israel were cursed for their breaches of the promises established by God, these covenants were made in return for His divine blessing, distinguishing them as a chosen and holy people among all others. The Book of

[12] For a fuller discussion of *policía* as an early modern concept encompassing social order, governance, and civility, see Chapter 1.

Deuteronomy—one of the biblical references named by Durán—states that the Israelites were not only forbidden to worship idols (Chapter 4) but also tasked with conquering the Canaanites and eradicating their idolatry (Chapter 7). This consciousness of being chosen to carry out divine purposes resonated with the Spaniards as they shaped their Catholic empire in Europe and overseas. Although Durán does not make this link explicit, his praise for the good governance and military power of the Mexica betrays his desire for an image of empire that reflects Spanish aspirations for expansion.

While the conquest of Mexico belonged to a chapter of the past, ongoing evangelization and the epidemic outbreak of 1576 were pressing issues for Durán. The outcomes of the missionary initiatives over five decades proved to be less than satisfactory. Durán blames this failure on Indigenous people, who continued to view the Spaniards with mistrust. In this context, his inquiry into the origins of Indigenous populations seems to echo what Bhabha refers to, in "Sly Civility," as "the colonialist demand for narrative." This demand functions as the colonial form of confession, a "strategy of calculation," which "seeks to dominate the 'calculable' individual by positing the truth that the subject *has* but does not *know*." As colonized subjects resist and remain incalculable, the question addressed to them shifts from "Tell us exactly what happened" to "*Tell us why you, the native, are there*," and finally to "*Tell us why we are here*" (98–100). Bhabha elucidates this process through the lens of paranoia. The colonizer seeks love and acknowledgment from the colonized. However, if the colonized refuse to fulfill this need, the colonizer becomes more assertive in demanding validation for their narcissistic self-image. This frustrated desire then turns into aggression towards the colonized, which, through projection, is then perceived as hatred coming from the colonized towards the colonizer.

Given that, for Durán, the theoretical Jewish ancestry of Indigenous people serves both as their origin and the justification for colonial violence, his exploration of the narrative of where the Mexica came from mirrors a veiled demand for the colonized to justify the Spanish presence. The failure of evangelization and the demographic catastrophe underscore the frustration of colonial ideals of salvation and good governance. In other words, it could be argued that the Spaniards might not have come as redeemers or benefactors but rather as mere agents of destruction and misery. Adopting the lens of paranoia, as suggested by Bhabha, this realization could induce a narcissistic injury, subsequently sparking hatred and aggression towards the colonized. Yet this animosity is projected back in the opposite direction—from the colonized towards the colonizer. Durán's observation of the Indigenous antipathy and skepticism towards the Spaniards exemplifies this final stage of the paranoiac process. While the preceding phase—the underlying aggression from the colonizer—is not overtly disclosed by Durán, I posit that it surfaces in his interpretation of colonial violence as divine retribution. His assertion that Indigenous people deserve their suffering for their own sins and wickedness unmistakably hints at latent aggression towards them.

In the introduction to the *Crónica mexicáyotl*, Alvarado Tezozomoc counters the alienating impacts of colonial discourse exemplified by Durán by defending his Tenochca community's interpretive authority over its narrative and self-understanding. The opening sentence encapsulates the central theme of the chronicle: the journey of the Mexica from their origins in Aztlan and Chicomoztoc to their foundation of Tenochtitlan. While Durán assumed the role of preserving this memory as an outsider, Alvarado Tezozomoc declares it the collective responsibility of the Mexica themselves. Passed down from the ancients, these accounts are to be safeguarded by present and future generations. However, the right of inheritance is not extended

to all members of the nation but is exclusively reserved for the noble lineage of the Tenochca.[13] Alvarado Tezozomoc particularly guards against potential claims from the other Mexica *altepetl*, Tlatelolco: "And as for Tlatelolco: never will [these accounts] be taken from us, for truly they were not only in [the Tlatelolca's] keeping . . . These accounts are indeed in our keeping" [Auh yn tlatilolco ayc ompa ticuililozque ca nel amo ynpiel mochiuhtiuh . . . yn huel topial ynin tlahtolli] (Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, *Codex* 60–63).

Alvarado Tezozomoc employs a spectrum of tactics in a layered manner to validate the information presented in the *Crónica mexicáyotl*. He repeatedly mentions both verbal and inscribed sources,[14] highlighting the accuracy of the written account in his possession by cross-referencing it with the oral traditions received directly from his family elders (Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, *Codex* 64). These informants include his father, don Diego Huanitzin, the first *tlatoani* of postconquest Tenochtitlan; don Pedro Tlacahuepantzin; and don Diego de San Francisco Tehuetzquititzin—who succeeded don Diego Huanitzin (Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, *Codex* 172). By naming these Tenochca rulers, Alvarado Tezozomoc links their political authority to the credibility of his narrative. Further emphasis is placed on the consensus among these esteemed figures about the authenticity of this ancient account. Alvarado

[13] "[W]e shall always guard them . . . we, their descendants, their offspring" [mochipa ticpiezque . . . yn titetlapallohuan yn titeheçohuan] (Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, *Codex* 60–61). Although Anderson and Schroeder translate "yn titetlapallohuan yn titeheçohuan" merely as "we, their descendants, their offspring," it is worth noting that according to Marc Thouvenot's *Diccionario náhuatl-español*, "teezo, tetlapallo" specifically refers to "son or daughter of nobles" [hijo o hija de nobles caballeros] (304).

[14] Alvarado Tezozomoc explicitly separates the two types of sources, spoken ("huehuenenotzaliztlahtolli") and written ("huehuenenotzalizamoxtlacuilolli) (Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, *Codex* 62). The precise meaning of these two Nahuatl compound words is challenging to grasp. Anderson and Schroeder render them as "accounts of the ancient ones" and "book of their accounts," omitting the middle component "nenonotzaliz" in their interpretation (Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, *Codex* 63). In Thouvenot's *Diccionario*, "nenonotzaliztli" is translated as "council, those who gather together, or the act of discussing and deciding something" [cabildo, los mismos que se juntan o el acto de tratar y determinar algo] (212). By incorporating this term, Alvarado Tezozomoc appears to emphasize the notion that these accounts represent a collective agreement, especially among individuals with authority.

Tezozomoc presents himself as the sole survivor of his lineage and keeper of its tradition, thus underscoring his unmatched qualifications to verify his sources. While Durán criticizes his Indigenous informants for their fabricated versions of history, Alvarado Tezozomoc, on the other hand, confidently declares:

> What they [the deceased Tenochca noblemen] have said, what they have set down in their writings, has all come to pass; all is the truth. It is not a lie; they did not just make it up; they did not just create false accounts of what the ancient ones set forth. [yn tleyn oquitotiaque yn tleyn oquitlallitiaque yn imamatlacuilolpan ca mochi mochiuh ca mochi neltiliztli amo yztlacatiliztli amo çan quiyollohuique amo çan quipipicque yn inhuehuetlahtol yn oquitlallitiaque] (Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, *Codex* 62–64)

For Durán, the essential part of historiography lies in discerning truth from the narratives provided by Indigenous sources. Conversely, Alvarado Tezozomoc does not view historical truth as something to be uncovered or decrypted. It is manifest in itself, much like the self-presence of speech enunciated by his family members. It requires no external reference, such as the Bible. The mere fact that the account originated from the revered Tenochca rulers, and that Alvarado Tezozomoc, a direct descendant of their lineage, received and documented it, constitutes authority enough. This narrative is not addressed to outsiders who assume the role of arbiters of truth; rather, it is intended for a tight-knit community, defined by blood ties and a shared historical consciousness.

After identifying his oral informants, including his father, Alvarado Tezozomoc states that "the first Christian neophytes mentioned above . . . indeed knew well how what they arranged was to appear" [yn achto christianosme momachtianime yn tlacpac omoteneuhque yn huel cenca quimatia yn iuh ye onneciz yn iuh oquitecpantiaque] (Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, *Codex* 64–65). Here, the phrase "what they arranged" seemingly refers more

to written or pictorial materials than to oral traditions. This suggests that both types of sources consulted by Alvarado Tezozomoc likely originated from, if not exactly the same individuals, then at least the same social or familial circle, which remained closed to external perspectives and critiques. Importantly, Alvarado Tezozomoc stresses that his informants verbally communicated and reached a collective agreement on their understanding of ancient accounts. These accounts are thus intended to circulate within a cohesive and protective community and to be passed down through successive generations. For Alvarado Tezozomoc, the primary goal of historiography is to preserve interpretive authority within this community, fostering a shared acceptance of a tradition, much like an assembly of individuals speaking in unison.

Our next task is to analyze Alvarado Tezozomoc' intention within the specific context of his era. José Rabasa contrasts European forms of remembering the past with those of Mesoamerica, emphasizing how colonizers extracted Indigenous knowledge for practical purposes of domination and control. They translated the memories of the colonized into narratives familiar to them while simultaneously suppressing their original significations. Rabasa views the *Crónica mexicáyotl*, written in Nahuatl and rooted in a Mesoamerican institution of historical writing, as a response to Durán's *Historia*, which exemplifies the appropriation of Indigenous heritage.

Ivonne del Valle notes that the sense of urgency in a community facing cultural disruption is evident in the introduction to the *Crónica mexicáyotl*. Particularly insightful is her observation that Alvarado Tezozomoc's insistence on maintaining Tenochca heritage is tied to his claim about which group holds rightful ownership of colonial Mexico City. Del Valle contrasts the *Crónica mexicáyotl* with Francisco Cervantes de Salazar's *México en 1554*, a series of Latin dialogues reflecting the Spanish and Creole desire to envision the city devoid of its

Indigenous past, replaced by an idealized urban plan rooted in European intellectual traditions. In response, Alvarado Tezozomoc deliberately emphasizes the connection between the memory of old Tenochtitlan and contemporary Mexico City, thereby asserting the Tenochca's right to the territory. Similar to Cervantes's exclusion of Indigenous elements to reinforce the Spanish identity of the city, Alvarado Tezozomoc depicts the preconquest world as one without internal fissures, silencing the history of oppression against lower social classes and other ethnic groups, including the Tlatelolca. This selective remembrance allows him to attribute the city's legacy solely to the Tenochca elite and their descendants.

Rabasa and del Valle view the *Crónica mexicáyotl* as part of the Tenochca elite's effort to preserve their form—or privilege—of remembering the Mexica past within the colonial context, opposing both the Spaniards and other Indigenous groups. Del Valle, in particular, emphasizes the specific space of Tenochtitlan–Mexico City as the focal point of this politics of memory. However, as previously discussed, Alvarado Tezozomoc had already written the *Crónica mexicana*—its Nahuatl original, if not the present Spanish version. The remaining question, then, is why he felt the need to produce a similar text in 1609, with a new introduction. While details of his personal life remain elusive, the shifting social landscape of this period could help contextualize this decision.

In the first decade of the seventeenth century, the inhabitants of Tenochtitlan experienced two disastrous floods, followed by the Desagüe project to drain the lake system of the Basin of Mexico.[15] Since its foundation on an island within Lake Texcoco, the city had struggled with periodic overflows. As the population grew and land use expanded, water levels and the risk of flooding steadily increased. Under colonial rule, the reconstructed city of Mexico, already

[15] For a brief history of floods in Tenochtitlan since pre-Hispanic times and the 1607–1608 Desagüe, see Mathes.

severely flooded in 1555 and 1580, was again hit by two major floods in 1604 and 1607. Chimalpahin provides a vivid account of the 1607 flood. With only a small portion of land remaining, almost the entire city was submerged. Witnessing their homes flooded, and some even collapsing, the Spaniards panicked and were on the verge of "leaving the altepetl of Mexico Tenochtitlan orphaned" [quicnocavazquia. yn altepetl mexico. tenochtitlan] (Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, *Annals* 98–101). Viceroy Luis de Velasco resorted to imposing fines to deter them. Indigenous people were not exempt from the devastation of flooding, suffering even greater damage to their homes and loss of lives. However, Chimalpahin does not indicate that they intended to abandon the city as their Spanish neighbors did.

Faced with the real threat of the city disappearing underwater, the distinct reactions of the Spanish and Indigenous populations reveal much about their relationships to the place and their intergroup dynamics. This brings into focus a pivotal question about the identity of Mexico City. It was the capital of the first New World viceroyalty and, by the early seventeenth century, might have been one of the most Hispanized cities in the Americas. Yet, when a catastrophe loomed, its Spanish inhabitants seemed ready to abandon it. Does this suggest that the city truly belonged to Indigenous people, who had a stronger bond with it and shared a fate with it? However, as Chimalpahin suggests, it was the Spaniards who had a duty to protect and guide the *altepetl* of Mexico as its parents. Their potential abandonment of it would thus equate to forsaking these responsibilities. After all, what bond could be stronger than that between parents and children?

In discussing the identity of colonial Mexico City, it is pertinent to consider another event recorded by Chimalpahin. According to his account, the year 1608 saw a shift in jurisdiction over the parish of San Sebastián Atzacualco—one of the four wards into which Tenochtitlan was

divided—from the Discalced Carmelites to the Augustinians.[16] This transition met with resistance from Indigenous inhabitants over ownership of the Chapel of San Sebastián. They asserted that, as the structure stood on their land and had been "built by those of old, who were their fathers and grandfathers" [yntlaquetzal yn huehuetque. yn incolhuan yntahuã catca], it should rightfully be their property (Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, *Annals* 108–109). However, their fruitless attempts to reclaim the building eventually led to a lawsuit. While it is impossible to ascertain whether Alvarado Tezozomoc played any role in this event or whether it had any bearing on his composition of the *Crónica mexicáyotl*, it is conceivable that he would have empathized with the sentiments of the Indigenous litigants of Atzacualco. The dispute over the chapel serves as a microcosm of the broader legacy of Tenochtitlan. Although transformed into a center of Spanish governance, filled with many Spanish-style edifices, its foundation was laid on Indigenous soil, and its construction was undertaken by Indigenous hands. Reflecting on the possible departure of the Spaniards, much like the Carmelites abandoned the parish of San Sebastián, one might wonder to whom the colonial city really belonged.

While Tenochtitlan became a possession of the Spanish monarchy after the conquest, this did not erase the deep-rooted sentiment among the Tenochca that the city belonged to them through ancestral rights. I propose that this consciousness echoes in the introduction to the *Crónica mexicáyotl*. Having witnessed the city narrowly escape complete ruin from flooding, Alvarado Tezozomoc recognizes that the Spaniards might forsake it in the face of similar adversities. The legacy of the Tenochca—including the first converts to Christianity, such as his father, don Diego Huanitzin—is entrenched in this land. It is embodied not only in tangible

[16] The transfer of San Sebastián Atzacualco from the Discalced Carmelites to the Augustinians occurred in 1607, a year earlier than the date reported by Chimalpahin (Gibson, *The Aztecs* 373). For a detailed background and unfolding of this event, see Ramírez Méndez.

structures such as church buildings but also in oral traditions and documents passed down through the ages. Alvarado Tezozomoc emphasizes the importance of safeguarding these accounts within the confines of Tenochtitlan. This mandate for future generations underscores their obligation to protect the city itself—both as a territory and a repository of cultural heritage. Even if the Spaniards were to leave someday, the land and ancestral memories preserved on it would eternally remain Tenochca property. It is only through this undying bond to Tenochtitlan that the Tenochca can truly retain their identity.

2.3 The Comparative Analysis of the Narratives

This section extends the discussion on the complex interplay between historiography and identity, with a focus on the unique narrative structure of each text in the Chronicle X tradition in constructing the distinctive character of the Mexica. Durán portrays them as both idolatrous and heroic, aligning with his vision expressed in the introductory remarks of the *Historia*, while the *Crónica mexicáyotl* offers a distinct framework for its narrative of identity formation. Despite this, readers more familiar with European styles of discourse may intuitively gravitate towards the structure of the *Historia*. This familiarity, however, brings a risk: it may overshadow the particular organizing principles of the *Crónica mexicáyotl*, potentially leading to an interpretation of the text through a Europeanized lens. In this context, the *Crónica mexicana* serves a specific purpose: it helps distinguish the framework that Durán may have introduced to the original narrative, allowing us to maintain a critical distance from it.

The first subsection of the *Crónica mexicáyotl*, spanning folios 24 recto through 40 verso, chronicles the Mexica migration from their ancestral home of Aztlan. The narrative can be divided into thirteen segments, beginning with their wandering through Chichimeca lands [1] and their separation from the people of Michoacán at Lake Pátzcuaro [2]. It continues with the

abandonment of Malinalxoch, the sister of Huitzilopochtli [3], followed by a temporary settlement at Coatepec [4]. Upon entering the Basin of Mexico, the Mexica arrive at Chapultepec [5], where Huitzilopochtli confronts Malinalxoch's son [6], and the group endures a siege by hostile *altepetl* [7]. They subsequently settle in Tizaapan, intermarrying with the people of Culhuacan [8], but after sacrificing the daughter of the king of Culhuacan, they are expelled [9]. The Mexica eventually reach the promised land [10], where they establish Tenochtitlan [11]. Later, a faction departs from Tenochtitlan to found Tlatelolco [12], and the narrative concludes with the election of the first Tenochca dynastic ruler [13].

While the *Historia* includes all the episodes listed above, there are two textual gaps in the *Crónica mexicana*: it is first interrupted right after the arrival of the Mexica at Chapultepec, and then resumes with the construction of Tenochtitlan, only to be discontinued before the separation of the Tlatelolca. Therefore, a comparison between the *Crónica mexicáyotl*, *Crónica mexicana*, and the *Historia* can be conducted for the narrative segments 1 through 5 and 11. Given these limitations, my analysis in this section primarily focuses on the first five.

The migratory process from Aztlan was marked by multiple stopovers of varying durations. The Mexica established extended residencies in favorable locations—lasting from one to twenty years. In contrast, areas that failed to satisfy their needs saw only brief stays, amounting to twenty or forty days. During their prolonged habitation, the Mexica built houses of worship for their gods, not only Huitzilopochtli but also other deities after whom the seven subgroups, *calpolli*, were designated. They also cultivated corn, but they did not always reap what they had sown, occasionally abandoning their crops at various growth stages.

As their journey took them eastward through the land referred to as "distant Culhuacan" [hueca culhuacan], the Mexica reached Lake Pátzcuaro, located in the present-day state of

Michoacán (Chimalpahin Quahtlehuanitzin, *Codex* 76–77). Up until this point, they had been in the company of two other subdivisions of the same lineage: those who would become the peoples of Michoacán and Malinalco. When some of the group removed their clothes to amuse themselves in the water, the rest seized their clothes and departed. Those who had entered the lake were then left with no choice but to wander about naked. From then on, the men of Michoacán adopted the *huipilli*, originally a female garment, and the women used garments called *cicuilli*. This narrative explains the origins of the inhabitants of Michoacán and their dressing customs. However, the rationale behind the theft of clothing remains ambiguous.

The *Historia* characterizes the locations sought by the Mexica as "fertile and abundant in waters, groves, and other refreshing features" [fértiles y abundosos de aguas y arboledas y otras frescuras] (20). They initiated their settlement by building a temple, which Durán refers to as a tabernacle. This choice of word reveals his intent to draw a parallel with the sanctuaries used by the Israelites during the Exodus. Following that, the Mexica planted corn, chili, and other vegetables. However, the harvest could only be undertaken at their god's command. Otherwise, they abandoned their produce and moved on. The crops left untouched thus served as a means of provision for the elderly and the sick who remained behind at each settlement. Durán sheds light on the underlying motive of these actions: it was through this gradual colonization that the Mexica aimed to become masters of the land and its produce.

This preceding account provides a logical context for the subsequent event in Michoacán. Upon their arrival at Lake Pátzcuaro, abundant in water and vegetation, the priests implored Huitzilopochtli to ensure that, even if this place was not their promised land, it would become a permanent settlement. He revealed in their dreams that while some bathed in the water, the others would steal their clothes and leave. Those who came out of the water realized that they

had been tricked by their companions and yet, without knowing their whereabouts, chose to remain there. The unexplained theft in the *Crónica mexicáyotl* now finds its context as a strategic maneuver to further the process of establishing new communities while still in pursuit of the promised land.

In examining the *Historia* and the *Crónica mexicana* side by side, one finds that they exhibit common details that were not found—or at least not explicitly stated—in the *Crónica mexicáyotl*. The *Crónica mexicana* indicates that the Mexica were driven by the goal of discovering the land designated by Huitzilopochtli, ready to abandon their temporary settlements at any given moment in obedience to their god's directives: "Then they would immediately raise the woven surface at the command of their god Huitzilupochtli . . . 'Forward, Mexica, for we are already nearing the place'" [y luego alçauan el sarzo por mandato de su dios Huitzilupochtli . . . «Adelante, mexicanos, que ya vamos llegando al lugar»] (54). Additionally, the *Crónica mexicana* describes their favored landscape as "fertile, abundant in forests and waters" [fértil, abundosa de montes y aguas], echoing Durán's phrase closely. It is further noted that during their journey, the Mexica always made certain that the areas they had once occupied were populated with their descendants: "In such a way that they went on their journey . . . always leaving behind and sowing their lineage and generation" [De manera que benían caminando . . . dexando y sembrando siempre de su deçendencia y generación] (55).

Nevertheless, the *Crónica mexicana* diverges from the *Historia* in its account of the event at Lake Pátzcuaro. For Durán, the stealth with which the Mexica took the clothes is a pivotal plot point that explains the subsequent settlement of the people of Michoacán, who were left with no means to pursue the thieves. It was this lack of choice, stemming from not knowing the direction in which their clothes were taken, that influenced their decision to remain. On the other hand, the

Crónica mexicana highlights the exercise of force during the act, instead of its secrecy: "Seeing that many of them were remaining behind, they forcibly took their cloaks and loincloths from their bodies" [biendo cantidad dellos se quedauan, les tomaron forçiblemente sus mantas y atapador sus bergüenças] (55). Furthermore, this robbery is construed not as a calculated strategy to ensure that the people of Michoacán would settle the area but as a violent response to their apparent intent to stay.

Durán assigns a specific intention to the theft of the Mexica—planting settlers in favorable lands—which appears to be his original interpretation. By portraying their action as aligned with a lofty purpose, Durán generates empathy for the Mexica from his audience. Despite their use of violence, the Mexica are framed as acting on commendable motives and adhering to a logical code of conduct, thus allowing readers to identify with them more readily. The author of the *Crónica mexicana* also seems to have felt the need to explain some rationale behind the actions of the Mexica, that is, to understand those actions as responses to something they witnessed. In contrast, the *Crónica mexicáyotl* does not appear to require any justification for their offense, suggesting that its moral standing is irrelevant. The narrative primarily concentrates on the forcible separation between the Mexica and the people of Michoacán, who were of the same lineage from Aztlan. This schism necessarily involves antagonism, which is caused by the Mexica, highlighting their role as agents of discord. Violence by the Mexica, or by their god Huitzilopochtli, resulting in the emergence of a distinct ethnic identity, recurs as a key theme in the subsequent accounts of the *Crónica mexicáyotl*.

The following narrative segment details the ethnic divergence from another branch of the Mexica, the Malinalca. Huitzilopochtli had a sister, Malinalxoch, who was known for her wicked

behavior.[17] He wanted to exclude her from their migration, as she "became a sorceress" and "was exceedingly perverse" [tlahuipochin mocuepa ca cenca huey tlahuelliloc] (Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, *Codex* 78–79). Consequently, the Mexica left her and her senior advisors on the road while they slept.[18] Following this, Huitzilopochtli declared to his senior advisors that his task lay in performing warfare—which distinguished him from his sorceress sister—and foretold that he would conquer various peoples, elevating his renown through material wealth.

Upon waking, Malinalxoch found that her brother had abandoned her. After weeping, she consulted with her senior advisors to decide on their next destination. Although the surrounding area was already occupied, they came upon a mountain known as Texcaltepetl. Having received permission from the local inhabitants, they settled at its summit. There, Malinalxoch gave birth to her son, Copil, fathered by the ruler of Malinalco.[19] Durán provides clarification on the link between Malinalxoch and the place name Malinalco, pointing out that the practice of naming a new settlement after its founder was a "Jewish custom" [costumbre judaica] (23). He also notes that, even in his time, there still existed sorcerers and witches among the Malinalca, resembling their primogenitor, Malinalxoch.

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[17] The *Crónica mexicáyotl* provides a comprehensive description of Malinalxoch's evil practices: "*one who sucked people's blood*, made them lose their footing, deceived them, made them lose their way, put them to sleep, made them eat snakes, made them eat owls. She summoned all [manner of] centipedes and spiders" [*teyolloquani* tecotzanani teyxcuepani. teotlaxiliani. tecochmamani tecohuaqualtiani. Tecoloqualtiani. ca mochi quinotza yn petlaçolcohuatl. yn tocatl] (Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, *Codex* 77–79; emphasis added). Anderson and Schroeder translate the term *teyolloquani* as "one who sucked people's blood," instead of its more literal rendition as "one who ate people's hearts." In Thouvenot's *Diccionario*, this word is defined as "a witch who sucks blood" [bruja que chupa la sangre] (349), which supports Anderson and Schroeder. In contrast, the *Crónica mexicana* interprets it as "she ate the heart alive" [comía biuo el coraçón] (56).

[18] Anderson and Schroeder translate the kinship term *itahuan* ("his/her fathers") as "senior advisers" and provide further explanation of its possible connotations, suggesting that it may refer to "second-in-rank officials, senior advisers, priestly auxiliaries, or actual relatives" (Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, *Codex* 77n7).

[19] Considering that neither the *Historia* nor the *Crónica mexicana* mentions Copil's father, it is likely that this information was added in the *Crónica mexicáyotl* by Alvarado Tezozomoc, or subsequently by Chimalpahin in his transcription.

The discrepancy between the accounts of the *Crónica mexicáyotl* and the *Historia* is most evident in the explanation for the abandonment of Malinalxoch. While Alvarado Tezozomoc attributes her exile to her practices of witchcraft, Durán emphasizes her harmful use of this power against her own people and her immunity to retribution due to her status as the god's sister. The Mexica sought freedom from her oppression through Huitzilopochtli, who instructed them to desert her. This framework—emancipation from an oppressor who wields supernatural means to dominate—echoes the narrative of Exodus. In this light, Durán seems to cast Huitzilopochtli in a role akin to the divine intervention that led to the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery, with Malinalxoch paralleled not only to the Pharaoh but also to his magicians, who were defeated by the ten plagues brought to Egypt.

The *Crónica mexicana* enriches the account with unique details missing from both the *Historia* and the *Crónica mexicáyotl*. One such detail is that after the Mexica took the clothes of the people of Michoacán, Malinalxoch stayed with the victims for a period to provide comfort before eventually rejoining the Mexica on their journey. Additionally, the *Crónica mexicana* elaborates on Nahuatl terms describing her practices of witchcraft—the same as in the *Crónica mexicáyotl*—supplementing them with information that is not immediately evident from their literal translation alone. It further adds that Malinalxoch could transform into birds or animals—a detail not found in the *Crónica mexicáyotl*. These elements convincingly appear to have been introduced by a cultural insider, someone versed in Mexica traditions and possibly aware of other variants of Chronicle X.

It is important to address several key points regarding the desertion of Malinalxoch. This generated animosity from her people, the Malinalca, toward the Mexica, culminating in Copil's attempt to avenge his mother. Compared to the episode in Michoacán, however, the actions of

the Mexica leading to this conflict appear less overtly violent, resembling instead an act of betrayal or a more passive form of aggression. Another significant point is the distinction made by Huitzilopochtli between his purpose and Malinalxoch's: his role was to achieve conquest through warfare, not through witchcraft. He had yet to demonstrate that he was fundamentally different from his sorceress sister and capable of fulfilling his self-declared mission. Finally, it is worth noting that later in the narrative, both the Mexica and Huitzilopochtli, rather than entirely disavowing the malevolent reputation associated with Malinalxoch, seem to perpetuate certain aspects of her malice, which does not sustain the binary of good versus evil between the two characters that Durán seeks to project.

After the abandonment of Malinalxoch, the Mexica established themselves on Coatepec, where their presence disturbed the local Otomi people, who considered them as "evil" and "most perverse" [amo tlaca ca cenca tlahueliloque] (Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, *Codex* 80–81). The term *tlahueliloc* (perverse) used to describe the Mexica here is notably the same as that attributed to Malinalxoch. They erected a temple for Huitzilopochtli, set out a ritual tray, and accommodated other deities. The god installed a ball court and a skull rack, referred to in the narrative in their possessed forms, *itlach* ("his ball court") and *itzompan* ("his skull rack"). At his instruction, a ravine was obstructed with a low and steep mound, causing water to overflow and creating a pool filled up to its edge. His senior advisors populated it with plants and trees, introducing fish, other aquatic life, and birds. After all that, Huitzilopochtli sang his songs and danced to them.

The *Historia* describes the same settlement process on Coatepec. The Mexica constructed a tabernacle, along with an altar that Durán refers to as *propiciatorio* (Mercy Seat) and *sacrificadero* (place of sacrifice). They set up their tents around the sanctuary, arranging them in

the four cardinal directions. This layout mirrors the encampment of the Israelites described in Numbers 2. In this light, Durán appears to have applied the term *propiciatorio* deliberately to draw a parallel with the Mercy Seat—the lid placed on the Ark of the Covenant. Huitzilopochtli manifested in the dreams of his priests and ordered the construction of a dam at a nearby river, which spread over the plain and formed a large lake with Mount Coatepec at its center.[20] Durán provides a rationale behind this radical transformation of the landscape: Huitzilopochtli intended to provide the Mexica with a resemblance to their promised land, which was also destined to be located in the middle of a lake. Nevertheless, enthralled by its pleasant sight, they forgot about the god's plan and showed a reluctance to travel further. It was they, not Huitzilopochtli, who sang and danced.

Durán omits the establishment of the ball court and skull rack; yet the derivatives of their Nahuatl terms—Teotlachco and Tzonpanco—are later used as the names of the location where the first sacrifice occurred (25). On the other hand, the *Crónica mexicana* offers a more elaborate account of these structures.[21] Some additional details are not corroborated by either the *Historia* or the *Crónica mexicáyotl* and even contribute to confusion stemming from factors beyond mere linguistic inaccuracies or misinterpretations. As mentioned above, *itlach* and *itzompan* are respectively the possessed forms of the Nahuatl terms for a ball court and a skull rack. The *Crónica mexicana* specifies that the ball court the Mexica built as a kind of altar was called "y tlach." However, in this account, "y tzompan" does not refer to the skull rack but to either a ball

[20] This interpretation might be influenced by the visual depiction of the landscape that Durán likely encountered in Chronicle X and reproduced in the illustration on folio 7 verso of his manuscript, which shows Mount Coatepec rising amidst a circular body of water teeming with aquatic life and vegetation. Durán's digitized manuscript is freely accessible online (*Historia de las Indias de Nueva España e islas de la tierra firme*, Biblioteca Nacional de España, bdh.bne.es/bnesearch/detalle/bdh0000169486; accessed 20 Jan. 2026).

[21] For instance, a description of the shape and color of the rubber ball is inserted, which leads to a portrayal of spectators at the court who publicly denounce adulterous men.

or a hole—there is an ambiguity in the original—located in the center of the court: "a hole in the middle, larger than the ball with which they now play the ball game, which they call y tzompan" [aguxero en medio, del grandor de más de una bola con que juegan agora a la bola, <que> llaman y tzompan] (58). Furthermore, the Mexica did not dam a ravine or a river, as in the *Crónica mexicáyotl* or the *Historia*, but obstructed the middle of this hole with a triangle and filled it with water, thereby creating a well.[22] Concerning who performed the singing and dancing, both the *Crónica mexicana* and the *Crónica mexicáyotl* name Huitzilopochtli. This implies that it was Durán who chose to alter the subject of the action from Huitzilopochtli to the Mexica.

The narrative in the *Crónica mexicáyotl* continues as follows: his senior advisors, the Centzonhuitznahua, told Huitzilopochtli that his final destination was Coatepec, his *altepetl* where all his glorious prophecies for himself and for his people would be realized. This speech directed at Huitzilopochtli echoes a substantial part of his earlier declaration following the abandonment of Malinalxoch, but with a shift in the grammatical subject and possessive prefixes—for example, "my task" [notequiuh] to "your task" [motequiuh] (Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, *Codex* 80–81). Enraged upon hearing their request, Huitzilopochtli said: "What are you all saying? [What] do you know? Is [this] your task? Are you greater than I? For I know what I shall do" [tleyn anquitohua cuix amehuan anquimatin cuix amotequiuh cuix ānechpanahuia ca nehuatl nicmati yn tlein nicchihuaz] (Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, *Codex* 82–83). Huitzilopochtli prepared for battle at the top of his temple, painted himself around his eyes, raised his shield, defeated the Centzonhuitznahua at the ball court, and then consumed them. He also killed their elder sister, Coyolxauh, who had been taken as his mother, cutting off

[22] This interpretation makes sense under the assumption that the author of the *Crónica mexicana* was describing the same illustration that Durán later reproduced in his manuscript, albeit from a different perspective: the circular body of water and Mount Coatepec correspond to the well and the obstructing "triangle" placed within the ball court.

her head and eating her heart. This event occurred at midnight, and by dawn, the Mexica saw the victims with their chests all pierced, void of hearts. Thus, Huitzilopochtli transformed into "a very great demon of darkness, a great fiend" [cenca huey tzitzimitl. huey colleletli] (Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, *Codex* 82–83). The account explicitly states that the god rejected Coatepec as his *altepetl*. He tore down the obstruction at the ravine. Consequently, the plants that had been in the pool dried up, the animals that had lived in the water perished, and the birds flew away. Following this, Huitzilopochtli led the Mexica and departed.

According to Durán, the leaders of those voices praising the scenery of Coatepec and advocating that it be made their permanent home were Vitznahua and a lady named Coyolxauh.[23] They defied Huitzilopochtli's will by asserting that Coatepec was their destined end of the journey. He responded in wrath:

> Who are these who thus wish to overstep my determinations and place objections and limits upon them? Are they perhaps greater than I? Tell them that I shall take vengeance on them before tomorrow, so that they may not dare to give counsel in what I have determined. [¿quién son estos que así quieren traspasar mis determinaciones y poner objecion y término á ellas? ¿son ellos por ventura mas que yo? decildes que yo tomaré vengança dellos antes de mañana, porque no se atrevan á dar parecer en lo que yo tengo determinado] (25).

The *Historia* diverges from the *Crónica mexicáyotl* in the following passage by avoiding a direct depiction of the sacrifice at the ball court; rather, Durán reports the event through what was heard by the Mexica during the night and what they subsequently witnessed as the outcome. First, "They say that they saw the face of the idol at that place, so ugly and so terrifying, with an

[23] Durán uses the name Vitznahua for a single individual, unlike the Centzonhuitznahua, which refers to a group of people in the *Crónica mexicáyotl*.

appearance possessed by a demon, that filled everyone with fear and terror" [Dicen que vieron el rostro del ídolo en aquel punto tan feo y tan espantoso, con una figura endemoniada que á todos puso espanto y terror]; and then:

> They recount that at midnight, while all were at rest, they heard in the place they called Teotlachco and by another name Tzonpanco . . . a great noise, and in that place, when morning came, they found the principal instigators of that rebellion dead . . . and all with their chests opened and only the hearts removed. . . . [Cuentan que á media noche, estando todos en sosiego, oyeron en el lugar que llamaban *Teotlachco* y por otro nombre *Tzonpanco* . . . un gran ruido, en el qual lugar, venida la mañana, allaron muertos á los principales movedores de aquella rebelion . . . y á todos abiertos por los pechos y sacados solamente los coraçones. . . . (25–26)

Durán employs indirect quotations ("Dicen que" and "Cuentan que"), which appear to be his way of distancing himself from the accounts he finds unbelievable. Moreover, the actions attributed to Huitzilopochtli in the *Crónica mexicáyotl* are either left out or altered. For instance, the depiction of his idol appearing as if possessed by a demon ("endemoniada") is a more "plausible" rendition than that of the god preparing himself for battle at his temple. Durán also replaces the description of Huitzilopochtli defeating and consuming the Centzonhuitznahua and Coyolxauh with that of a loud noise coming from the Teotlachco. The gruesome sight of the aftermath led the Mexica to the belief that Huitzilopochtli only consumed human hearts, from which their practices of human sacrifice originated. As a subsequent display of his wrath, Huitzilopochtli instructed them to tear the dam down, and the Mexica, terrified by his severe punishment, complied against their will.

Durán's account of the event at Coatepec highlights the framework of human defiance and the resulting divine punishment. The Mexica knew that Coatepec was merely a sample of their promised land, yet they were seduced by the beauty of its scenery, placing their own wishes

above the decisions made by their god. It seems intentional that the *Historia*, unlike the *Crónica mexicáyotl*, presents the actor singing and dancing as the people, not Huitzilopochtli. This is reminiscent of the biblical episode in Exodus, where Moses descended from Mount Sinai to find the Israelites worshipping an idol with song and dance. For Durán, this link between such actions and an affront to the deity was implicitly understood.

The interpretation of the same narrative segment in the *Crónica mexicana* provides a seemingly contradictory approach to the event, compared with the *Historia* and the *Crónica mexicáyotl*. Most divergent is that after singing, Huitzilopochtli declared to the Mexica that Coatepec was indeed their promised land: "Here is where we were to come and establish ourselves" [Aquí es adonde habíamos de venir y hacer asiento] (59). The humble and tearful gratitude expressed by the Centzonhuitznahua in response to that announcement contrasts sharply with his furious response, which is puzzling, especially as Huitzilopochtli acknowledged that "this is to be your charge" [aquí a de ser u<uest>ro cargo], only to later contradict this with a rebuking question: "Is this your charge, or is it mine?" [¿Es a u<uest>ro cargo, sino al mío?] (59–60). He captured Coyolxauh, who was watching them, and sacrificed her. To the Mexica, terrified at the sight of heartless bodies, Huitzilopochtli stated that Coatepec would be their *altepetl*: "For this reason you will now understand that in this place of Coatepec Mexico is to be" [«Ya por esto entenderéis que en este lugar de Coatepec a de ser Mexico»] (60).[24] Then, the god interrupted a channel or a river to turn it into a large lake filled with birds, fish, trees, and plants, observing once again that the place was suitable to become Mexico. Subsequently, he pierced

[24] One possible interpretation of this otherwise perplexing statement is that the exercise of brutal force—specifically, the ritual of heart extraction—was constitutive of the identity of Mexico, or more precisely, that Mexico was to be defined as the place where such ritual violence would take place.

through the water and emerged from it. The lake dried up, and all life disappeared in an instant as if it were smoke.

Unlike the *Crónica mexicáyotl*, which states that Huitzilopochtli refused to establish his *altepetl* at Coatepec, the *Crónica mexicana* repeatedly indicates that it was the god who decided that the place would become Mexico. A question arises as to explaining this discrepancy between the two versions: should we consider it the result of an error in translation or as the reflection of a distinct interpretive stance? If it is the latter case, such a stance would be incompatible with a punitive perspective like that of Durán, which presupposes a conflict between two opposing wills—the human desire to remain and the divine intention to leave. This perspective reflects his biblical approach: the narrative of Exodus shows multiple instances of divine retribution for Israelite rebellion,[25] and it is not difficult to imagine that Durán applied the same framework to the Coatepec episode. Stepping back from this framework, however, allows us to find that neither does the *Crónica mexicáyotl* substantiate a direct link between Huitzilopochtli's wrath and any overt objection to, or disruption of, his plans by the Centzonhuitznahua. His disapproval of Coatepec as Mexico is expressed only after the ball court massacre, suggesting that the statement is introduced to rationalize the subsequent destruction of the lake rather than to justify the preceding event.

If we view the divine violence outside of the biblical perspective imposed by Durán and attempt not to derive normative meanings—that is, what is right or wrong in the god's eyes—what other interpretations might we deduce? As previously discussed, the Michoacán episode in the *Crónica mexicáyotl* offers an example of the Mexica exerting force without explicit

[25] One such example appears in Numbers 16, where God causes the earth to swallow Korah and his followers for rising against Moses. Durán cites this episode as one of the biblical narratives he claims to have identified in Indigenous pictorial sources (5).

justification. It highlights the importance of such acts in fostering ethnic division as a result of antagonism produced by the Mexica themselves. Looking through this lens, what does the first act of human sacrifice by Huitzilopochtli mean? Why was such an event deemed necessary within the context of identity construction?

To answer this, I argue that the first human sacrifice at Coatepec serves as an extension or conclusion of the narrative in which the Mexica and the Malinalca are divided. A key element in understanding the link between these two events is the direct description of the massacre at the ball court. As noted above, there is no active aggression—comparable to the robbery from the people of Michoacán—on the part of the Mexica in the process of separating Malinalxoch from the group. To compensate for this absence, the text introduces outright violence against Coyolxauh and the Centzonhuitznahua. The fact that these victims are a group of senior men led by a woman is particularly significant, as their previously unmentioned existence seems to fill the roles vacated by Malinalxoch and her advisors.

The execution of this violence plays a vital role in establishing an identity for the Mexica distinct from that of the Malinalca. Huitzilopochtli's active engagement in battle represents the fulfillment of the task he assumed after his departure from Malinalxoch, and his victory concretely demonstrates his competence in performing it. Therefore, the direct portrayal of this divine act, which Durán replaces with an indirect account, proves indispensable in this context. Its absence would blur the marked contrast between Huitzilopochtli and Malinalxoch, obscuring a thematic element essential to the narrative. Malinalxoch is described as having the power to suck people's blood, or literally to eat their hearts (*teyolloquani*). In this regard, Huitzilopochtli's

action of consuming his victims' hearts is indistinguishable from hers in outcome alone. The only distinction lies in the means—using weapons versus magic—to achieve this end.[26]

Unlike Durán's account, which is anchored in a binary concept of good and evil, the *Crónica mexicáyotl* does not adhere to this dichotomy as its driving narrative principle. The Mexica are not portrayed as inherently good compared to the Malinalca. Likewise, Coyolxauh and the Centzonhuitznahua are not characterized as evil in contrast to Huitzilopochtli. Rather, it is through committing greater acts of evil that the Mexica assert their distinctive power and presence. By doing so, they also strengthen their sense of agency, actively creating divisions and conflicts with other ethnic groups. The focus is on the psychological impacts of hostility and fear generated by the excessive use of force. These impacts arise from the very fact that such violence offends general sensibilities of justice. In other words, the narrative emphasizes the exceptional status of the Mexica: their god operates beyond established norms or standards, and their actions are guided solely by his will, rather than by external principles of morality.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter explores the interplay between historiography and identity, as elucidated through the analysis of the texts derived from Chronicle X. This exploration goes beyond the question of authenticity to delve into how Indigenous elements within the narratives—such as orality and mythohistorical frameworks—interact with the performance of cultural identification.

[26] The *Crónica mexicana* offers several details that reinforce the parallels between Malinalxoch and Coyolxauh, as well as the centrality of human sacrifice to Mexica identity. One notable example is the description of Coyolxauh watching the Mexica before being captured by Huitzilopochtli: "She looks on and observes them, a woman named Coyolxauh" [mira y deuisa contra ellos una muger llamada Coyulxauh] (60). This recalls an earlier account of Malinalxoch, who was believed to inflict harm merely through her gaze. If Coyolxauh is read as a substitute for Malinalxoch, her presence at the ball court may signify more than vigilance, potentially implying the casting of spells upon her adversaries. This subtle narrative detail supports the view that the author of the *Crónica mexicana* was likely a cultural insider deeply familiar with Mexica traditions, rather than a purely external translator of Chronicle X.

I argue that the preservation or translation of these elements does not straightforwardly equate to the survival or loss of Mexica identity. Instead, the focus has shifted towards understanding how these narrative characteristics respond to the demands for identity in the specific social and intellectual context of the time.

At the time the *Crónica mexicáyotl* was created, Mexico City had recently endured two devastating floods and faced the threat of abandonment by the Spaniards. Under these challenging circumstances, Alvarado Tezozomoc entrusted future generations of the Tenochca with the responsibility of safeguarding their cultural heritage within the *altepetl* established by their ancestors. His objective was to ensure that the Tenochca elite, a community bound by intimate familial ties, maintained the exclusive right to interpret historical memory while closely linking their ethnic identity to the place—positioning the colonial city of Mexico as a continuation of Tenochtitlan—in order to defend territorial claims. In this context, orality plays a crucial role in asserting Tenochca identity not only because it is an Indigenous cultural aspect; its key attributes include fostering unanimous internal recognition of collective interpretive authority and acting as a shield against external influences and critiques. Alvarado Tezozomoc aimed to achieve a similar effect with his creation of the *Crónica mexicáyotl*, by advocating for the authority of his personal sources and urging the transmission of his narrative across generations among the Tenochca.

Durán, by contrast, relied on his own cultural reference system to assert authority in producing what he considered more accurate knowledge about the colonized. This knowledge aimed to fix the identity of Indigenous peoples through stereotypes, which served to justify the colonizers' presence and violence, while also allowing them to identify with the glorious and heroic past of the Mexica empire. For Durán, the narrative of the *Crónica mexicáyotl* likely

appeared obscure and unconvincing, as it often lacks explanations for actions and includes seemingly implausible and fantastical elements. His approach involved filling in gaps or omitting details that did not align with his framework, and justifying violent acts committed by the Mexica or by Huitzilopochtli as either a means to a noble end or as retribution for transgressions, often referencing episodes from the Exodus. This framing not only helped his readers comprehend Indigenous narratives but also enabled them to empathize emotionally with the Mexica. However, it simultaneously presented the past of the colonized as either a mimicry or a degenerated version of a "true" history reported in the Bible.

This interpretation by Durán undermines the unique and incomparable identity of the Mexica as presented in the *Crónica mexicáyotl*, where they are positioned as exceptional, characterized by their capacity to exert brutal force without being constrained by ethical norms or standards. One of the narrative segments that best exemplifies this aspect of Mexica identity is that of Huitzilopochtli himself taking up arms and defeating his enemies—an element that Durán deemed implausible and thus omitted to create a more credible account. This amoral perspective that highlights the exercise of dominant power is not separable from the self-image of the Mexica as an empire.

The *Crónica mexicáyotl* includes a brief subsection (folios 20 recto to 20 verso) summarizing Mexica history prior to the main account. This part depicts the Roman and Spanish Empires as agents of divine purpose in spreading Christianity, while portraying the Mexica as destined by the devil Huitzilopochtli to become renowned and feared among other nations.[27]

[27] "And thus the devil knew perfectly well how the Mexica would therefore be great examples; that *they would be terrified*, *awe-stricken* here and everywhere" [Auh ca yuhqui yn quenin yn iuh quimacicama in yehuatl yn tlacatecolotl yiniqu iuh yehuātin mexica yezque in cenca machiyoque yezque ynic *tlamamauhtizque*. *ymacaxozque* in ye nican nohuian] (Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, *Codex* 66–67; emphasis added). Although Anderson and Schroeder translate "tlamamauhtizque. ymacaxozque" as "they would be terrified, awe-stricken," the literal sense of these two verbal forms is causative: "they will cause fear" and "they will be feared."

Despite the apparent distinction between the two types of empires, such a portrayal does not necessarily reproduce the negative stereotypes of Indigenous peoples prevalent in colonialist discourse. Rather, it resonates with Huitzilopochtli's defining quality in the *Crónica mexicáyotl*: his exercise of violence, carried out with complete disregard for normative standards of justification, enables him to become a source of terror. For the Mexica, the same capacity to overwhelm enemies through fear allows them to achieve their imperial objectives. Thus, beneath its apparent alignment with colonial ideology, this subsection preserves a profound sense of ethnic pride and superiority.

Reading this latent self-aggrandizement at the core of Mexica imperial identity blurs the doctrinal dichotomy between the God-driven Christian empire and the Devil-influenced Indigenous empire, thereby challenging the colonialist notion that the foundations of their authority are inherently different. For it exposes the same aggression and narcissistic pursuit of unmitigated power underlying Spanish colonialism. Durán argues that Indigenous peoples were defeated by a small number of Spanish forces because the fear instilled in their minds by God caused them to flee from the invaders. He further highlights the indiscriminate killing of Indigenous men, women, and children by the Spaniards during the conquest. The depiction of the Spanish conquerors as a source of overwhelming terror, exercising brutal and excessive force without being bound by any ethical concerns, mirrors that of Huitzilopochtli or the Mexica as described in the *Crónica mexicáyotl*. In other words, a comparison between the self-images of these two empires reveals a striking similarity: their imaginary omnipotence, rooted in their willingness to violate normative standards while asserting dominance.

Chapter 3 Competing Rights to War: Punitive and Sacrificial Justice in Cristóbal del Castillo

Cristóbal del Castillo remains relatively obscure among colonial historians of Nahua descent, primarily because much of his work has been lost. What survives consists of fragmentary copies of the original Nahuatl text, and Spanish translations prepared by the creole priest and antiquarian Antonio Pichardo in the early nineteenth century, now dispersed across various manuscripts at the Bibliothèque nationale de France.[1] From these remnants, scholars have identified two thematically distinct parts, as originally conceived by the author: *Historia de la venida de los mexicanos y de otros pueblos* and *Historia de la Conquista*—titles adopted by Federico Navarrete Linares in his 2001 edition. Only Chapters 1 through 5 and 9 of the *Historia de la venida* are extant, along with a portion of its epilogue translated by Pichardo. This epilogue summarizes the preceding chapters as "the history and account of the coming of the Mexicans and of the reign of Acamapichtli, the first to rule in Mexico Tenochtitlan" [la historia y narración de la venida de los mexicanos y del reinado de Acamapichtli, el primero que reinó en México Tenochtitlan] and dates the composition to between 1597 and 1600 (del Castillo 125).[2] The *Historia de la Conquista* includes a prologue in which the author notes that it was completed in 1599.[3]

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[1] For an overview of the textual tradition of del Castillo's work, see Navarrete Linares, "Las *Historias*" 284–286.

[2] All translations of Spanish quotations in this chapter are my own.

[3] For a reconstruction of the overall structure of del Castillo's *Historias* based on its surviving fragments, see Navarrete Linares, "Las *Historias*" 286–292, and "Estudio Preliminar" 16–23.

Among the Nahuatl sources used in his *Myths of Ancient Mexico*, Michel Graulich cites del Castillo's *Historia de la venida*, noting its uniqueness as an origin and migration story of the Mexica, in which their tutelary god, Huitzilopochtli, "appears as a flesh-and-blood individual who leads his people to the Promised Land" (24). Graulich questions the reliability of this account for two main reasons. First, it lacks corroboration from other sources, apart from the *Memorial breve acerca de la fundación de la ciudad de Culhuacan*, written by Domingo de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin in 1631, which, however, is most likely derivative of del Castillo's original. Second, the figure of Huitzilopochtli as a human leader of the Mexica appears to be modeled on Moses in the Old Testament.

The parallels between the *Historia de la venida* and the Exodus narrative are found in several key motifs: both the Mexica and the Israelites rise from foreign oppression, distinguish themselves from their oppressors through monotheistic devotion, and enter into a covenant with their god, who delivers divine commands through a human leader guiding them to the promised land. This analogy reaches its climax in the parting of the sea, which clears the path for their departure. Navarrete Linares argues that, although his narrative centers on the Mexica, del Castillo presents a perspective distinct from, or even contrary to, the dominant tradition of that group, thus offering "an individual and novel perspective" [una perspectiva individual y novedosa] ("Estudio preliminar" 11–12). What makes this Indigenous author exceptional is not simply his divergence from more mainstream or "official" versions. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century historians of Nahua descent such as Hernando de Alvarado Tezozomoc, Chimalpahin, and Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl grounded their authorial authority in their status as heirs to historical truths collectively sanctioned within the ruling elite of their respective *altepetl* (Navarrete Linares, *Los orígenes* 37, 88–89). In contrast, del Castillo does not claim affiliation

with any particular group, making his work atypical and distinctly an individual creation. It should be noted, however, that Navarrete Linares derives this conclusion from his particular reading of the historian's ethnic and social background, the certainty of which remains open to question.

There has been a debate over whether del Castillo was of Indigenous or mixed descent, and to which *altepetl* his lineage may have belonged (Navarrete Linares, "Estudio Preliminar" 23–26). The author himself left subtle yet significant clues regarding his ethnic affiliation and social position. Chapter 9 of the *Historia de la venida* includes a reference to the Tetzcoca as "our grandparents, our parents" [in tocolhuan in totahuan] (122). Additionally, in the prologue to the *Historia de la conquista,* del Castillo describes himself as "a poor and miserable man" [nicnotlacatzintli], who earns a living through physical labor: "In the forests and grasses, I go about looking for what I need; only here, in the midst of them, do I go to carry out my work" [canin quauhtla zacatla nicnotemolitinemi in tlein notech monequi iz zan itzalan nicquixtitiuh inin notlatequipanoliz] (130). While this evidence is insufficient for a definitive conclusion, it suggests a sense of identification with the Tetzcoca and a relatively modest social status.

Navarrete Linares argues that del Castillo was likely descended from a less powerful ethnic group that had been subjugated by the Mexica—possibly affiliated with the Acolhua, whose regional center was Tetzcoco ("Las *Historias*" 300). He further proposes that the *Historia de la venida* was less concerned with documenting historical fact than with constructing an archetype that defines the essential nature of the Mexica. In this account, the customs and rituals commanded by their god, Tetzauhteotl, play a central role in shaping that ethnic characterization. The Mexica are depicted as ruthless warriors, plunderers, and practitioners of human sacrifice and cannibalism. Navarrete Linares suggests that this archetypal portrayal serves a political

purpose. By demonizing the Mexica from a Christian perspective and casting other Indigenous groups as their innocent victims, the text aims to legitimize and elevate the rights of the latter over those of the former within the colonial order.

Alexander F. Christensen places greater emphasis on the fact that the *Historia de la venida* unmistakably parallels the Exodus of the Israelites, examining why del Castillo employs a biblical framework to reconstruct the Mexica migration narrative. Christensen argues that his intended audience included Nahuatl-speaking elites educated in Spanish traditions, as well as missionaries proficient in Nahuatl. By presenting these intellectual circles with a historical and religious text written in Nahuatl and modeled on the Bible—the most authoritative text in European discourse—del Castillo sought to restore cultural pride among the colonized and resist the humiliation imposed by the dominant culture. According to Christensen, his purpose, which transcended mere ethnic rivalry with the Mexica based on loyalty to his local ancestry, was to craft a sort of new Bible in which the Nahuas—broadly defined beyond the *altepetl* level—served as central figures. This vision was shaped by his expansive cultural consciousness within the multiethnic colonial city of Mexico. On the surface, as Navarrete Linares argues, the work may appear to portray the Mexica as evil. However, by equating them with the chosen people of God, it ultimately glorifies their preconquest past and subversively justifies their religious practices that had been condemned by colonial authorities.

These two contrasting interpretations of the *Historia de la venida* nevertheless share a common premise: that the ultimate meaning of the text is anchored in what del Castillo intended. Such intention is understood to emerge within a polemical framework, in which the author takes a position against the perspective of a certain hegemonic tradition—whether that of the Mexica ruling elite or of the Spanish colonizers—and that position, in turn, is presumed to derive from

his social location—whether as a humble descendant of a non-Mexica *altepetl* or as a member of the trans-*altepetl* Nahua community in colonial Mexico City. In this chapter, however, I approach the text from a different angle: as a reformulation of Mexica political ideology. As Navarrete Linares has pointed out, del Castillo focuses not on chronicling historical fact, but on constructing an archetype of Mexica ethnic identity as conquerors and practitioners of human sacrifice. What deserves attention is how this characterization unfolds. Unlike other Mexica sources, the *Historia de la venida* gives little narrative space to where the group stopped along their migration or to what actions they took at each location. Instead, it places sustained emphasis on both the exchanges between Huitzilopochtli and Tetzauhteotl and the speeches Huitzilopochtli delivers to his people. These discourses are rendered in extended, rhetorically elaborate form, offering an opportunity to hear how the Mexica interpret the religious and ceremonial meanings of their military actions from their own point of view. That said, one should keep in mind that this interpretive frame was shaped by an author of the late sixteenth century. In other words, the Mexica worldview expressed in his account cannot be historically verified; it is unclear whether it genuinely reflects ideas current before the Spanish conquest.

In the *Historia de la venida*, the Mexica understanding of conquest is expressed through two distinct frames: one historical, the other normative. According to Alvarado Tezozomoc, Durán, and other sources, the Basin of Mexico was already fully occupied by various groups, leaving no unclaimed space for the late-arriving Mexica. Driven out by these earlier inhabitants, they eventually settled on an island in Lake Texcoco, which lay within the territory of the *altepetl* of Azcapotzalco, to whose authority they became subject. For the Mexica, then, the conquest of neighboring peoples was the only viable path to land ownership and political autonomy. In other words, war was the only alternative to subjugation. I suggest that this

historical condition under which the Mexica found themselves during their migration and settlement is reflected in their decision to leave Aztlan—not only as an act of liberation, but also as the beginning of a military campaign—as recounted in the *Historia de la venida*.

In contrast, del Castillo portrays the native groups already inhabiting the promised land and later conquered by the Mexica as harmless and peaceful, prompting readers to ask the following question: can war ever be just when no prior harm has been committed? This question aligns with a central issue in sixteenth-century debates over the justice of the Spanish conquest of the Americas—led by figures such as Francisco de Vitoria, Bartolomé de Las Casas, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, and José de Acosta—thereby lending the text a sense of contemporary relevance. Through the voices of the Mexica leader Huitzilopochtli and the deity Tetzauhteotl, the *Historia de la venida* offers a response within this normative framework, explaining how their conquest might be justified.

I argue that this narrative articulates a particular form of expansionist ideology. Unlike the justificatory logic of Spanish colonialism, this ideology does not posit a preexisting, universal law separate from the new order of domination imposed through conquest, nor does it recode the violence accompanying the establishment of that order as a means of maintaining such a higher law, or more specifically, a form of retribution for a breach of that law. Rather, the order of domination and universal law are identical from the outset, and their establishment and preservation are not distinct processes; for together they constitute a cosmic order that reenacts the moment of its creation each day with the rising of the sun. The exercise of brutal force thus serves both to found and sustain the law. It is, however, not simply the instrument of the law; rather, it constitutes the substance of the law itself—its primary command. A particular

collective agent is accordingly chosen as the legitimate wielder of that force and as the one called upon to execute the mandate of the law. In this framework, violence is self-justifying.

3.1 War of Liberation, War of Conquest

In this section and the next, I analyze the origin story of the Mexica as reported by del Castillo in the *Historia de la venida de los mexicanos y de otros pueblos*. As previously mentioned, the extant portions of this text contain only Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 9. Of these, the first five chapters recount the departure of the Mexica from Aztlan Chicomoztoc, leading up to the death and deification of their leader, Huitzilopochtli. As for the later chapters, we have no direct evidence of their content aside from the epilogue, which survives not in the Nahuatl original but in Pichardo's Spanish translation. This epilogue states that the *Historia de la venida* covered not only the arrival of the Mexica but also the reign of Acamapichtli, the first *tlatoani* of Tenochtitlan. What we have, then, is an incomplete account—at the very least, the establishment of the *altepetl* and its dynasty must have been included in the lost manuscript. Nevertheless, if we focus on Huitzilopochtli's life and his role in shaping the collective identity of the Mexica, the remaining chapters can be considered a self-contained narrative.

This narrative can be divided into two major parts. The first two chapters report on how the Mexica lived in Aztlan Chicomoztoc and why they left their homeland. This account effectively illustrates the transformation of a people once subjugated and under threat of war and destruction into a people who took up arms and subjugated others. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 provide an overview of their migration process and relay Huitzilopochtli's parting words before his death. In this section, I focus on the former and examine its political implications through a comparison with another decisive moment in Mexica history: the defeat of Azcapotzalco and the Tepaneca.

Chapter 1 provides a brief preview of the content of the next chapter while also offering an etymological explanation of the different names by which the Mexica were known. According to what the Mexica Tenochca elders were told, they crossed a sea—literally "celestial water" [ilhuica atl] or "divine water" [teoatl]—when it parted and revealed dry land (86). During their migration, the Mexica acquired various names. Initially, they were called Azteca Chicomoztoca after their place of origin, Aztlan Chicomoztoc. Upon reaching Great Colhuacan and Great Chichimecatlalpan, they became known as the Colhuaque Chichimeca. They were then named Tenochca in honor of their *tlatoani,* who led them to Tenochtitlan. The inhabitants of Azcapotzalco and the Tepaneca referred to them as *mexixquilquani*, meaning "those who eat cress." However, their true name, Mexica or Mecitin, was derived from the Nahuatl term for the moon, *metztli*, since Tetzauhteotl, the *tlacatecolotl* (devil) worshipped as their god, introduced himself as the moon. He guided the Mexica across the sea to Tlatepotzco.

A detailed account of this event appears in Chapter 2. The Mexica, living as fisherfolk along the coast of a great lagoon—called Metztli Iapan, meaning "the waterway of the moon"—were subjects of the rightful citizens and rulers of Aztlan Chicomoztoc.[4] Their *tlatoque* enslaved them, demanding daily tribute of everything harvested from the water, along with feathers from specific species of birds, and abhorred them, seeking to conquer and destroy them. The Mexica had a leader, Huitzitlin, a brave warrior and a priest devoted to Tetzauhteotl, who would

[4] The original text states: "Those who were making their home, calling it their *altepetl,* and ruled in Aztlan Chicomoztoc are the Azteca Chicomoztoca" [in yehuantin in oncan huel chanchiuhticate in maltepeitoticate in oncan tlatotocati in oncan in Aztlan Chicomoztoc in huel yehuantin azteca chicomoztoca] (88). I use the phrase "rightful citizens" to emphasize that they were not merely inhabitants of Aztlan Chicomoztoc but, as opposed to the Mexica, also had the legitimate claim to it as their own community. The subordinate status of the Mexica to the rulers of Aztlan Chicomoztoc is defined by the expression "their subjects" [inmacehualhuan] (90). According to James Lockhart, the term *macehualli* means a commoner or an ordinary person who lacks social distinction, such as nobility (96). However, when it is used with possessives, it comes to have a political meaning "vassal" or "subject." The possessed form of this word appears throughout the text, and in my analysis below I consistently render it as "subject."

personally speak to him and manifest himself. The god later made Huitzitlin his earthly image, and from that moment, the man—left-handed, or *opochmaye* in Nahuatl—came to be called Huitzilopochtli.

Huitzilopochtli wept before Tetzauhteotl, pleading that since the Mexica worshipped only him and not the other gods of Aztlan Chicomoztoc, he should take pity on his subjects, save them from impending destruction, and guide them to a land where they could serve him alone. In response, Tetzauhteotl assured Huitzilopochtli that he had already located a favorable place for the Mexica. This area, like the one they currently inhabited, contained a great lake, where all they needed grew in abundance. However, it was not unclaimed—every part of it was already settled. The Mexica themselves would not reach it, but their descendants would, after a long journey. Tetzauhteotl then set forth his conditions: the Mexica were to offer sacrifices and swear oaths in his presence in exchange for his divine assistance. Reaffirming his role as the intermediary between Tetzauhteotl and the Mexica,[5] Huitzilopochtli vowed to fulfill every command given to him and to instruct his people to do the same. He then reminded Tetzauhteotl that the Mexica had already been offering their own blood, along with that of water creatures and birds, and further pledged to seize captives from other groups, sacrificing their blood and hearts.

Tetzauhteotl issued commands, which appear in the text as six items—though it is noted that the author does not record all of the "devilish order" [tlacatecolonahuatilli] but only provides a condensed version (102): the Mexica were to strike fear into every *altepetl* they encountered, subjugating its people through conquest. They would cut open the chests of captives, offer their

[5] The way Huitzilopochtli addresses Tetzauhteotl reveals that their relationship extends beyond that of a deity and his priest, emphasizing its political dimensions. He calls Tetzauhteotl not only his god but also his lord and *tlatoani*, declaring himself his subject and slave: "For I am truly your subject; for I am truly your slave" [ca nel nimomacehual, ca nel nimotlacauh] (94). Furthermore, Huitzilopochtli notes that, although the Mexica are under his guidance, they remain subjects of Tetzauhteotl, not his own: "I lead all those who settled here, your subjects" [niquizcenyacana in ixquichtin nican onoque in momacelhuan] (96).

hearts to the rising sun and the gods—Tetzauhteotl, Tlaloc, and others—and consume their flesh. Distinguished warriors who excelled in battle and captured prisoners were rewarded with every luxury. Their destination was already inhabited by various groups of original occupants who had long established their own governments but were unfamiliar with combat. Thus, those dedicated to warfare faced no limits or hindrances in indulging their desires—they took any women they pleased and claimed whatever they found desirable, whether flowers, tobacco, or songs. Only the military elite held the right to rule. Furthermore, the text details the preparation of captives for sacrifice, describing their ritual execution either in gladiatorial combat or atop a high temple.

The Mexica who departed from Aztlan numbered ten thousand. As they crossed the sea, which had parted and turned into dry land, Tetzauhteotl ordered them to remain there for two years to craft weapons and insignias. The atlatl (dart-thrower), which served as a substitute for the bow, is described in detail.

For the Mexica, the covenant with Tetzauhteotl and their departure from Aztlan marked a radical transformation in their mode of existence and identity. In their homeland, they were a humble, marginalized people, politically subordinate to another community whose rulers not only imposed heavy tribute upon them but also sought their annihilation. Nevertheless, they remained religiously independent, as evidenced by their devotion to Tetzauhteotl rather than the gods of the Azteca Chicomoztoca. However, when they crossed the dry land revealed between the parted waters, they were no longer victims of servitude and death—an event that strongly evokes the Exodus narrative, in which the Israelites, freed from slavery in Egypt, found themselves trapped between the pursuing army led by Pharaoh and the sea, which then miraculously divided. As they set foot on the far shore, the Mexica ceased to be mere fisherfolk and emerged as fierce warriors and captors of men. Their role was no longer to offer water

creatures and bird feathers as tribute to foreign rulers. Instead, their duty was to sacrifice human blood and hearts to the sun and the gods. Those who excelled in this role would not only be esteemed and elevated as rulers within their own community but also come to command the service of those they had conquered.

Among all known documents, the *Historia de la venida* is unique in portraying the Mexica as subordinate to another group at their place of origin. The only other example is Chimalpahin's *Memorial breve*, substantial portions of which were evidently copied from del Castillo. Navarrete Linares notes that a total of twenty-five sources agree in naming Aztlan as the Mexica place of origin (*Los orígenes* 103). Only five of them depict the social conditions of this group in Aztlan: Alvarado Tezozomoc's *Crónica mexicáyotl*, Chimalpahin's *Memorial breve* and third *Relación*, del Castillo's *Historia de la venida*, and Diego Durán's *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España e islas de la tierra firme* (109–111). In the *Crónica mexicáyotl*, for example, the Mexica appear alongside the Cuexteca, both living in Aztlan under the rule of a *tlatoani* named Moteuczoma, who, upon his death, divided his *altepetl* between his two sons, each inheriting leadership of one group. Although tensions between the brothers led to the eventual departure of the Mexica, there is no suggestion that they had been subordinate to the Cuexteca, or vice versa. The third *Relación* reports that a *quauhtlatoani* (a non-dynastic, interim ruler), White Mixcoatl, governed the Mexica in Aztlan, with no mention of any other ethnic group.[6]

[6] Of particular interest is the anonymous *Histoire du Mechique*, which contains an origin story of the Mexica that may have inspired del Castillo. Composed in Spanish during the mid-sixteenth century, it survives only in a French translation from the same period. Scholars generally agree that it is a summarized derivative of a now-lost work by the Franciscan Andrés de Olmos, *Tratado de las antigüedades mexicanas*. For hypotheses regarding the authorship of the original Spanish text and the extant French manuscript, as well as their dates of composition, see Tena 115–121. According to Chapter 3 of the *Historie du Mechique*, the Mexica originated from a place marked by a large rock with a cave at its base. There, two brothers, each devoted to a different deity, lived in proximity until a conflict erupted between them. The elder seized the better part of the land and subjugated his younger brother. In response, the younger's god appeared to him in a vision, offering reassurance and promising to lead him to a new place where he would rise to greater power than his brother.

As attested by many sources, after the Mexica entered the Basin of Mexico, they lived for a long time as a people subject to more powerful communities already established in the region and, at times, were forced to abandon their settlements due to armed conflicts with hostile neighbors. This pattern is echoed in the crisis the Mexica faced under the Azteca Chicomoztoca, as reported by del Castillo. A particularly striking resemblance appears in their conflicts with the Tepaneca following the foundation of Tenochtitlan, as recorded by Durán and Alvarado Tezozomoc. The parallel between these two episodes is further reinforced by the fact that overcoming such obstacles proved decisive in shaping a new identity for the Mexica—namely, conquerors and builders of an empire.

Between Chapters 6 and 9 of *Historia de las Indias*, Durán presents a narrative spanning four generations, from the first king of Tenochtitlan, Acamapichtli, to the fourth, Itzcoatl, focusing on the shifting dynamics between the Mexica and the Tepaneca. The Tepaneca grew uneasy when the Mexica, who had already settled within their territory, went so far as to elect their own ruler. Tezozomoc, the Tepaneca king of Azcapotzalco, responded by ordering that the tribute the Mexica originally paid be doubled. His intent was to prevent them from gradually rising in power and becoming arrogant, to the point that they might one day subjugate the Tepaneca and reduce them to vassals. The Mexica were disheartened by this decision. However, they managed to fulfill their increased obligations with the aid of their god, Huitzilopochtli, who consoled them, prophesying that in time, the Tepaneca would pay for this oppression with their own deaths and enslavement.

After Acamapichtli died—Durán continues—one of his sons, Huitzilihuitl, was elected as his successor. Seeking an alliance with Tezozomoc, the Mexica requested his daughter in marriage, making her their queen. From this union, a boy was born, Chimalpopoca. With both

his daughter and grandson now part of the Mexica and residing in Tenochtitlan, the king of Azcapotzalco promised to reduce the tribute previously imposed on the group, allowing them to provide only what could be easily obtained, such as ducks, fish, frogs, and other small creatures from the lake. In Chapter 6 of the *Crónica mexicana*, Alvarado Tezozomoc presents a more detailed list of the tribute, including not only those mentioned by Durán but also the Nahuatl names of various lacustrine species.

Significantly, many of these items also appear among the tributes that del Castillo claims were offered to the Azteca rulers, such as fish, frogs, *tecuitlatl*, *izcahuitli*, and ducks. This parallel between the products yielded by the Mexica in Aztlan and in Tenochtitlan stems from the shared ecosystem of both locations. In the *Historia*, Tetzauhteotl told the Mexica that the promised land they were destined for would have a great lake, much like the one they now lived beside, where everything they needed would flourish. The geographical and ecological similarities between Aztlan and Tenochtitlan have led many scholars to suggest that the Mexica projected their current reality at Lake Texcoco onto the place they believed to be their ancestral homeland (Navarrete Linares, *Los orígenes* 107–109). In other words, the activities they were said to have engaged in and the species they reportedly captured or harvested in Aztlan may be more a retroactive projection of their life in Tenochtitlan than a historically accurate account. If so, the subordinate status the Mexica held in Aztlan may likewise mirror the social dynamics they encountered with other established groups in the Basin of Mexico.

The Azteca rulers who oppressed the Mexica in the *Historia de la venida* may, therefore, have been modeled after the kings of Azcapotzalco, who subjugated the Mexica during their early years in Tenochtitlan. This does not necessarily imply that del Castillo had read the works of Durán or Alvarado Tezozomoc—though the possibility cannot be entirely ruled out—nor that

his account of the origin of the Mexica was purely a personal invention inspired by relatively recent historical events. The memory of enduring tribute demands and persecution from more powerful *altepetl*, such as Azcapotzalco and Culhuacan, was widely regarded as historically true among the Mexica during the colonial period, as attested by multiple sources. This shared experience of suffering may have shaped their imagination, leading some to project onto their distant home, Aztlan, not only the lacustrine environment of their current settlement and their lifestyle as fisherfolk but also their politically humble beginnings. If such a tradition—depicting the Mexica as oppressed tributaries in their place of origin—ever existed, it was clearly neither widespread nor influential, as no surviving records besides the *Historia de la venida* and the *Memorial breve* support this version of the past.

However, the relations between the Mexica and both the Tepaneca and the Azteca rulers, as recorded by Durán, Alvarado Tezozomoc, and del Castillo, followed similar patterns beyond tribute obligations, with the next stage being the threat of military annihilation by their foreign rulers. According to Durán, after the premature death of Huitzilihuitl, his son, Chimalpopoca, was elected king at a young age. His grandfather, Tezozomoc, was deeply fond of him, strengthening ties and communication between Tenochtitlan and Azcapotzalco. However, this peace did not last long. The conflict began when the Mexica sought a reliable source of clean drinking water. Chimalpopoca petitioned his grandfather for permission to draw water from Chapultepec, which lay within Tepaneca territory. The request was initially granted. However, when they later asked for additional materials—timber, stone, and lime—and for labor to reinforce the water conduit, the Tepaneca council reacted with rage. Viewing these demands as excessive and presumptuous, they questioned whether the Mexica had begun to see them as subordinates.

Separately among themselves, the Tepaneca lords of Coyoacan and Tacuba (Tlacopan) plotted to annihilate the Mexica, inciting their people to take up arms. Seeing that his efforts to intervene could not prevent the attack, Tezozomoc pleaded for at least his grandson to be spared. The conspirators refused, and stricken with grief, the king of Azcapotzalco fell ill and died. Soon after, the Tepaneca sent assassins, who killed Chimalpopoca and his son under the cover of night. Itzcoatl, a son of Acamapichtli and half-brother of Huitzilihuitl, was elected in his place. Until then, the Mexica had lived fearfully, untrained in warfare. Upon learning that the people of Azcapotzalco were rushing to destroy them, the "commoners" [gente común] implored the king and the "lords" [señores] to seek peace; they proposed surrendering their god, Huitzilopochtli, to the new king of Azcapotzalco and submitting to his rule, hoping for mercy, a place to live, and eventual assimilation into its population (Durán 69–70). At that moment, a brave young man named Tlacaelel stepped forward and volunteered to go as an envoy to the king of Azcapotzalco, fully aware of the possibility of being killed by the Tepaneca. He expressed the reason for taking the risk: "For if I understood that I were to live forever and never die, I would go with the same resolve with which I go now; since given that I must die, it matters very little whether it be today or tomorrow" [porque si entendiera que auia de vivir perpetuamente y que nunca auia de morir, con la mesma voluntad fuera que agora voy, porque supuesto que tengo de morir, hácesele muy poco al caso que sea oy que sea mañana] (71). There in Azcapotzalco, Tlacaelel heard the king state outright that his people had severed all ties with the Mexica, foreclosing any possibility of reconciliation. What followed was an open declaration of war. The commoners panicked and tried to flee the city, but the lords reassured them, vowing to free them from the Tepaneca yoke without any harm. When the commoners expressed concern about the consequences of failure, the lords proclaimed that if they were defeated, the commoners could take revenge by consuming

their flesh. In turn, the commoners pledged that if the lords succeeded, they would recognize them as their masters, provide labor, pay tribute, and offer their women, committing themselves and their property to perpetual servitude.

According to Durán, under Tlacaelel's leadership, a small group of lords charged into enemy lines, shifting the tide of battle in their favor. Once the Tepaneca began to retreat, Itzcoatl, who had remained behind with the commoners, finally gave the order for the entire army to enter the city of Azcapotzalco, laying it to waste and looting it. The surviving inhabitants fled to the hills, where they surrendered, laying down their arms. In exchange for their lives, they pledged to hand over their lands, build houses and cultivate fields for the victors, and remain their tributaries in perpetuity. Additionally, they agreed to provide stone, lime, and timber—precisely the materials the Mexica had originally requested from Tezozomoc to construct the pipes that would bring clean water from Chapultepec. Furthermore, the people of Azcapotzalco lost the right to elect their own ruler; instead, they were forced to recognize Itzcoatl as their king and submit to his rule.

As previously mentioned, Tenochtitlan was founded within the territory of Azcapotzalco. From the moment the Mexica elected their first king, the Tepaneca viewed them with unease and suspicion, imposing severe tribute demands upon the fledgling *altepetl* as a means of control until the two royal houses were bound through marriage. The small island in Lake Texcoco on which the Mexica settled imposed natural geographic limits on their growth and expansion, keeping them in a state of poverty and deprivation. They could not even obtain clean drinking water within their own territory and therefore sought to channel it from Chapultepec. Yet, they lacked the necessary materials to construct the aqueduct. Thus, the conquest of Azcapotzalco granted them not only arable land but also access to a variety of newly acquired resources. In

contrast, the people of Azcapotzalco were now confined to a narrow and insufficient area, as most of their territory had been stripped away and redistributed among the Mexica conquerors. They were forced to provide tribute, particularly by cultivating land that had previously been theirs for their new masters. Thus, the positions of Tenochtitlan and Azcapotzalco were entirely reversed.

A clear parallel exists not only in the conditions the Mexica endured under their Azteca and Tepaneca rulers but also in how they overcame them. In both cases, their decision to take up arms transformed them into conquerors. However, a close comparison of the two narratives reveals as many differences as similarities. In their conflict with the Tepaneca, as narrated by Durán, war not only saved the Mexica from extermination and liberated them from subjugation; it also instantly elevated them to the position of rulers. This outcome also fulfilled the prophecy Huitzilopochtli delivered to his people when they were burdened with heavy tribute—that the day would come when the Tepaneca would pay for their oppression with their own deaths and enslavement. For the Mexica, a war of independence and a war of conquest were not separate but one and the same. In the *Historia de la venida*, however, liberation and conquest are not presented as inseparable outcomes of war but rather as distinct processes. To break free from servitude and secure their survival in Aztlan, the Mexica did not fight against their oppressors in battle, as they later would in Tenochtitlan. Instead, they chose to flee their homeland. Their departure was facilitated by an event reminiscent of the Exodus—the parting of the waters. In other words, their means of resisting enslavement and death was migration. Only after their escape was complete did the Mexica begin waging war against other peoples.

Yet del Castillo employs several narrative devices that blur the distinction between migration and conquest. Most notable among them is the covenant established between

Tetzauhteotl and the Mexica before the journey began. Huitzilopochtli pleaded with his god to grant them a land where they could live freely and safely. In response, Tetzauhteotl asked whether the Mexica would fulfill his demands for offerings and commands in return for his deliverance. Even before those conditions were specified, Huitzilopochtli swore that they would comply with whatever was required and, of his own accord, proposed sacrificing captives from other peoples. This can be read as Huitzilopochtli himself declaring his willingness to take up arms—an unavoidable means of obtaining prisoners. For the Mexica, aid from Tetzauhteotl was essential to their salvation, but that aid came at the cost of going to war.

Tetzauhteotl warned that the land destined for them was already occupied by groups of earlier settlers, each governed independently. Unless the Mexica seized it from its previous owners, they would be left with no choice but to live in foreign territory, very likely under its sovereign—a life little different from what they had endured in Aztlan. Therefore, as they departed their homeland, the choice before them was clear: to submit or to subjugate—and they chose to subjugate. After crossing the sea, the Mexica remained on the shore for two years, crafting their weapons and insignias. These details depict them not simply as a people fleeing oppression, but as one actively preparing for a campaign. In this sense, their migration marked the beginning of a military expedition. In the *Historia de la venida*, then, migration and conquest are not distinct. Rather, war was as much a means of their liberation as migration, and that mission could only be fulfilled once the original inhabitants of the land they migrated to were overcome and brought under their control.

Then, what does conquest—more specifically, control over people—actually mean in the *Historia de la venida*? What Huitzilopochtli initially asked of Tetzauhteotl was only land; yet what the god promised the Mexica was more than territory: it was that they would rule over it

and be served by the peoples they would conquer. In particular, the warrior class was told that they would be entitled not only to necessities but to anything they desired—whether luxuries or women. Domination thus finds its substance in the extraction of tribute and labor from the dominated. That is exactly what also happened to the Tepaneca after they were defeated by the Mexica.

However, there is a significant difference between the causes of the two conquests—one narrated by Durán and Alvarado Tezozomoc, the other by del Castillo. For Durán and Alvarado Tezozomoc, the Tepaneca had oppressed the Mexica through tribute and ultimately sought their total destruction through war. Thus, the conquest of Azcapotzalco is framed either as a defense against an existential threat or as recompense for harms already inflicted. In contrast, for del Castillo, when the Mexica embarked on their campaign, no wrong had yet been done to them by the original inhabitants of the promised land. The cause of the war, therefore, did not lie with its targets. They were attacked simply because they lived in a land designated by Tetzauhteotl. The cause, on the contrary, lay solely in the needs of the attackers. The Mexica primarily pursued territory, along with the privileges of rulership. To obtain these benefits, they were required to go to battle and capture the offerings demanded by their god in exchange for his help.

The fact that del Castillo makes no attempt to justify the conquest—or, more accurately, to identify a cause that could be attributed to the conquered—offers a kind of theoretical insight into the nature of territorial claims between natives and settlers. The former assert their rights on the basis of having first occupied an empty space; the latter can claim no right except that which is acquired through conquest. Regardless of any reasons advanced to justify it, settlers acquire an effective title to land only once they have overpowered the natives with sufficient force to dispossess them. In this context, whether the war was fought on just grounds becomes secondary.

The legal fact that conquered land belongs to the conqueror is not grounded in the causes that led to conflict, but in the simple condition that the previous owners were defeated and left at the mercy of the victor, who may choose either to annihilate, expel, or spare them in exchange for submission. In other words, even an "unjust" war may serve as the basis for territorial acquisition and subsequent domination.

I am not claiming, however, that del Castillo approached the Mexica conquest as a cold fact of winner-takes-all reality, entirely detached from any external normative framework, which, whether intentionally or not, would serve to legitimize the rights granted to the conquerors as a result. Rather, when compared to the narrative of the war with the Tepaneca as reported by Durán and Alvarado Tezozomoc, something in the *Historia de la venida* continues to unsettle our moral sensibility and makes it difficult to sympathize with the Mexica. One reason, however, is that no wrong had been committed against the Mexica by the natives of the promised land. Indeed, these peoples are portrayed as living in an almost ideal state of peaceful autonomy, and thus completely unprepared for armed conflict—representing no threat whatsoever. The Mexica, by contrast, having committed themselves to warfare as a sacred vocation and being accustomed to risking their lives in battle, could easily terrify and overpower them.[7] In other words, unlike the Tepaneca, against whom the Mexica staked their fate in a struggle with little chance of victory, their enemies in the *Historia de la venida* appear as easy prey.

[7] "It is truly this that you will take as your heart: the qualities of the eagle and the ocelot, war, arrows, and shields. For it is truly this that you will feed on and come to need in order to frighten others. Your chest, your heart, will be the price paid. For you will go conquering people; for you will go conquering and destroying all the commoners and *altepetl* dwellers who have already settled in the many places through which you will pass" [huel yehuatl ic anquimoyollotitiazque in quauhyotl, in oceloyotl, in teoatl tlachinolli, mitl chimalli, ca huel yehuatl in anquicuatiazque in amotech monectiaz inic antlamamauhtitiazque in amelchiquiuh in amoyollo ipatiuh ye tiaz ca antepeuhtiazque, ca anquimpeuhtiazque, anquimpopolotiazque in ixquichtin macehualtin altepehuaque in ye oncan onoque in izquican anquiztiazque] (del Castillo 96, 98).

In Chapter 3, del Castillo explicitly identifies not only human sacrifice and cannibalism but also hostility and warfare as morally reprehensible practices taught and commanded to the Mexica by Tetzauhteotl. Should we then regard his depictions of those conquered by the Mexica as a narrative device intended to lead readers to sympathize with the victims and condemn the conquest? One thing is certain: just as a war waged against peoples content to remain within their own territory, governed by their own rulers, and guilty of no preceding aggression would offend modern sensibilities, it would likely have had a similar effect on Spanish audiences of the sixteenth century. The central elements found here—innocence, territorial possession, autonomy, and peaceful living—were all crucial factors in contemporary debates over the justice of the Spanish conquest of the Americas. Critics of the conquest like Las Casas attributed these qualities to the Indigenous populations; defenders, conversely, sought to deny them. At the heart of the controversy was a core question: can war be just if no prior offense has been committed? *Historia de la venida* raises the same question. Comparing how this Indigenous author responds to that question with how Spanish thinkers of the same period approached it may offer insight not only into his text, but also into broader patterns of Nahua thought.

Before undertaking this comparative inquiry, however, I want to consider the possibility that the contrast between the warlike Mexica and the pacifist natives they conquer was not meant to correspond to a moral dichotomy of good and evil. Instead, it might suggest that the former embodied a more desirable ethos than the latter. Noteworthy here is that the portrayal of these peaceful inhabitants of the promised land echoes that of the Mexica commoners who opposed war against Azcapotzalco. According to Durán, "until then, the Mexica were very intimidated and very little practiced in matters of warfare" [los mexicanos hasta entonces estauan muy acobardados y muy poco exercitados en cosas de guerra] (69). This explains why—except for

their lords—they wished to avoid military confrontation at all costs, convinced that resistance against the Tepaneca would only bring massacre and destruction. To the commoners, the situation presented a choice between life and death, and in order to escape death, everything else could be relinquished. They proposed surrendering their god Huitzilopochtli to the king of Azcapotzalco and living among its people, "almost offering themselves as slaves" [casi ofreciéndose por esclavos] (70). For them, therefore, a life in a condition approaching enslavement was preferable to certain death.

Such an outcome, however, was unacceptable to Itzcoatl and the other members of the royal house. In their eyes, death was a fate common to all mortals and thus inescapable in the end, whether one went to war or not. Their choice was therefore not death or survival, but life in subjugation or freedom. If there was even a slight chance of victory, they stood to not only save their lives but also gain liberation from the Tepaneca yoke. In addition, should they triumph in battle, they could anticipate the rewards granted to conquerors: the claim to foreign territory and the right to demand tribute and labor. In short, the Mexica lords, unlike the commoners, believed it was better to risk death than to survive as "slaves." And it was precisely this difference in outlook that placed the latter under the same obligations of service and tribute to the former as those imposed on any conquered people.

In Chapter 9 of the *Crónica mexicana*, Alvarado Tezozomoc provides a more detailed account of the debate among the Mexica over whether they should fight against the Tepaneca invasion or surrender. After Tlacaelel returned from his mission as envoy, a council was assembled. Those opposing the war emphasized overwhelming disadvantages in terms of numbers and the lack of natural defenses in Tenochtitlan. However, Tlacaelel and his supporters asserted, addressing the gathered people as "lords" [señores] and "nobles" [prençipales], that

they should take up their arms with unwavering resolve, and that even if they lost their country, they would not have failed in honor, having done everything within their power (74). The anti-war faction countered that such boldness would only bring destruction, placing their women, children, and elders at the mercy of the enemy. They warned of the cruel and terrifying death that awaited them. The brave Mexica retorted by asking what death could be worse than the one that was equally destined for everyone. The others responded that an even worse death would be one in which they themselves would consume the flesh of those who died in battle. From this point on, Alvarado Tezozomoc refers to those arguing against the war as "old men" [biexos] and those advocating for it as "brave young Mexica, sons of nobles" [mançebos balerosos mexicanos, hijos de prençipales] (74–75). In turn, the young warriors declared that if they succeeded in subjugating the Tepaneca, the elders would lose their noble status and be reduced to "commoners" [maçehuales], serving as their vassals.

While Durán distinguishes these factions by social standing—identifying the lords and commoners—Alvarado Tezozomoc suggests that all were initially nobles, with their differences consisting solely of age or generation. Those who prioritized honor over survival retained their status, while those who chose servitude over death were relegated to the rank of commoners and became subjects of the victors. Schematizing this opposition brings us closer to the contrast between the Mexica and the original inhabitants of the promised land in the *Historia de la venida*: those who embraced the risk of death in battle became rulers, while those overwhelmed by it became the ruled. Although del Castillo does not explicitly state that the latter submitted voluntarily to the former in order to avoid war, there is no description of them rising to resist the invaders either. What is clearly emphasized instead is the fear experienced by those unacquainted with war when confronted by those willing to fight it—a fear that unmistakably recalls that

which overcame the commoners, or the old men, who opposed going to war against the Tepaneca.

3.2 The Spanish Justice of War

In the previous section, I proposed the following interpretation of the origin story of the Mexica as reported in the *Historia de la venida*: it presents a theoretical contrast between the foundations of territorial rights claimed by natives and settlers. The former derive their rights from having been the first to occupy a previously uninhabited land, whereas the latter must either submit to the authority of the original inhabitants or overwhelm them by superior force and seize their land. According to del Castillo, the Mexica were not rightful citizens of Aztlan, the homeland from which they departed; that title belonged instead to another group known as the Azteca Chicomoztoca. Facing exploitation and the threat of annihilation under these foreign rulers, they viewed migration not only as a path to liberation but also as a military expedition toward a new land. I argued that the text centers on the transformation of the Mexica from the dominated to the dominant between their points of departure and arrival, which parallels the historical sequence, as recorded by Durán and Alvarado Tezozomoc, from their settlement in Tenochtitlan to their conquest of Azcapotzalco. The suffering endured by the Mexica under the Azteca and the Tepaneca overlords closely mirrors each other. In both narratives, it is war that ultimately delivers them from oppression. This suggests that the radical shift in their mode of existence—from Aztlan to the promised land—corresponds to the only two options available to the Mexica as latecomers to the Basin of Mexico: to rule or to be ruled. In other words, conquest emerges as the only basis upon which migrants may assert rights to an already occupied land.

I also examined what the justification of war reveals about the legitimacy of such rights. According to Durán and Alvarado Tezozomoc, the Mexica were compelled to fight the Tepaneca

not only to defend themselves from total destruction but also to cast off a long-standing yoke and reclaim their freedom. The conquest of Azcapotzalco thus became a legitimate act of retribution for the many years of oppression they had endured under its rule. In contrast, according to del Castillo, when the Mexica declared war on the promised land, they had not previously suffered any harm at the hands of its original inhabitants. Moreover, these native groups had lived peacefully within their own territories and had no experience of warfare. The narrative thus provides no justification for violence other than a religious one—the need to capture prisoners as sacrificial offerings to the sun and other deities. Instead, it emphasizes the passivity of the conquered, whose helplessness is sharply contrasted with the aggressiveness of the conquerors. This rhetorical structure can be interpreted as a device that appeals to readers' sense of justice, inviting sympathy for the former and condemnation of the latter. However, I also pointed to another possibility: that the portrayal of the victims as timid and submissive serves to elevate the courage and martial spirit of the Mexica by comparison, thus making each group appear, by nature, either suited to be ruled or destined to rule.

This question—whether it is just to make war on a people who have committed no prior injury—lay at the heart of sixteenth-century debates among Spanish intellectuals over the legitimacy of the conquest of the Americas. For some, the wars waged against Indigenous populations appeared as unilateral acts of violence that deeply offended their moral sensibilities. The question thus extended beyond legal considerations to provoke theological concern. A central figure who gave voice to such concern was Las Casas. In the *Brevísima relación de la destruición de las Indias*, written in 1542 and published a decade later, he characterizes the events that took place in New Spain between the first Spanish arrival in 1518 and 1530 as a history of slaughter and devastation, declaring that "what they call conquests" [lo que ellos

llaman conquistas] were in fact "violent invasions by cruel tyrants, condemned not only by God's law but by all human laws" [invasiones violentas de crueles tiranos, condenados no sólo por la ley de Dios, pero por todas las humanas] (105). Reporting on the massacre at the Great Temple of Tenochtitlan—an attack conducted under the command of Pedro de Alvarado against the nobility and warriors gathered to celebrate the Feast of Toxcatl—and the subsequent armed resistance of the Mexica, Las Casas argued that this response was justified, given the horrific violence inflicted on innocent people who had done no wrong.

One of the early causes claimed by the conquerors for their invasion and destruction, as encapsulated by the *Requerimiento*, was that they demanded Indigenous peoples submit to the authority of the Spanish Crown. Those who did not immediately comply with that demand were branded rebels, killed, and enslaved. To expose the irrationality of this claim and to affirm the natural legitimacy of resistance, Las Casas invokes what he considers the clearest of the first principles of law: "No one is or can be called a rebel unless that person is first a subject" [ninguno es ni puede ser llamado rebelde si primero no es súbdito] (112). Accordingly, Indigenous peoples could not be punished for rebellion, since they had never been subjects of Spanish sovereignty. He then asks his readers to imagine how people living peacefully in their own lands, under their own natural lords, might respond if confronted with the following ultimatum: "Submit yourselves to obey a foreign king, whom you have never seen nor heard of, and if not, know that we will immediately tear you to pieces" [Daos a obedecer a un rey estaño, que nunca vistes ni oistes, y si no, sabed que luego os hemos de hacer pedazos] (112).

The *Brevísima relación* is not a legal or theological treatise; as its title indicates, it is a historical account and, more precisely, a rhetorical discourse crafted to elicit a strong affective response from its intended reader, Prince Philip—later King Philip II of Spain—by unsettling his

conscience and prompting a concrete reaction: persuading his father, Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and king of Spain, to take corrective action against the injustices inflicted on Indigenous peoples.[8] Nevertheless, the discussion of the justice of war in this text presupposes certain legal principles that served as the central framework for debates over Spanish rights in the Americas. First, war is understood as a punitive measure in response to a prior offense. Since the Indigenous populations were not under the jurisdiction of the Spanish Crown, their refusal to submit to its authority could not be deemed wrongdoing; thus, war as a form of punishment for such resistance was unjustifiable. Within this framework, anyone seeking to justify the conquest would have to demonstrate either that Indigenous people had committed harm against the Spaniards, for which war was a proportionate response, or that they were already legally subject to Spanish sovereignty, so that in resisting it, they had violated an established authority, and war could be waged as a means of enforcing that subordination.

Just a few years before the *Brevísima relación* was written, Vitoria discussed the justice of the Spanish conquest of the Americas in a pair of thematically linked lectures delivered at the University of Salamanca in 1539: *On the American Indians* (*De Indis*) and *On the Law of War* (*De iure belli*). In the second lecture, Vitoria draws on earlier theological authorities such as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas to assert that the only just cause for war is a prior injury. Defensive war—whether to defend property or to recover what has been wrongfully taken—is

[8] The year 1542, when the *Brevísima relación* was written, was also the year in which Las Casas appeared before the Council of Castile to request the drafting of new legislation aimed at abolishing the encomienda system and Indigenous slavery—an effort that culminated in the promulgation of the New Laws later that same year. At this hearing, Las Casas not only proposed legal reforms but also delivered an extensive account of the atrocities and abuses committed by Spaniards against the Indigenous population. The text we now know as the *Brevísima relación* is the "briefly" written version of that account (Las Casas 69). According to Rolena Adorno, the purpose of the work was not to challenge the legitimacy of Spanish sovereignty in the Americas itself, but rather to provoke moral discomfort and unease in Prince Philip by confronting him with the suffering endured by Indigenous peoples at the hands of his subjects (74–76). In doing so, Las Casas sought to compel the prince to intervene by liberating Indigenous populations from the control of private citizens and placing them under the direct jurisdiction of the Crown.

unquestionably legitimate. Offensive war, too, may be just, provided it is waged as vengeance for injury already committed. However, not every injury qualifies as a just cause for war. As Vitoria cautions, "all the effects of war are cruel and horrible—slaughter, fire, devastation—it is not lawful to persecute those responsible for trivial offences by waging war upon them" (304).

Vitoria addresses the specific question of whether war against Indigenous peoples is just in his first lecture, *On the American Indians*. The text is organized into three sections. The first establishes that, prior to the arrival of the Spaniards, Indigenous peoples possessed both private and public dominion—that is, they held property rights and had among themselves legitimate rulers. If they lacked such ownership, they would be little more than slaves who, not being true masters of their persons or possessions, would be open to appropriation and subjugation by foreigners. The second section critically examines seven arguments that might be proposed to justify subjecting such peoples to Spanish rule, all of which Vitoria rejects as invalid. The third, by contrast, proposes eight scenarios that might be supposed as legitimate justifications.

Vitoria asserts the existence of the *ius gentium*, or law of nations, which he understands as derived from natural law—that is, from principles dictated by the faculty of natural reason common to all humanity—and therefore presumed to be universally established among all peoples. Since the precept to love one's neighbor as oneself is part of natural law, Indigenous peoples are obligated to respect the rights of their fellow human beings—in this case, the Spaniards—to travel through their territories, engage in trade, and seek profit from resources drawn from unclaimed common lands and seas. Moreover, the Spaniards possess the right to preach the Gospel for the salvation of their neighbors, not only by authority granted through Scripture but also out of a duty of brotherly love, as prescribed by natural law. If Indigenous peoples obstruct the exercise of these rights—free passage and the propagation of Christianity—

and peaceful persuasion proves ineffective, then war against them is deemed just. The third and fourth just causes considered by Vitoria follow from the second: if missionary efforts lead to conversions among the Indigenous population, war may be waged to protect converts from persecution or forced apostasy—even to the extent of replacing a non-Christian ruler with a Christian one. Notably, the justifications Vitoria examines presuppose harm either to the rights of the Spaniards or to those of fellow Christians.

The discussion then goes a step further, concluding that humanitarian armed intervention to prohibit oppressive laws and customs directed against innocent lives—"neighbors" of the Spaniards in the sense that they are fellow human beings—as well as military assistance to allies in conflicts between Indigenous groups, may also be legitimate. The annexation of new territory and subjugation of its inhabitants in the course of such involvement is likewise considered lawful. These cases, like the other grounds discussed in the previous paragraph, demonstrate that *On the American Indians* adheres to the principle laid out in *On the Law of War*: that war is just only when it serves as a defense against, or punishment for, a prior injury. What Vitoria seeks to determine is under what circumstances the harm done to the Spaniards or to others they were bound to defend—namely, their fellow Christians, "neighbors," and "friends"—might be considered grave enough to justify waging war against Indigenous peoples.

According to *On the American Indians*, the Spanish conquest of Mexico was lawful, as it squarely corresponded to the last two legitimate grounds Vitoria identifies: humanitarian war and military assistance to allies. The examples cited in support of these causes are drawn directly from the Mexican context. The Spaniards put an end to human sacrifice and cannibalism, defending innocent lives from such oppression, and they formed an alliance with the Tlaxcalteca, aiding them in their conflict against the Mexica. However, this did not bring the broader

controversy to a definitive close. As mentioned earlier, Las Casas condemned the conquest of New Spain as unjust in his *Brevísma relación*, which was published in 1552. On the other side, even those who supported war against Indigenous peoples do not appear to have been fully satisfied with the causes deemed just by Vitoria. Most of them presuppose violations of the rights of either the Spaniards or their Indigenous converts. However, it was difficult to argue that all the conquests already completed or still underway across the Americas had in fact been preceded by such wrongs committed by the conquered. Moreover, the grounds that could plausibly be applied may have been viewed as too marginal or incidental to serve as a thorough basis for conquest. Sepúlveda, who opposed Las Casas as the chief representative of the pro-conquest position in the famous 1550–1551 debates held in Valladolid, appeared to require a more foundational and comprehensive justification. That justification was provided by the concept of natural slavery.

In Book I of his *Politics*, Aristotle defines the natural slave as a human being who, by nature, belongs to another. This condition is found in those who can understand the commands of reason but do not possess reason themselves. If their highest function lies not in rational activity but in physical labor, then—just as the body is the instrument of the soul and domesticated animals are the instruments of human beings—their enslavement is considered both just and beneficial, not only for the common good but also for themselves. This idea offered a convenient and compelling solution for those who sought to legitimize both conquest and the exploitation of Indigenous labor. For them, the peoples of the Americas lacked sufficient rational capacity and thus fit Aristotle's description of natural slaves.[9]

[9] The legitimacy of Spanish dominion in the Americas was initially grounded in the bulls of donation issued in 1493 by Pope Alexander VI to Ferdinand and Isabella. In particular, the *Inter Caetera* of May 4 granted them and their successors exclusive rights to all lands, discovered or yet to be discovered, that had not already been actually occupied by any other Christian prince, west of an imaginary line of longitude drawn one hundred leagues beyond the Azores and Cape Verde Islands (Davenport 71–78). This form of justification underlies the *Requerimiento*,

It was precisely to refute this assumption that Vitoria begins *On the American Indians* with a section discussing whether Indigenous peoples possessed true dominion. His conclusion is that even if they fell significantly short in rational capacity, this would not justify denying them the right of ownership. Consequently, to dispossess them of their property or to enslave them—which constitutes civil or legal slavery—on such grounds would be unlawful. What Aristotle meant by the term natural slave, Vitoria clarifies, is that those mentally unprepared to govern themselves are naturally suited to subordination and to receiving the guidance and rule of others. This idea of natural slavery is revisited toward the end of his examination of the just causes for conquest, where he considers the possibility that the Indigenous peoples are, in terms of mental capacity, truly little better than madmen, children, or wild animals. Under such extreme conditions, it might be appropriate, and in their best interest, for the Spanish monarch to assume responsibility for their care and to govern them accordingly, even partly as slaves. Vitoria concedes this point hypothetically, adding the proviso that the argument is introduced merely for the sake of discussion and not asserted with any confidence in its applicability.

However, the proposition that Indigenous peoples should be subjected to Spanish rule as natural slaves appeared to Sepúlveda as the decisive key to resolving the question of whether the conquest could be justified in the absence of any prior harm. His *Tratado sobre las justas causas de la guerra contra los indios*—also known as *Democrates segundo*—was likely written around 1544 but denied publication by royal censors and by the faculties of the universities of Alcalá and Salamanca (Pagden 109–110). This work is structured as a dialogue between two fictional

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which effectively translates the principle articulated in the papal bulls into a concrete rationale for conquest. However, doubts were soon raised about whether the pope truly possessed such temporal authority over non-Christian peoples—a point later challenged explicitly by Vitoria in *On the American Indians*. In order to avoid relying on such a contested foundation, an alternative justification emerged: that the inhabitants of the Americas were natural slaves. According to Anthony Pagden, the first to advance this argument was the Scottish theologian John Mair, whose claim was quickly adopted by the Spaniards as a convenient solution to their dilemma (38–39).

interlocutors. Through the voice of one of them, Leopoldus, Sepúlveda introduces the very conundrum that concerns us here: "whether it was in accordance with justice and Christian piety that the Spaniards had made war on those innocent mortals who had done them no harm" [si era conforme á la justicia y á la piedad cristiana el que los españoles hubiesen hecho la guerra á aquellos mortales inocentes y que ningún mal les habían causado] (59). In order to answer this, the other character, Democrates, begins by noting that a just cause alone does not suffice to make a war just; additional essential conditions must also be met. The right to resist immediate aggression by force is a natural right granted to all human beings, but the right to declare war by calling citizens to arms is reserved solely for the highest authority within a commonwealth—that is, sovereignty, which, according to Sepúlveda, resides in the figure of the prince. Furthermore, war may be undertaken justly only when it aims at securing the welfare of society, such as peace or justice, when no alternative means remain, and when it is carried out with moderation and in proportion to that end.

Following this discussion, Sepúlveda finally enumerates the just causes of war. The first, and most fundamental and natural, is defense: it is just to repel force with force. The second is the recovery of what has been unjustly taken. The third is the imposition of appropriate punishment upon wrongdoers. This right of retribution may be exercised only through public authority—that is, through princes and magistrates. Private citizens, by contrast, may not take vengeance for injuries done to them; they may only repel immediate aggression and must otherwise entrust their cause to the protection of the law. These causes correspond to those examined by Vitoria in *On the Law of War*, under the categories of defensive and offensive war, and each presupposes the existence of a prior injury as a condition of justice. To these, however, Sepúlveda adds a fourth: the use of force to subjugate those who, though naturally obliged to

submit to others, refuse that submission. He draws a distinction between what the term *slavery* denotes for jurists and for philosophers: for the former, it is civil, imposed by external power; for the latter, it is natural, rooted in intellectual inferiority and expressed through inhuman and barbaric customs. This is evidently his interpretation of Aristotle's concept of natural slavery.

According to Sepúlveda, all forms of dominion and authority in human society are grounded in a single principle of natural law: that the perfect and excellent rule the imperfect and inferior. But what constitutes such superiority—the basis for distinguishing those who are naturally masters from those who are naturally slaves? Recalling Aristotle's definition, Sepúlveda affirms a hierarchy between intellectual and physical faculties: those who surpass others in the former are fit to rule, even if they are not exceptional in the latter. Conversely, those who excel in the latter but are slow or deficient in the former are naturally suited to obey. He argues that such a hierarchy may also be applied to relations between nations. It is just and in accordance with nature that peoples who are barbaric, inhuman, and far removed from civic life and peaceful customs should be ruled by those who are more humane and virtuous, so that they may be led away from their barbarity and toward a more human way of life and the cultivation of virtue. If they reject such dominion, then it is lawful—and indeed in their greatest interest—that force be used to compel their submission, as a fulfillment of natural law. Sepúlveda then turns to the task of demonstrating that the Spaniards and the inhabitants of the Americas respectively meet his criteria for rule and subjugation. This comparison is carried out not only in terms of intellectual capacity, as reflected in different sciences and written law, but also through other virtues: fortitude and greatness of spirit shown in war, temperance and gentleness displayed in

the treatment of defeated enemies, and religion.[10] On the basis of this comparison, Sepúlveda concludes that the Indigenous peoples fall short of the standard of humanity and possess a nature suited to servitude.

In order to remain within the principle that a just war must be preceded by an injury, Vitoria examines the kinds of injury that Indigenous peoples could plausibly have inflicted upon the Spaniards. But how could peoples living across the ocean, who had until then been unaware of the very existence of the Spaniards, have harmed them? The answer, Vitoria suggests, lies in the possibility that Indigenous peoples might obstruct the Spaniards in the exercise of rights that had been justly granted to them. In that case, such obstruction could be understood as a form of harm. Yet for something to count as a right, it must be granted by a law, and for one party to demand that another respect its rights, both must be equally bound by that law. This is why Vitoria posits the existence of the law of nations, founded on universal natural reason. This law also authorizes the Spaniards to undertake military intervention aimed at protecting fellow human beings against oppressive regimes, thereby providing a means of extending the scope of injury beyond harm inflicted directly upon the Spaniards themselves.

[10] In his effort to demonstrate the superiority of the Spaniards and the inferiority of the Indigenous peoples—and thus their respective dispositions toward rule or obedience—Sepúlveda places particular weight on the customs and conduct of each group in war. He claims that Indigenous peoples were constantly engaged in fierce conflicts with one another, and that victors would consume the flesh of their enemies as a reward to satisfy their hunger. Yet when faced with even a small number of Spanish soldiers, they offered no resistance, but instead fled in cowardice, despite their numerical advantage. Most telling is the case of the Mexica, regarded as the most civilized and powerful of all Indigenous nations. According to Sepúlveda, their king, Moteuczoma, despite ruling over an extensive empire from a large and well-defended city, failed to prevent the arrival of Hernán Cortés and instead received him. Cortés exploited their fear to subjugate the Mexica and their tributary peoples, imprisoning Moteuczoma while his subjects, paralyzed by terror, lacked the courage to take up arms. For Sepúlveda, the mere fact that a handful of Spaniards could terrify and overpower such a vast Indigenous population proves that the former possessed far greater wisdom and courage, and that it was natural for them to rule over the latter, who were so manifestly inferior. The wartime conducts reportedly displayed by the Indigenous peoples during the conquest of Mexico thus becomes a key basis for his conclusion that they were by nature servile. Adorno highlights this very point—the claim that the Indigenous peoples are inclined to subjugation is grounded in the very fact that they were so easily subjugated—and describes it as "justifying a war retrospectively" (130). Daniel Nemser likewise identifies the same logic as "circular" (26).

While acknowledging the principle established by Vitoria regarding the justice of war, Sepúlveda departs from it by proposing a different ground—one applicable specifically to the relationship between the Spaniards and Indigenous peoples. On the part of the Spaniards, there had to be a justification for the use of force even without having suffered any harm from Indigenous peoples. Conversely, any right to wage defensive war or seek retribution against the Spanish invaders had to be denied. The theoretical foundation for such a position was provided by the concept of natural slavery. According to Sepúlveda, under natural law, Indigenous peoples were obligated to serve the Spaniards, and if they resisted, the use of force to subjugate them was not a violation of law but its fulfillment—and ultimately to their own benefit. Through Spanish rule, they would be brought to the threshold of humanity and prepared in soul to accept Christianity.

Vitoria, too, explores the same argument, albeit only tentatively, in his discussion of the possible justifications for Spanish dominion over Indigenous peoples. If, indeed, they lack the mental capacity to govern themselves, then the Spaniards ought, solely for the benefit of the Indigenous peoples, to assume responsibility for them as a work of charity toward their neighbors. However, Vitoria does not explicitly state that this duty must be carried out through war if Indigenous peoples refuse to submit. He may not have been able to bring himself to claim that actions intended for the good of others could justify not only coercion but also the destructive consequences of war against them. As previously noted, Vitoria argues in *On the Law of War* that, due to its inherent brutality, war cannot serve as a proportionate punishment for minor offenses. All the more unreasonable, then, would be its use as a means of pursuing benevolent ends. In contrast, Sepúlveda argues that submission to Spanish rule is a duty owed by the Indigenous peoples under natural law. Their refusal, therefore, constitutes a wrongdoing. In

this view, the use of force is not merely a last resort to ensure their subjugation but also a form of punishment. And insofar as war serves as punishment, the death and destruction it brings can be justified.

This logic becomes especially clear when the same principle—that it is just and natural for those who are best in virtue to rule—is applied to European kingdoms. Hereditary monarchy does not always guarantee that this principle will be fulfilled. Nevertheless, even an unworthy or deficient king, if elevated to the throne in accordance with established laws and customs, should be tolerated as the lesser evil. For otherwise, attempting to overthrow an unfit king by force would lead to discord and civil war, and such action—undertaken without the authority of a legitimate sovereign to declare war—would not only lack legal standing, but would also violate and undermine the inherited laws agreed upon for the preservation of the peace and health of the kingdom. In doing so, it would inflict even greater harm upon the ultimate good of the commonwealth. By the same reasoning, then, why should war against Indigenous peoples not also be avoided? Sepúlveda argues: "In an unjust war the innocent often pay the price, and here, by contrast, those who are defeated suffer a just punishment" [en la guerra injusta pagan muchas veces los inocentes, y aquí, por el contrario, los que son vencidos sufren justa pena] (95). In other words, the harm inflicted upon the Indigenous peoples is not the price of fulfilling natural law—if it were, one would have to weigh whether the good achieved truly outweighs the evils produced—but rather a deserved consequence of their wrongdoing.

For Sepúlveda, war is not a means of establishing a new legal order. The Spaniards are already presumed to possess jurisdiction over Indigenous peoples, and it is on this basis that they are authorized to punish the latter for their resistance. War, then, does not create law but rather serves to uphold an existing one by enforcing its authority and restoring the order disrupted by its

violation. In contrast, Vitoria denies that the Spaniards hold any prior right to rule over Indigenous peoples. According to the law of nations, however, they are entitled to rights of free passage, trade, and proselytization, and any infringement upon these rights constitutes a wrongful act that may be justly punished by war.[11] The Spaniards are also bound by duties toward fellow Christians, military allies, and humankind in general. They may legitimately go so far as to subjugate Indigenous peoples if that is the only measure available to protect the safety and rights of themselves or others. Despite his clear differences from Sepúlveda, then, Vitoria also conceives of war as a means of enforcing an already existing law.

What is noteworthy is that for both Vitoria and Sepúlveda, Indigenous peoples are assumed to be bound by a law in relation to the Spaniards even before the outbreak of war. The validity of this law is supposed to be a universal truth, and Indigenous peoples are expected to be aware of its existence and accept its authority. If they violate that law, punishment in the form of war is therefore deemed just. From the perspective of those subject to this logic, however, that truth can only be unilaterally valid. Its supposed universality is not a fact but a normative claim. In other words, the precepts of natural law and their derivative law of nations may not have been known to Indigenous peoples. For the Spaniards, this ignorance does not count as an excuse that would absolve them of responsibility. Yet, at the same time, such ignorance is, to a certain

[11] Some interpretations suggest that, in Vitoria's thought, the law of nations is not fully reciprocal between the Spaniards and Indigenous peoples: the latter are treated as liable to sanction for ignorance or malintent, while the former are positioned as those entitled to judge and punish. The rights granted to the Spaniards by this law in relation to Indigenous peoples do not operate in reverse. As Carl Schmitt points out, the apparent neutrality of Vitoria's position—that Indigenous peoples have legitimate rights of ownership and rulership, and that the Spaniards cannot claim any prior dominion over them or their property—reaches its limits when confronted with the hierarchical distinction between Christians and non-Christians (113). The missionary rights presumed to belong to the Spaniards cannot be extended to Indigenous peoples; it is difficult to imagine that Vitoria would have accepted that Indigenous peoples had an equivalent right to spread their "idolatrous" religions in Europe. Antony Anghie also notes that, according to Vitoria, Indigenous peoples do not participate in the law of nations as sovereign equals alongside the Spaniards. Instead, they are incorporated into the system as its violators—and thus as subjects of discipline (331). In other words, the reverse scenario—one in which the Spaniards violate the rights of Indigenous peoples and thereby become legitimate targets of war as punishment—is never contemplated.

extent, expected of Indigenous peoples under an ethnocentric conception of barbarism. In this way, the law operates like a net—or even a trap—already set in place, so that Indigenous peoples might be caught in it, with the conditional clause "if they violate it" preemptively framing their resistance as transgression. They stumble into it unknowingly, and only through punishment does its presumed binding force become real. In other words, from the standpoint of Indigenous peoples, war does not preserve an existing law but establishes a new one. It is only in defeat that they are retroactively constituted as guilty and thus incorporated—or ensnared—into the law. The violence inflicted upon them during the war before this incorporation is then justified as punishment for that guilt.

Acosta captures this underlying premise succinctly in Book 2, Chapter 5 of his *De procuranda indorum salute*, first published in 1588. After discussing the justifications for the conquest offered by the previous generation, he quotes an unnamed source to summarize his own position: "It was not law that gave rise to war, but rather war that gave rise to law" [No fue el derecho el que dio paso a la guerra, sino más bien la guerra la que dio paso al derecho] (285, 287).[12] It is victory in war that retroactively authorizes the right to wage it, according to the law it brings into being—not the other way around. In this light, the conquerors of New Spain's claim—that they had declared Indigenous peoples to be subject to the Spanish Crown, and that any objection to this declaration was to be treated as rebellion—appears not so much irrational or unlawful, as Las Casas argued; rather, it reflects a deeper structure in which law and violence are

[12] After carefully weighing the arguments in favor of and against conquest, Acosta makes an unexpected turn in Book 2, Chapter 11, arguing that it is a serious error to continue debating whether the Spaniards could claim just cause for waging war against Indigenous peoples. To raise that question, he contends, is to cast doubt on the legitimacy of Spanish dominion itself in the Americas, which would ultimately lead to the conclusion that it ought to be abandoned altogether—an outcome that would imperil the Christian faith already accepted by the colonized. Thus, even if colonial possessions had been acquired through usurpation and were therefore tyrannical in origin, they would still represent the lesser evil.

intertwined—a structure also present in the logics of conquest articulated by Vitoria and Sepúlveda. The Spaniards presumed the authority of a certain law by which Indigenous peoples were already bound, thus defining their resistance as its violation. When they were militarily defeated, the presumed authority became an actual legal fact, as if it had been so even before. Violence thus establishes law; yet it does so only by functioning as punishment for its violation, and this, in turn, requires that the jurisdiction and force of the law it establishes be presupposed as already effective.

3.3 The Mexica Justice of War

3.3.1 Christianity versus Idolatry

A significant departure of the *Historia de la venida* from the accounts of the Mexica migration and early settlement by Durán and Alvarado Tezozomoc lies in its portrayal of the natives of the Basin of Mexico as innocents who had inflicted no harm on the newcomers and as the rightful owners of the land. Living self-sufficiently within their own territory, they lacked even the concept of war. This characterization of the conquered seems intended to prompt readers to question the moral and legal legitimacy of the conquest itself—a concern that directly echoes the central issue debated in the Spanish court and ecclesiastical circles during the sixteenth century: Is it just to wage war against Indigenous peoples when no prior injury has been committed by them?

In the previous section, I examined how these debates were addressed by Vitoria and Sepúlveda. Vitoria begins with the premise of the law of nations, grounded in natural law and universally binding on all peoples, arguing that Spaniards have the right to travel, trade, and evangelize freely across Indigenous territories. A prohibition of these rights constitutes a violation of the law. Thus, even when Indigenous communities use force to expel intruders who

enter without consent, the fault, according to Vitoria, lies with them. In such cases, Spaniards are not only permitted to defend themselves but may also declare war to redress the injury—and, if that proves the only effective means of securing their safety and rights, the seizure of land and sovereignty may be lawful. Sepúlveda, on the other hand, holds that natural law confers the right to rule on the Spaniards who embody superior virtues, while Indigenous peoples, deemed deficient in these qualities, are naturally bound to obey. Should they resist subjugation, they violate the law; even when they defend themselves against foreign invasion, the wrong remains theirs. Despite the differences in their arguments, both thinkers share an underlying logic: they posit the existence of a universal law binding both Spaniards and Indigenous peoples. From this perspective, war against Indigenous peoples appears as punishment for the breach of such a law. War thus emerges not as a means to establish a new legal order but as a means to preserve one already in place. Yet from the standpoint of the conquered, that same war imposes a new law, by which the violence inflicted upon them is retroactively justified.

How, then, does the *Historia de la venida* approach a comparable issue—this time with the Mexica as the conquerors and the original inhabitants of the promised land as the conquered? As previously noted, in Chapter 3 the author directly intervenes in the narrative to denounce war as one of the moral evils introduced by the Mexica—alongside human sacrifice and cannibalism. For this reason, Navarrete Linares concludes that del Castillo adopts the perspective of those who were conquered by the Mexica in pre-Hispanic times. Yet I argue that this editorial comment does not ultimately determine the meaning of the work as a whole, since the author's is neither the only voice heard in the text nor the dominant one. Both Huitzilopochtli and Tetzauhteotl are quoted at length, and their words articulate the Mexica perspective. Their speeches are more rhetorically elaborate and eloquent than the authorial narration and, depending

on the chapter, far more extensive. As a result, the reader is more frequently exposed—and more likely to be persuaded—by the voice of the conquerors than by that of the conquered.

The only justification ever offered for the Mexica conquest is religious: war captives provided hearts and blood as nourishment for the sun and other deities. However, del Castillo explicitly condemns human sacrifice as morally wrong and calls Tetzauhteotl—the one who demands the ritual—a *tlacatecolotl*, or a devil. This judgment clearly discredits the legitimacy of that justification. Nevertheless, readers later encounter passages that seem to undermine this effort to diabolize the Mexica tutelary god and, by extension, the Mexica themselves. Chapter 4 of the *Historia de la venida* resumes the narrative when the Mexica arrive at Colhuacan Chichimecatlalpan, fifty-two years after their departure from Aztlan.[13] Their leader and *tlatoani*, Huitzilopochtli—now 160 years old, too vulnerable to walk without assistance, and near the end of his life—summons his people and addresses them from the altar atop the temple. He begins by reminding them that their obligation to perform human sacrifice is directly tied to the movement of the sun. Hearts and blood must always be offered to Tetzauhteotl, for they are not only "his food, his prerogative, and his rightful possession" ["itlaqual, itonal inemac"] (110);[14] through this offering, the sunlight continues to spread across the sky. Strikingly, this light is also identified with the "only god, Tloque Nahuaque, through whom we all live, the lord of the

[13] Chapter 3 includes a brief description of a recurring process during the migration. Tetzauhteotl, having taken the form of an eagle, flies ahead of the Mexica to guide them. He lands at a place deemed suitable for settlement, where the group built an altar, a temple, and a bed of grass for him, and then constructs their own houses. Tetzauhteotl also provides them with food, which appears at dawn at the altar in the form of corn and other fruits of the earth. Huitzilopochtli distributes these provisions among his people.

[14] The term *tonalli*, whose possessed form ("his *tonalli*") is *itonal*, presents a particular interpretive challenge. Navarrete Linares renders *itonal* as "his property" [su propiedad] (del Castillo 111). Molly H. Bassett further proposes that, "as a right that is unique to a particular individual, 'prerogative' best encapsulates the full sense of *tonalli*" (118). See also López Austin 223.

heavens and the earth" [in icelteotl, in Tloquê in Nahuaquê ipalnemoa in ilhuicahua in tlalticpaque] (112).

According to the 1571 Nahuatl-Spanish dictionary by the Franciscan Alonso de Molina, *Tloque nahuaque* is defined as: "near whom is the being of all things, preserving and sustaining them" [cabe quien está el ser de todas las cosas, conservándolas y sustentándolas, y dícese de nuestro señor dios] (434).[15] In other words, the phrase describes a deity who sustains and upholds all beings from within their proximity. Frances Karttunen, in *An Analytical Dictionary of Nahuatl*, explains that *tloqueh* and *nahuaqueh* are possessor derivatives of the postpositions *-tloc* ("adjacent to, close to") and *-nahuac* ("near to, adjacent to, within earshot"); when paired, the expression refers to "the universal and all-pervading deity" (309). In *Aztec Thought and Culture*, Miguel León-Portilla interprets *in Tloque in Nahuaque* as "Lord of the Close Vicinity" or "Lord of the Everywhere," identifying it as a reference to "multipresence," one of the divine qualities associated with Ometeotl, the supreme deity in the Nahua religious worldview and the father and mother of all the gods (90–91).

Of particular interest are two other titles León-Portilla includes among the many epithets attributed to this deity: *Ipalnemohuani* ("He through whom one lives") and *Totecuio in ilhuicahua in tlalticpacque in mictlane* ("Our lord, master of Heaven, of earth, and of the region of the dead") (91). These are significant because they closely correspond to the wording that follows "in Tloquê in Nahuaquê" in the passage previously cited from the *Historia de la venida*: "ipalnemoa in ilhuicahua in tlalticpaque." Could del Castillo, then, be referring here to Ometeotl? Yet such an interpretation is complicated by the expression "the only god" [icelteotl],

[15] The Mexican edition of Molina's dictionary was published by Porrúa in 1970 under the title *Vocabulario en lengua castellana y mexicana y mexicana y castellana* and has since been reprinted multiple times. On the basis of this vocabulary, Marc Thouvenot produced the *Diccionario náhuatl-español* (2014), standardizing and modernizing the orthography of both Nahuatl and Spanish.

which appears in the same line. That designation conflicts with the title of Ometeotl as the progenitor of all other deities, for to bring others into existence is, by definition, to affirm the existence of beings other than oneself, thereby disqualifying the status of being the only god. Even if *in Tloque in Nahuaque* is not intended to refer to Ometeotl in this instance, the contradiction remains: the very claim that this is the only god negates the divinity of all others subsequently named, including Tetzauhteotl.

In his speech, Huitzilopochtli goes on to introduce Tezcatlipoca as another *tlacatecolotl* and the god of rulership and nobility. This deity was to guard the land to which Tetzauhteotl was leading the Mexica. Tetzauhteotl, for his part, would become his war captain, fulfilling that role wherever there was an *altepetl* to conquer. The Mexica warriors, through their courage and martial feats, were to serve all the gods—especially Tlaloc—who had already been favoring various local peoples they were destined to subjugate. At the end of the chapter, Huitzilopochtli offers words of encouragement to his audience, urging them not to be overwhelmed by the long journey still ahead until all these prophecies are fulfilled. He concludes with a statement that Navarrete Linares describes as "apparently enigmatic" [aparentemente enigmática] ("Estudio preliminar" 64):

> For the time when the count of the one who is the only god is completed—he who dwells in the heavens, who is unknown, whose name is unknown, and who is never a visible one—has not yet come. But it is he who has given orders to the one who is now our god, Tetzauhteotl, to lead us there, where he goes signaling with his finger, where he goes promising. [ca ayamo aci in itlapohualpan in aquin icel teotl in ilhuicac onoc in amo iximachoni, in amo macho in tlein itoca, ihuan aic ittoni. Auh ca ye ehuatl in oquinahuatilmacac in axcan toteouh in Tetzauhteotl inic ompa techhuicaz in canin tlamapilhuitiuh in canin tlateneuhtiuh] (114)

Given the historical context in which del Castillo was writing, it is difficult not to interpret the phrase "the time when the count of the one who is the only god is completed" as a reference to the arrival of Christianity. If the "only god" in the present passage refers to the Christian God, then it becomes likely that the same expression, used earlier in reference to *Tloque Nahuaque*, does so as well.

An explicit identification of the concept *Tloque Nahuaque* with Christian monotheism appears in Alva Ixtlilxochitl's *Historia de la nación chichimeca*. The historian presents the Tetzcoca *tlatoani* Nezahualcoyotl as a model of the ideal ruler in the New World, claiming that his wisdom surpassed even that of ancient Greek philosophers, to the point of asserting the existence of the one true God:

> Ypan yn Chahconauhtla manpan meztica intloque nahuaque ypal nenohuani teyocoyani ic el téotl oquiyócox ynícquex quéxquix mita ynamota, which, properly interpreted, means: "after nine levels is the creator of heaven and earth, through whom creatures live, and only one god who created visible and invisible things." [Ypan yn Chahconauhtla manpan meztica intloque nahuaque ypal nenohuani teyocoyani ic el téotl oquiyócox ynícquex quéxquix mita ynamota, que bien interpretado quiere decir: "después de nueve andanas está el criador del cielo y de la tierra, por quien viven las criaturas, y un solo dios que crió las cosas visibles e invisibles".] (1:404–405)

Within the quoted Nahuatl text, we can recognize familiar expressions: "*intloque nahuaque ypal nenohuani*"—unmistakably *in Tloque in Nahuaque* and *ipalnemohuani*. Just as Alva Ixtlilxochitl blurred the notion of the Nahua supreme deity with that of the Christian god to convince his readers that the latter was not entirely foreign even before the conquest, del Castillo likewise appears to have promoted the idea that the one and only god had intervened in the Mexica migration and was known under the name *Tloque Nahuaque*.

Navarrete Linares points to a broader tendency among colonial Indigenous writers—including Alva Ixtlilxochitl and del Castillo—to involve the Christian God in pre-Hispanic history. He interprets this as an effort to erase the "stigma of paganism" [estigma del paganismo] from their ancestral past ("Estudio preliminar" 63). Christensen links the previously quoted passage about the unknown god whose time has not yet come to his analysis of the structural parallels between the *Historia de la venida* and the Exodus narrative. Just as the prophecies in the Old Testament of a coming messiah were retroactively understood to refer to Christ, the reference to the future arrival of a new faith—almost certainly Christianity—positions Huitzilopochtli alongside the Hebrew prophets. This reading supports Christensen's overall interpretation of the intention underlying the work: by likening the Mexica to the Israelites—a people chosen by God—del Castillo sought to elevate their status, even above that of the Spaniards, and to redeem their religion from charges of idolatry. The problem, however, lies in the fact that del Castillo calls Tetzauhteotl, who made a covenant with the Mexica, a *tlacatecolotl*, and describes the content of that covenant—war, human sacrifice, and cannibalism—in explicitly negative terms. Moreover, since it was Huitzilopochtli who first proposed the offering of human sacrifice, the Mexica can hardly avoid responsibility for its diabolic nature. For this reason, Navarrete Linares counters Christensen, arguing that the text is better read as a condemnation of the Mexica as a people chosen by the devil.

Yet, as noted earlier, the authorial commentary alone does not determine the meaning of the text. Especially when we consider the social context in which del Castillo was writing, it becomes plausible that his apparent criticism of pre-Hispanic religion was at least partly shaped by an awareness of inquisitorial censorship. This is why I have previously emphasized the importance of attending to voices other than that of the narrator. In particular, Huitzilopochtli's

speech to the Mexica on the eve of his death actively promotes the legitimacy of their religious cause. As Navarrete Linares has observed, the characterization of Tetzauhteotl as a *tlacatecolotl* seems intended not only to distinguish him from the Christian God, but also to oppose the two. If this is the case, however, Huitzilopochtli, who represents the "false and evil" religion, has no reason to describe the gods his people worship as "devils," and much less to refer to the advent of a new religion destined to overcome them. And yet, as we have seen, it is Huitzilopochtli who introduces Tezcatlipoca as a *tlacatecolotl* and prophesies the coming time of the "only god."

More importantly, Huitzilopochtli does not place the "only god" outside or in opposition to the Mexica pantheon but rather presents Him as one who operates within it—or through it—to fulfill His will. Tetzauhteotl, in particular, plays a mediating role between this divine will and the Mexica by demanding human sacrifice from them. Their offerings are made to the daily movement of the sun, whose light, in turn, illuminates the world through the agency of the "only god." It is also the "only god" who commands the Mexica migration; Tetzauhteotl merely carries out these orders. Thus, their military and religious endeavors are not so much condemnable as they are justifiable—as acts that illuminate the glory of God in the lands they are to conquer and prepare the way for the coming of His time.

The *Historia de la venida* has a structure akin to that of a Möbius strip, in which outer and inner surfaces are indistinguishable. The voices of del Castillo and Huitzilopochtli appear to stand at odds with one another, but not in the straightforward sense of a true Christian confronting an idolater. Rather, a discourse that is expected to be unequivocally idolatrous, when followed to its conclusion, ultimately intersects with the Christian belief system, affirming one of its aspects while simultaneously countering its doctrinal condemnation of idolatry. As a result,

the reader is left disoriented, uncertain both about which position within the narrative is being criticized and from which vantage point outside it that critique is being articulated.

In this sense, the *Historia de la venida* is an indeterminate and ambiguous text, one in which no reconciliation of its inconsistencies is possible from within. Any attempt to impose coherence therefore requires positing an underlying intention that the author himself never explicitly states. One possible explanation is that del Castillo adopts, at the surface level, the perspective of Spanish colonialists, while giving voice to his true opinion—namely, a defense of the Mexica—through the characters in his narrative. Another possibility is that Huitzilopochtli's words to his people, aside from the prophecy of a true religion yet to come, are themselves deceptive. In other words, they are likely calculated lies meant to compel the Mexica, in the name of God, to commit evident wrongs, such as war and human sacrifice. From this perspective, the use of Christian language does not sanctify the message it conveys but instead reveals the cunning artifice of the Devil. This interpretation avoids contradiction with del Castillo's explicitly anti-Mexica stance. Both approaches are plausible, yet neither is supported by decisive evidence.

What drives these efforts at reconciliation is the desire to determine what the author truly intended to convey through his text, based on the assumption that its ultimate meaning resides in the discovery of that intention. However, even if the debate over whether del Castillo sought to condemn the Mexica or secretly defend them were resolved, this alone would not exhaust the interpretation of his work. As I have argued, the *Historia de la venida* prompts readers to ask a question through its portrayal of those conquered by the Mexica: Can a war be just when no prior injury has been suffered? Both Vitoria and Sepúlveda posed the same question with regard to the Spanish conquest of Indigenous peoples. Yet concluding whether or not they took a justificatory

stance on behalf of their fellow conquerors does not, by itself, complete our understanding of their discussions. What matters more—and what I examined in the previous section—is the logic by which they justified conquest, and what that logic reveals about contemporary cultural conceptions of law and violence. In the case of the *Historia de la venida*, what I wish to emphasize is how a logic of justification is constructed from the perspective of the conquerors—the Mexica—regardless of whether del Castillo ultimately endorses that logic.

3.3.2 Punitive Justice versus Sacrificial Justice

For the Mexica, who arrived in an already fully inhabited region, the only way to secure access to land without submitting to the authority of another group was to seize it by force from its previous occupants. Those who were conquered could avoid death and destruction only by offering tribute or service. War thus enabled both the redistribution of land between victors and vanquished and the rechanneling of labor and its products. In other words, violence was the means by which a new order was established. The same holds true for the Spanish conquest of Indigenous peoples. The legal basis for the annexation of American territories and the subjugation of their inhabitants rested primarily on the fact that they had been acquired through military victory. Yet conquerors are left not only with the right to enjoy their spoils, but also with the task of legitimizing the very initiation of war. As discussed earlier, the strategy adopted by Spanish intellectuals such as Vitoria and Sepúlveda was to obscure the fact that war had established a new legal order and instead to present it as a means of preserving one—natural law—that was already recognized. Within that framework, war is understood as violence exercised under the authority of that law for the purpose of redressing the harm done to it.

In the *Historia de la venida*, then, do the Mexica—speaking through Tetzauhteotl or his spokesman Huitzilopochtli—also justify their conquests as acts of violence carried out to

preserve an established law? The answer is yes. For them, just as for their Spanish counterparts, the law presumed to already exist is a "natural law" that transcends any human-made institutions. In this case, however, it refers not to universal moral principles intelligible to all rational beings, but to the cosmic order represented by the movement of the sun. According to this logic, the daily rising of the sun and its passage through the sky depend on human participation. That participation takes the form of human sacrifice. Before departing from Aztlan, Tetzauhteotl promised to rescue the Mexica on the condition that they offer the hearts and blood of war captives to himself, the sun, and other deities. On the eve of his death, Huitzilopochtli reminds his people that their sacrificial obligations are closely linked to the dissemination of the light of the "only god" through the sun. Notably, del Castillo calls the sun *Ollin*, or "movement." This term unmistakably refers to *Ollin Tonatiuh*, or "Sun of Movement," which, according to several sixteenth-century sources, designates the Fifth Sun—the current era—preceded by four earlier Suns, each of which ended in catastrophe and the destruction of humanity.[16]

Of the sources that enumerate the five Suns, the *Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas* and the *Leyenda de los Soles*—according to Graulich—contain "the 'official version' of the Mexica" (75).[17] According to the *Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas*, after a great flood, four gods gathered to create the sun to illuminate the earth. To supply it with hearts to eat and blood to drink, they waged war. Tezcatlipoca created four hundred men and five women for the same purpose. Quetzalcoatl wanted his son to become the sun and Tlaloc's to become the

[16] For discussions of the names and sequence of the five Suns, as well as divergent accounts of the preceding four eras, see Graulich, 63–71. Graulich observes that extant sources differ in the number of Suns—some list four, others five—and posits that an older and more widely shared Tolteca tradition identified the present era as the Fourth Sun (71–79). In his interpretation, the version of the Fifth Sun reflects an ideological need on the part of the Mexica, as they were building an empire, to align their emergence with the beginning of a new cosmic age.

[17] The Spanish *Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas* is widely believed to be an excerpt from Olmos's *Tratado de las antigüedades mexicanas*, likely composed in the 1530s (Tena 16–19). The *Leyenda de los Soles*, written in Nahuatl between 1558 and 1561, is attributed to one of Sahagún's Indigenous collaborators (Tena 170).

moon. The gods fasted and engaged in ritual self-sacrifice by extracting blood from their own bodies. Quetzalcoatl was the first to throw his son into a great fire; when the fire died out, Tlaloc cast his son into the ashes. The two sons became the sun and the moon, respectively. Camaxtle, or Mixcoatl, ascended to the eighth heaven and created four men and one woman to provide sustenance for the sun through war. They fell into water and later rose back into the sky. Camaxtle then struck a rock with a staff, from which four hundred Chichimeca emerged. These Chichimeca, also known as the Otomi, were the original inhabitants of the lands the Mexica would later come to conquer. Camaxtle performed a penitential rite of bloodletting using maguey thorns and invented pulque—an alcoholic beverage made from fermented maguey sap—to intoxicate the Chichimeca. The four men and one woman created earlier then descended once again and slaughtered the Chichimeca.

The *Leyenda de los Soles* presents a myth that is similar but differs in some respects. The Fifth Sun is named 4 Movement, and it is the sun of Topiltzin of Tollan (Tula), of Quetzalcoatl, who was called Nanahuatl. The gods appointed him and 4 Flint, or the moon, to guard heaven and earth. After fasting and performing ritual bloodletting, they bathed and threw themselves into the sacred brazier that had been burning for four years at Teotihuacan. Nanahuatl was the first to leap into the flames; the moon followed but fell only into the ashes. Now transformed into the sun, Nanahuatl remained motionless for four days. It demanded blood. Only after the gods sacrificed their lives did it begin its movement across the sky. The narrative then turns to White Chalchiuhtlicue, who gave birth to four hundred Mixcoa and entered a cave in Chicomoztoc with them, then bringing forth five more. These five Mixcoa descended into water and remained there for four days before emerging and nursing from the breast of Mecitli, who is identified with Tlalteuctli (the Lord of the Earth). The Mexica derived their original name, Mecitin, from this

goddess. Meanwhile, the sun armed the first four hundred Mixcoa with arrows and shields and commanded them to feed him and their mother, Tlalteuctli. But they neglected this obligation. Instead, they hunted only for pleasure, offered no sacrifices from their prey, adorned themselves with feathers, engaged in sexual indulgence, and drank pulque to the point of intoxication. The sun then ordered the five newly born Mixcoa to kill and sacrifice the original four hundred. Some survivors were expelled from Chicomoztoc and resettled along the outer edges of the cave.

The myths examined so far reveal a necessary connection between the sustainment of the sun and the waging of war to capture and sacrifice enemies. What is crucial here is the presence of "conquerors" to carry out that task. In both the *Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas* and the *Leyenda de los Soles*, those conquerors are deliberately linked to the Mexica. In the former, the Chichimeca—conquered by the four men and one woman created by Camaxtle—are identified as the original inhabitants of the lands the Mexica would conquer. In the latter, the five Mixcoa were nursed by the goddess from whom the name Mecitin is derived. These myths, then, establish a symbolic kinship between the first cosmic warriors who fed the sun and the Mexica themselves. For the Mexica, therefore, conquest was not merely a means of bringing a new political order to subjugated territories; it also served to uphold a higher cosmic order. The sun, after all, guards both heaven and earth, and its demise marks the end of the present era.

I want to emphasize the punitive character of the war in the *Leyenda de los Soles*. The four hundred Mixcoa neglected the duty imposed upon them by the sun. In response, the five other Mixcoa waged war on the offenders, thereby not only supplying the nourishment the sun required but also restoring its compromised authority. In other words, violence, when exercised to redress the harm caused by a breach of obligations, constitutes punishment and as such, serves as a means of preserving the law. This logic closely parallels the reasoning advanced by Vitoria

and Sepúlveda to justify conquest. They understand the law presumed to be universally established as a system of rights and obligations. Within that framework, the Spaniards are granted the right to punish Indigenous peoples who fail to meet the obligations that bind them. Like the five Mixcoa, the Spanish conquerors appear as champions of the law.

Does the *Historia de la venida*, then, likewise frame Mexica conquest as punishment inflicted on the conquered? In other words, if the inhabitants of the promised land had done the Mexica no prior injury, had they—like the four hundred Mixcoa—at least failed to fulfill an obligation imposed by a cosmic law? In Chapter 3, del Castillo reports that they sacrificed animals to their gods. However, the Mexica themselves had once offered the blood of aquatic animals and birds to Tetzauhteotl without incurring penalty for that practice. The only apparent difference is that each group made offerings to different deities. Nowhere in the text is there an indication or suggestion that human sacrifice to the sun was ever required of any people other than the Mexica. And even for the Mexica, such an obligation arises not from a preexisting law but from a newly established covenant.

A law governing the universe would bind all those born into it, with no possibility of exemption. A contract, in contrast, presumes free will. It is no accident that it is Huitzilopochtli who proposes to offer human blood to Tetzauhteotl. His initiative marks precisely the voluntary nature of the act. The Mexica chose to become conquerors because the only alternative left was annihilation. This framing is particularly similar to the logic of the myths examined earlier. Under the law of the sun, humanity is divided into only two kinds: those who feed the sun and those who are fed to it; there is no third option. This mirrors the condition the Mexica faced in Aztlan. They had no other choice than either to conquer or perish. In other words, these

alternatives are imposed upon them as an inescapable law; yet which of them is chosen ultimately remains up to them.

As previously discussed, for Vitoria and Sepúlveda, war is justified retroactively through a legal structure that functions like a net. This structure takes the form of a conditional clause, "if someone fails to meet their obligations." The victim always had a chance to choose the right path and avoid punishment. Had Indigenous peoples fulfilled their duty of obedience to the Spaniards or refrained from infringing on the rights of those under Spanish protection, war could have been averted. Likewise, the four hundred Mixcoa would not have become victims of slaughter if they had offered their prey as tribute to the sun and the earth. In the *Historia de la venida*, however, those conquered by the Mexica were bound by no duty they were required to fulfill but failed to do. Their lack of obligation means that no transgression was committed. The war declared against them, then, cannot be considered punishment. What befalls them is not a consequence of wrongdoing; rather, it is sheer fate—an inescapable outcome with no possibility of avoidance. From the moment the covenant was made between Tetzauhteotl and the Mexica, their conquest was sealed as destiny. They never had a choice.

Within the Spanish framework, the law deploys violence as though it were a last resort to redress violations. It lies in wait, like a trap, anticipating transgression so that the use of force may be legitimized. In the *Historia de la venida*, in contrast, the law does not wait for prey; it waits for a hunter. It seeks someone willing to wield its weapons on its behalf. In other words, the choice of whether or not to meet duties lies not with those subjected to violence, but with those who enact it. This, precisely, is the logic that del Castillo attributes to the Mexica in justifying their conquests. The very existence of the sun—its radiance and movement—demands death. Under its law, all humans must either be sacrificers or the sacrificed. Which group fulfills

which role is, in itself, of little consequence. What matters is simply who first steps forward to take on the role of the conqueror. In that moment, all others are cast in the opposite role of the conquered. Only the determination and readiness to conquer, in itself, entitles the Mexica to conquer other peoples.

I propose to describe this mode of legitimizing Mexica conquest, in contrast to the Spanish model of punitive justice, as one of sacrificial justice. Whereas the former is represented as a confrontation between those who uphold the law and those who violate it, the latter assigns a law-sustaining role to both those who offer sacrifice and those who become its victims. Moreover, punitive justice necessarily presupposes an already established law that is binding on both executor and transgressor alike. Sacrificial justice, by contrast, allows for the establishment of a new law through a voluntary covenant and the decisive action of waging war.

3.4 Conclusion

The surviving fragments of the *Historia de la venida* focus on the origin and migration story of the Mexica, making it a notably atypical and original work when compared to other sources within the Mexica tradition or under its influence, such as Durán's *Historia de las Indias*, Alvarado Tezozomoc's *Crónica mexicana*, or the anonymous *Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas* and *Leyenda de los Soles*. A few scholars who have examined the text as an object of analysis in its own right interpret this atypicality in relation to the intention of its author, del Castillo—particularly by asking whether his stance was pro- or anti-Mexica. I have instead approached the text through its narrative logic, which centers on the transformation of the Mexica from subjugated people to conquerors, and examined how it conceptualizes the legitimacy of conquest and, more broadly, the relationship between law and violence. This

analysis draws on a comparative reading with Spanish thinkers who grappled with similar themes—Vitoria, Las Casas, and Sepúlveda.

Del Castillo presents the historical situation in which the Mexica—arriving late in an already inhabited region—were left with a choice between ruling or being ruled through a schematic contrast between their points of departure and destination. In their place of origin, Aztlan, not only the products of their labor but even their very existence were subject to the mercy of their rulers; migration, in the form of a military expedition, was the only path to survival. By contrast, in the land to which they would be brought by their god, various groups had long lived in peace and contentment within the territories they had first settled. The condition the Mexica endured in Aztlan and later imposed in the promised land recalls the cosmic law described in the *Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas* and the *Leyenda de los Soles*, under which all humans, since the creation of the sun, must become either conquerors or conquered. Thus, the law of the sun does not merely dictate the need for divine or human blood for the creation and ongoing cycle of the celestial body; it demands that war be continually waged to provide the universe with that nourishment. The Mexica are those who bring this law into a land where peaceful "international relations" have prevailed. Hence, the law exists not to ensure the safety of those under its protection, but as an unrelenting force that drives humanity toward the battlefield and the sacrificial altar. What distinguishes this from the Hobbesian state of nature—perpetual war of all against all—is, on the one hand, that such violence must be carried out for a higher good; and, on the other hand, that violence is monopolized by a specific group. This monopoly does not function by prohibiting others from exercising force or punishing them when they do; rather, it arises from the overwhelming power of that group—so absolute that it subdues all the rest or terrifies them into laying down their arms.

Therefore, this law of the sun does not require justification for its use of force, as it is itself a command to use force for its own sake. What does require justification, however, is why it is the Mexica—rather than any other group—who are designated to execute it. One thing is clear: their role was secured through an intimate covenant with their god, Tetzauhteotl, who connects the Mexica not only to the sun, but also to the unknown "only god," to Tezcatlipoca, and to the local deities of the promised land. In this way, the law they carry assumes a universal character, encompassing all humanity and all things illuminated by the sun, along with the entire pantheon, while their covenant remains particular and exclusive. This contract grants them—without requiring selection through "open recruitment"—a superior status within the universal order and the role of its champion.

But beyond this covenant, the *Historia de la venida* hints at why the Mexica were more fit for their role than other groups. First, they were already living in a situation that closely resembled the one demanded by the law of the sun that they would establish in the promised land. They understood that escaping their condition of oppression required placing other peoples into the same condition and thus chose to leave their homeland and endure the burdens of ceaseless warfare along a long and uncertain path, rather than passively become the victims of another people. Their future victims, by contrast, had no reason to abandon the contentment of their settled lives and initiate war. After generations of peace, they no longer knew the means of war. Confronted with the hardened strength of these warrior nomads and their readiness to sacrifice human lives, they were easily overcome by fear. In this sense, the Mexica perfectly embodied the role of conqueror demanded by the newly arrived law.

This stands in sharp contrast to how Spanish thinkers such as Vitoria and Sepúlveda addressed the question of why it was lawful to wage war against Indigenous peoples of the

Americas. Although they too presupposed the universality of a higher law, that law authorized the use of force only as a response to its violation. Lawful violence, in this framework, was necessarily punitive. In Nahua traditions as well, war was often framed as an act of punishment. The vision of violence articulated in the *Historia de la venida*, however, departs decisively from this model. Here, the question of whether the victims of violence deserved punishment—more precisely, whether they were liable to ethical, legal, or theological condemnation—no longer arises. The victims are simply all those who are not the self. And by the very fact of having been overcome by the self, they are retroactively constituted as legitimate victims.

The logic by which war is legitimized in the *Historia de la venida* is strikingly transparent. By transparency, I mean that no complex, or even dissimulative, manipulation of existing value systems intervenes to rationalize the sheer violence of conquest as the foundation of a new political order. This becomes evident when one replaces the sun with the empire the Mexica sought to build: every predicate still applies. Empire, like the sun, demands sacrifice for its creation and maintenance; those who succeed in founding it do so because they possess the strength and resolve appropriate to the task—qualities that retrospectively mark them as having been "meant" to rule. The imperial ideology expressed in the *Historia de la venida* is therefore nothing other than military expansionism itself, or more precisely, its most distilled articulation—one that renders the structure of its self-justifying logic theoretically visible.

Conclusion

What do colonial Nahua historians do? Ultimately, this is the question at stake. Despite the temporal and cultural differences that undeniably separate their world from ours—differences that are sometimes overstated—there can be little doubt that they assumed, and were conscious of assuming, what we recognize as the work of the historian: the reconstruction of past events from available sources and the transmission of collective historiographical traditions to future generations. To acknowledge this alone would already provide a more than sufficient answer to the question.

Yet the very designation "colonial Nahua historian," in which temporal context and ethnic identity appear as qualifying modifiers, signals a tension that exceeds this general definition. These conditions not only shaped their historical writing in their own time; they continue to frame how their work is understood today, imposing expectations that define, and at times even supersede, what counts as their task as historians. Some readers demand of these authors, before anything else, that they act as representatives of Indigenous society as a whole, or at least of their own local community, whether by resisting colonial domination or by preserving cultural authenticity. When these expectations are not met, disappointment is often followed by harsh criticism. Others, adopting a more sympathetic stance, commend them for having carved out a space—however limited—within colonial structures to refashion their past and identity in ways that maintain or advance their social status, or for having achieved a form of creative

survival of Indigenous traditions through cultural synthesis rather than remaining merely passive recipients of an overwhelming process of Hispanization and Christianization.

Both these critical and sympathetic responses ultimately rest on a shared recognition that, in the core region of central Mexico, following the intense phase of armed conflicts in the early sixteenth century, the Nahuas did not sustain resistance beyond sporadic and local forms. If colonization is understood not merely as military subjugation or the imposition of institutions, but as a process that reshaped systems of value and meaning, along with the forms through which they were expressed, then it remains logical and even legitimate to project onto Nahua historians—as intellectual elites of a subordinated population—certain expectations of role and responsibility: to mitigate or channel, if not resist, that process for the benefit of those whom they were supposed to guide or represent. When such expectations are not fulfilled, we are led to ask what they did, from within the position they occupied, in relation to the political and cultural hegemony that defined their world.

My dissertation, too, is not free from the impulse to pose such a question. It has, after all, examined how Nahua historians intervened through their writing in relation to colonial power, and whether these interventions shared features that justify their grouping under the designation "Nahua." However, my approach differs from existing frameworks in that it places its emphasis above all on their role as intellectuals, rather than on their position as social actors. This does not mean that I seek to revive the image of the traditional intellectual as detached from the world and devoted solely to the pursuit of truth. I do not deny that Nahua intellectuals functioned as intermediaries between Spanish rulers and Indigenous populations, contributing to the formation and development of the colonial system, while also negotiating their own agency within it. Yet,

we sometimes pay insufficient attention to what distinguishes intellectuals as intellectuals, or more precisely, as producers of knowledge.

The production of knowledge does not simply represent a reality that exists independently of it; rather, it renders that reality intelligible by constituting it as truth. It is through such constructions of truth that the relations of power that structure a given society come to appear natural and legitimate, determining who ought to rule and who ought to be ruled, and shaping reality as it is lived and understood. Many of the discourses produced by theologians, jurists, humanists, and also historians in the aftermath of the Spanish conquest contributed precisely to such ideological representations. In the process of naturalizing the colonial order, these discourses returned to its origin in foundational violence—the initial moment of military conflict and subjugation—to retrospectively justify that violence. This process of justification was carried out through a form of theoretical practice: the search for universal "truths" on which the conquerors' "rights" over conquered peoples and their lands could be grounded. These "truths" largely assumed the form of law, whether divine or natural law, and these "rights" no longer derived their foundation from the initial violence that had made them possible by establishing a new order, but instead from a supposedly prior and universal law. Within this legal framework, that violence came to appear as punishment for Indigenous transgression.

However, the naturalization of power relations is not the only effect we may expect from the production of knowledge. It may also perform critical theorization, either by exposing the ideological logic and function of dominant discourses or by offering alternative representations of reality that prevent such narratives from becoming the sole and unquestioned forms of representation—that is, from consolidating into ideology.

My dissertation argues that Nahua historiography not only diverges from colonial discourses but also advances theoretical frameworks that undermine their underlying logic. These frameworks share a common feature: they locate physical violence at the very root of a new order of power in which rights are distributed unevenly between those who emerge as victors and losers from that moment of conflict. This violence does not presuppose any moral or legal norms that could be invoked to justify it. Such non-normative understandings of violence can be extended as a critique of the ideological production carried out by Spanish intellectuals. In this view, the colonial regime is not grounded in a universal and timeless law—whether derived from divine will or human reason—but instead emerges from conquest, a concrete and contingent historical event in which the armed force of one group overcame that of another.

Apart from scattered voices preserved in historical records that denounce Spanish greed, the violence of the conquest, and subsequent forms of domination, no known Nahua individual appears to have expressly articulated a critique at the level of political theory, much less one directed at the ideological foundations of the colonial order. I remain cautious about attributing to the historians analyzed in this dissertation a project they did not explicitly claim or a role they may not have consciously assumed for themselves. Even so, the central logic of colonial ideology would not have come into such clear focus had I not read their texts in comparison with their Spanish counterparts. Moreover, their narratives offer critical insight into a broader phenomenon that transcends their specific historical context: the recurring tendency of discourses to obscure the violent origins of power through normative justification. In this sense, I propose that they should be understood, beyond their role as historians, as political thinkers.

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